

Time to Reappraise CP Position on Negro Question

By DOXEY WILKERSON

Communists in our country and abroad are seriously reexamining their theoretical premises and policies in the light of the new world situation we now face. The defeat of the fascist powers in World War II, the emergence of socialism to a great world system, and the powerful and ever-expanding national liberation struggles against imperialist oppression—all have brought about an entirely new relation of forces on a world scale, and thereby opened up new perspectives for the consolidation of peace, for big democratic advances, and for the transition to socialism. Many propositions once held valid are now clearly outmoded; and Marxists everywhere are confronted with the imperative need for ideological "re-tooling."

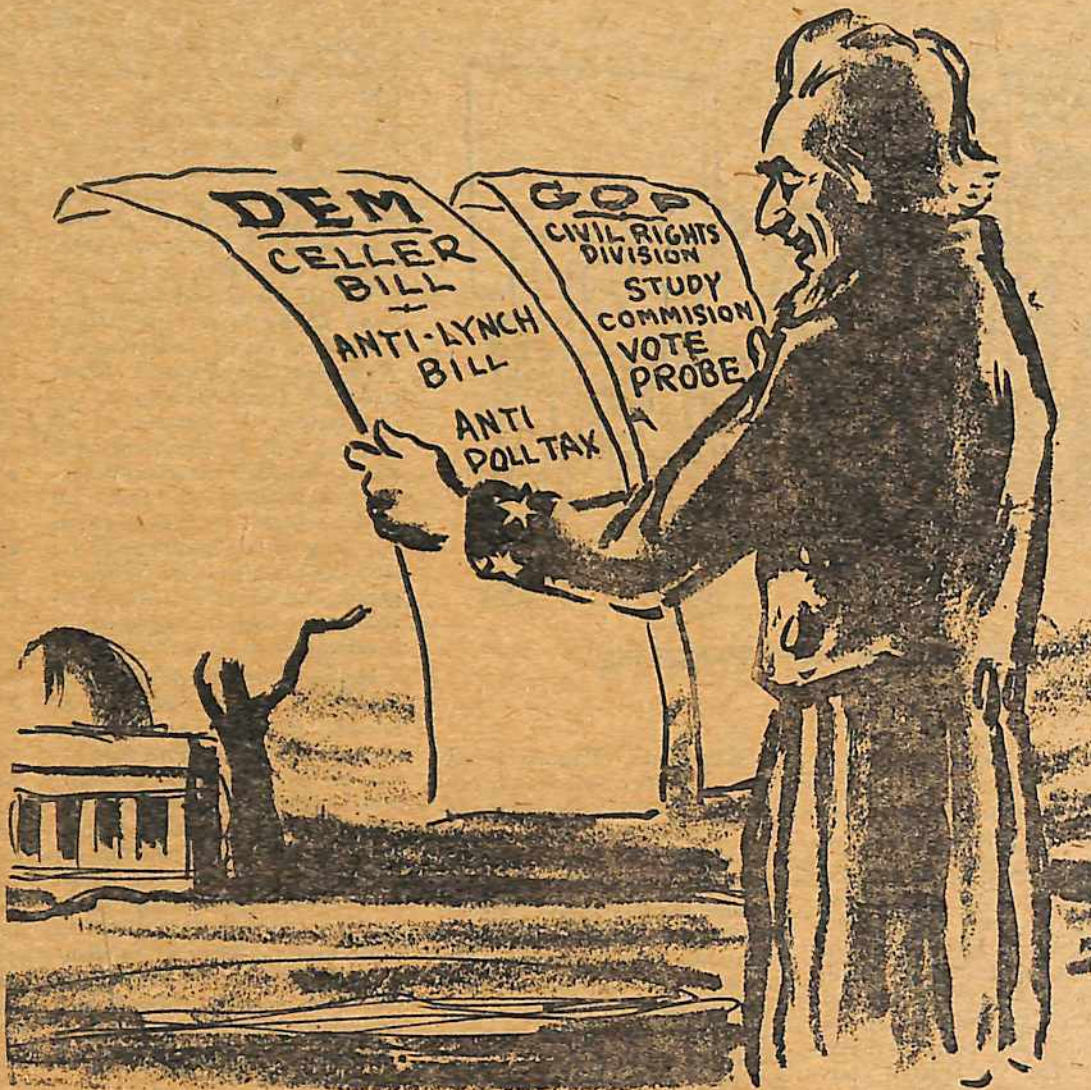
This, of course, is the process underway in our Party's pre-convention discussion. We are engaged in the collective and critical re-examination of our theoretical postulates, our political role and our organizational structure—all in the light of the changing relations of forces in our own country and in the world. We are trying to gear our Party to cope more effectively than heretofore with the realities of social developments on the American scene.

