

SPEECH BY DOXEY A. WILKERSON

THE VALIDITY of the C.P.A. National Board Draft Resolution, which analyzes the basic errors of American Communist policy since January, 1944, is fully confirmed by the wave of reaction which has burst forth on both the foreign and domestic fronts since V-E Day.

None can fail to see that many of our former win-the-war allies among the big bourgeoisie simply are not behaving as our "Teheran" analysis predicted that they would:

1. Instead of fostering Anglo-Soviet-American friendship "in their own interests," they have given American foreign policy a dangerous push along the anti-Soviet policy of imperialism and war.

2. Instead of promoting the speedy defeat of Japan, the liberation of colonial peoples, and the democratic reconstruction of Europe, they are toying with the idea of a negotiated peace with Hitler's Far Eastern ally, holding tightly to their colonial possessions, and fighting to suppress the upsurge of democratic currents in liberated Europe.

3. Instead of working to consolidate democratic national unity as our "intelligent" appraisal of the alternatives before them would demand, they are ganging up with old-line reactionaries to destroy the wartime gains of the Negro people, shackle and weaken organized labor, and press down the living standards of the people. Even the fervent ap-

peals of President Truman do not suffice to halt the aggressive role with which they seek to turn back the progressive trend which this people's war has brought well along toward maturity.

From these facts of current history Communists must infer either (1) that our Marxism is not a science, capable of accurate historical prediction, and thus competent to guide our vanguard role of the working class; or (2) that our pre-Duclos analyses and over-all policy represented a disastrously illusory distortion of Marxism.

It is not difficult to choose between these two propositions. Although the recent political behavior of "decisive sections" of the big bourgeoisie does not conform to our predictions, it does conform precisely to what our "old books" of unrevised Marxism would lead one to expect of monopoly capital in its imperialist stage of development.

We have, indeed, been led into a major Right deviationist error by our illusion that national unity born of urgent war necessity was an abiding historical phenomenon, that never again would monopoly capital revert to its traditional predatory role, and, therefore, that vigorous struggle of the working class *against* monopoly capital—as orthodox Marxists always knew was essential for abiding social progress—need no longer be a guiding premise in work-

ing-class strategy and tactics.

As a result, we have helped disarm the working class and the Negro people, rather than help prepare them for the hard struggles which life now thrusts to the forefront. We have alienated ourselves from large sections of the people who refused to accept our Pollyanna line. We have undermined the basic Marxist character of our Communist organization. We have made ourselves and the nation vulnerable to resurgent reactionary onslaughts which only a united and fighting coalition of all progressive forces, based upon an alert and powerful labor movement, can readily withstand.

REVISIONISM ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

If Earl Browder bears major responsibility for this near disastrous error, all members of our National Board share fully because of their suppression of the Foster letter of warning while this revisionist policy was being debated. Moreover, the entire National Committee, Communist cadres throughout the country, and practically the entire membership are seriously guilty; for our Marxist understanding plus courageous and genuinely democratic discussion should have prevented us from "unanimously" accepting and believing in so gross a distortion of our basic theory. I, personally, assume a very large share of the guilt which rank opportunism alone can fully explain.

It was inevitable that our over-all

revisionist policy should weaken all specialized aspects of Communist work—and this has unquestionably been true of our recent strategy and tactics on the Negro question.

Marxists - Leninists have long established that the Negro people constitute an oppressed nation. Communists have correctly held that this oppression of the Negro people operates seriously to divide the working class, and thus to weaken both white and Negro workers in their struggles for democratic liberties and for security. They have taught that there can be no substantial and lasting progress for the masses of people generally except through blasting the Jim Crow shackles which hold back the Negro people. And from this basic premise, Communists have historically been in the very forefront of the fight for Negro rights, refusing ever to compromise on this issue, and seeking always to rally the white and Negro people for united and vigorous struggle against the common oppressors of both.

Except for one brief period of ideological confusion immediately following Pearl Harbor, the Communists have maintained strict verbal adherence to the no-compromise-on-the-Negro-question line. The temporary period of unclarity was forcefully brought to an end by Earl Browder's speech at Madison Square Garden in July 1942, when he sharply criticized the tendency of many Communists to soft-pedal the fight for Negro rights lest such strug-

gles disrupt win-the-war national unity. Then, and later in *Victory—And After*, and still later in *Teheran—Our Path in War and Peace*, Browder repeatedly declared that the Negro question, above all others, permits of no compromise, that we must struggle with all our might to uproot the whole system of Jim-Crowism—as a necessary measure to consolidate national unity and hasten victory in the anti-Axis war.

But a critical examination of Communist practice during the recent period can but reveal a striking gap between ideological profession and actual performance.

1. We Communists did fight hard for the right of Negroes to work in war industries, but we failed signally to push the struggle to protect Negroes' wartime gains during the period of reconversion cutbacks now upon us.

