

The Negro Question

NEGRO LIBERATION, by Harry Haywood. *International*. \$2.25.

THE *main* enemy of the Negro people is Wall Street imperialism, which owns the economy of the South, dominates its government and oppresses its people through Bourbon "pro-consul" agents; and only in truly revolutionary struggles to help break this dominance of American finance capital—in struggles for "land, equality and freedom"—can the Negro people, as an independent political force allied with the labor-progressive movement, hope to achieve liberation from Jim Crow oppression.

This is the central thesis of Harry Haywood's *Negro Liberation*; and it is here developed comprehensively—with clarity, concreteness and full documentation unmatched in any other book I have read on the Negro question in the United States.

The first major theoretical merit of this book lies in its consistent emphasis upon the material foundations of Jim Crow oppression—the drive of capitalism in its imperialistic stage of development for super-profits. Within this framework, the horrible oppression of the predominant Negro population on the plantations of the Black Belt—robbery of tenant farmers, usury, lynching, peonage, enforced ignorance and "color caste" segregation—is seen as a

means for wringing super-profits out of human labor.

Within this theoretical framework also, the more general characteristics of the Jim Crow system are seen in proper perspective. The impoverishment and degradation of the Southern poor whites, depressed wage levels, violence against organized labor, mass illiteracy, widespread disease, oligarchic state Southern governments, as well as the barring of Negroes from many areas of industrial employment in the North and the Negro ghetto in Northern cities—all are interpreted as offshoots of the Jim Crow system in the agrarian South, as the "Shadow of the Plantation."

Haywood leaves no doubt as to the primary responsibility of Northern finance capital for the system of Jim Crow oppression. He shows how the defeat of Reconstruction democracy toward the end of the nineteenth century came as a direct consequence of the developing American imperialism, now firmly in control of the bourgeois state and "out to reap the full benefits of the new internal market that resulted from Northern victory in the war." The thoroughly outmoded plantation structure, he makes clear, persists in spite of social change and progress "because it has been bolstered up and kept alive by the dominant economic force of the country, finance capital." Even more concretely, with full documentation in text and appendix, the author dem-

onstrates that Northern finance capital—"the Morgans, Mellons, Fords and Rockefellers"—are the real rulers of the South today.

From these insights it follows that any fundamental approach to the goal of Negro liberation must attack and destroy the material foundations of the Jim Crow system. This means, first of all, drastic land reform in the agrarian South. "The plantation system which stifles the development of the productive forces of the South and warps the lives of its people must be swept away." It means, secondly, breaking the dominance of finance capital in the nation as a whole. "Only under the aegis of a genuine people's government in the United States can the status quo in Southern land relationships be radically altered in favor of the great bulk of the agricultural population, Negro and white."

These, of course, are "radical" proposals, from which those who cherish a "gentle and gradual" solution of the Negro question shy away. Their alternative "liberal remedies" are effectively exposed as illusory and opportunist in one of the most spirited polemics among the many which characterize this work. Moreover, drawing upon the highly illuminating experience of the Soviet Union and the new democracies of Eastern Europe, the author advances a concrete program of immediate demands, short of the ultimate goal of socialism, which point toward the more fundamental economic

and political changes which are required for the complete destruction of Jim Crow oppression.

The second major theoretical merit of *Negro Liberation* lies in its interpretation of the Negro question as a national question, with its roots in the Black Belt where some 5,000,000 Negro Americans are developing as a "nation within a nation," even though as yet largely unconscious of their national character and of the goal of self-determination toward which they are being propelled by the dialectics of history.

"The rise of a finance-capitalist oligarchy to dominant position in American economic and political life precluded the possibility of peaceful democratic fusion of the Negro into a single American nation along with whites. Thenceforth the issue of Negro equality could be solved only via the path of the Negro's full development as a nation. The Negro question has now definitely become the problem of an oppressed nation striving for national freedom against the main enemy, imperialism."

In this respect, incidentally, Haywood's work avoids a major weakness of another highly significant book in this field, Oliver C. Cox's *Caste, Class and Race*. Dr. Cox sees clearly the super-profit motivations of Jim Crow oppression and its organic relations to the struggle of the working class against American imperialism. What he fails to grasp, however,

is the *national* character of the Negro liberation movement, as an independent political force of major significance. Thus, his limited analysis precludes an insight which yields one of the most important tactical conclusions of *Negro Liberation*, namely, "the urgent need for the formation of a fighting alliance between the labor movement and the Negro people, without which neither the victory of labor nor the freedom of the Negro people can be achieved."

In his final chapter Haywood interprets the development of national movements among the Negro people since the turn of the century—the Tuskegee Movement, Niagara Movement, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Urban League, Garvey "Back to Africa" Movement, Southern tenant farmers movement, March-on-Washington and National Negro Congress. In so doing, he recognizes that there is "a wide gap between the predominant reformism of the Negro liberation movement today and the revolutionary political struggles inherent in the principle of self-determination for the Negro nation in the Black Belt." One wishes he had projected his analysis into the future, interpreting concretely the dialectical process by which the struggles of today for immediate demands must surely be transformed into the revolutionary struggles of tomorrow.

This latter comment is not to

be interpreted as suggesting that the book concludes without a sense of direction. On the contrary, its interpretations of the vital role of the Communist Party in the struggle for Negro liberation, of the developing alliance between the Negro people and the labor movement, and especially of the emergence of the Negro industrial working class as "the *main driving force* of the Negro national liberation movement"—all point clearly toward the coming development of Negro liberation struggles on higher and higher political levels, to the stage where it will be generally understood that the Negro question is "a focal point of vulnerability of American imperialism."

Negro Liberation is an extremely helpful book. It merits careful study by all Americans, Negro and white, who cherish freedom, security and peace.

DOXEY A. WILKERSON

Three Negro Reformers

THE STORY OF JOHN HOPE, by Ridgely Torrence. *Macmillan*. \$5.00.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON, by Basil Mathews. *Harvard University Press*. \$4.75.

A MAN CALLED WHITE, by Walter White. *Viking*. \$3.75.

"**B**LOWING one's brains out is a great sight easier than some of the things we have to do," the late President John Hope of