2. We never did throw our full power into the fight against the Red Cross Jim Crow blood bank; and we tended to discourage, or certainly failed to promote, the strong movement of a few years ago to amass hundreds of thousands of petitions demanding mixed Negro-white fighting units in the Army—a policy which eventually was initiated on the Western Front without our aid.

We criticized, but seldom led, vigorous struggles against racial discrimination in the armed forces; indeed, we characterized as unduly

"nationalist" certain Negro organizations that demanded immediate and substantial correction by the Roosevelt Administration.

4. We liquidated the Communist organization entirely in the South, and preached an (uneasy) reliance upon the Southern bourgeoisie, "in their own interests," to industrialize that semi-feudal land and establish democracy as a "necessary" step in the process.

5. We met and indulged in sharp self-criticism for failure to develop and bring forward a strong corps of Negro Communist cadres in the great industrial centers of America, but we never gave practical organizational expression to the correct conclusions then drawn.

This catalogue could be continued at length, but this should suffice to explain why it was possible for certain (largely anti-Communist) elements to stage a public debate not long ago on the question: Have the Communists Quit Fighting for Negro Rights? None could have raised that question during the 1920's or early 1930's when the outstanding and perhaps most widely-recognized fact about the Communists was their militant and uncompromising struggles for the democratic rights of the Negro people.

This slowing-up on struggles for Negro rights has not resulted from a deliberate policy to do so. Rather, it has resulted primarily from our over-all illusory policy of reliance

upon "decisive sections" of the big bourgeoisie to act in accord with the spirit of Teheran. If, "in their own interests," they were going to turn the scales in favor of enduring peace, expanding prosperity, stronger national unity and deepening democracy—as we have been eager to believe; indeed, to "prove" from occasional progressive wartime steps they have supported or tolerated—then there was little need for sharp struggle on the Negro question or any other. It was not difficult for us to accept Earl Browder's easy sophism that the Negro people have "exercised their right of self-determination" and have "chosen" the path of integration—which "Teheran" is certain to carry forward to full development.

The practical effects of this opportunist policy on the Negro question are now all too apparent. Tens of thousands of Negroes who instinctively rejected our illusions remained entirely without our influence. Many thousands of those who entered our ranks failed to find the answers they sought, and thereupon produced the "fluctuating Negro membership" problem which practically all districts report. That Negro's greatest ally, the labor movement, is strikingly unprepared, not only for the general struggles which this period thrusts upon it, but especially for the fight against disruptionist racial antagonisms which our government's failure to tackle the hu-

man aspects of reconversion will certainly provoke.

Despite the obvious errors here recounted, the Communists have helped greatly to push forward the boundaries of Negro freedom during the period just past, and they have made tremendous gains in Negro membership and in influence among the Negro people. But these achievements are minor, indeed, when measured by what could have been achieved by a correct policy. Moreover, they represent highly inadequate preparation for the struggles which lie ahead.

THE MAIN TASKS AHEAD

With reference to Communist policy regarding the Negro question, as with all other aspects of our work, the primary task we now face is to rid our minds of the stultifying bourgeois illusions under the influence of which we have been operating in the past. We must come quickly to realize that, despite notable wartime gains, the Negro people are still an oppressed nation, living in a society in which Jim-crowism is still the dominant pattern. We must draw the proper conclusions from the current aggressive efforts of Southern planter interests and Northern monopoly capitalist interests to destroy FEPC, defeat poll-tax repeal, and "put the Negro back in his place." We must recognize the peril which mounting anti-Negro attacks present to or-

ganized labor and the progressive pro-Teheran forces of our nation generally. And we must do everything in our power to rally the Negro people, in unity among themselves and with their labor and progressive allies, to launch a broad, militant counter-attack against reaction all up and down the Negro freedom front.

As a necessary basis for success in such efforts, it is of the utmost urgency that we move quickly to develop hundreds of Marxist-trained cadres among the Negro proletariat in the great industrial centers of our nation, and to guide them in rallying the masses of Negro workers in effective struggle alongside the organized white workers in defense of the national interests of us all. By the same token, we must step up our education of white Communists, especially those in the labor movement, on the urgent necessity for militant struggles for Negro democratic rights. These are among the major historic tasks which now con-

front the American Communist movement.

We enter this mixed period of continuing war and beginning reconversion with the forces of progress in our nation far more mature and powerful than ever before. The perspectives of Teheran and Yalta, which we have cherished during the recent past, still represent the goals toward which we and all freedom-loving mankind will continue to move. Moreover, these goals are entirely attainable. But as is now fully apparent to us all, we can win that enduring peace, freedom and security for which *we* have fought this war only through unrelenting and militant struggle against those reactionary forces of monopoly capital which now seek to turn the tide of history backward. And it is important for us ever to realize that what we Communists do, or fail to do, in the struggle for Negro democratic rights will have a truly decisive influence upon the course of our nation during the years ahead.