One of the many areas in which our Party's theoretical premises have lagged far behind ever-changing reality is in our outlook on the Negro question in the United States. Our theoretical position on this question was formulated in 1930 and basically reaffirmed in 1946. We viewed the Negro question as a national question—that of an oppressed "nation" in the Black Belt area of Negro majority population in the South, and that of an oppressed "national minority" elsewhere in the country. Our program to solve the problem called for struggle to realize the demands of "equal rights" for the Negro national minority, and of "self-determination" for the Negro nation.

Inherent in this "self-determination" demand was our outlook for the Negro nation in the Black Belt to mature as a nation, and to develop in the direction of—in time, itself to struggle for—some form of autonomous political existence. The 1930 Resolution, for example, called for "establishment of the state unity of the Black Belt," for bringing "together into one governmental unit all districts of the South where the majority of the settled population consists of Negroes." The 1946 Resolution re-asserted that the Negro people's "fight for liberation from oppression in the Black Belt—the area of Negro majority population—is a struggle for full nationhood, for their rightful position of full equality as a nation." It declared that "The Communist Party supports the right of self-determination for the Negro people, that is, their right to realize self-government in the Negro majority area in the South"; but it left open the question of "the form in which the right of self-determination will be exercised" for determination by future developments.

This, then, is today the theoretical outlook of the Communist Party on the Negro question. It is an untenable position, demonstrably undermined by the whole course of development of the Negro people during the past quarter-century. Our National Committee's call last April for our Party "to re-appraise our whole position on self-determination in the Black Belt" was long overdue.

At least three facts confront us in making a "re-appraisal" of our Party's theoretical position on the Negro question: (1) to review the considerations which



led to its formulation in the first place, and of its impact on the role of our Party and on the mass movement for Negro rights; (2) to analyze the reasons which argue for a change in our official position; and (3) to define precisely what we now consider a valid outlook and program for the solution of the Negro question. The first and third of these tasks are without the scope of this article, and are dealt with only tangentially. Attention is here focused on the second of these tasks—analysis of why a change is now necessary.

Many developments during recent decades raise serious doubt that our Party's conception of an "oppressed Negro nation in the Black Belt" moving in the direction of "self-determination" was valid at the outset; and they clearly demonstrate that it is wholly untenable today. Chief among them are (A) changes in the distribution of Negro population; (B) changes in the status of the Negro people in many areas of social life; (C) the dramatic recent upsurge and orientation of the Negro people's movement; (D) the role of our theoretical outlook in aggravating our Party's isolation from the Negro people's movement; and (E) the more mature, less doctrinaire, approach our Party is now taking generally in its application and development of Marxist principles in the concrete conditions of American life.

NEGRO POPULATION SHIFTS

At the turn of the century, almost nine-tenths of all Negroes lived in the South, and three-fourths in the rural-South. Even as late as 1930, when our theoretical position on the Negro question was formulated, 74 percent of the Negro population lived in the South, and 60 percent in the predominantly rural areas. By 1950, however, only 68 percent of all Negroes still lived in the Southern region, and only one-third in the rural-South. The country's Negro population is now almost equally divided among the rural South, the urban South and the northern cities; and 63 percent of the total (about the same as for whites) is urban. This changing pattern of Negro population distribution—from predominantly southern rural-farm to increas-

ingly nationwide and urban—fundamentally undermines our Party's outlook on the developmental perspectives of the Negro question in the United States.

Reflected in these changes, of course, are the great wartime waves of Negro population migration from South to North, and from rural to urban South. It is estimated that the northward movement that began during World War I, around 1915, brought at least 1,750,000 southern Negroes into the cities of the North and West by 1940; and that nearly 2,000,000 more migrated to these areas during the past 15 years. Whereas the total Negro population of the South increased by only 1.5 percent between 1940 and 1950, there was a corresponding increase of 57 percent in the rest of the country—52 percent in the North and 234 percent in the West. Some 2,600,000 Negroes living in these areas in 1950 were born in the South.

Along with this northward movement, there was a less dramatic but even more substantial Negro migration from the rural to the urban South. The proportions of southern Negroes living in the cities of the South changed from 22 percent in 1910 to 37 percent in 1940, and to 48 percent in 1950.

The impact of these migrations has been progressively to shrink and dissipate the Black Belt areas of Negro majority population. Whereas in 1900 there were some 293 counties in the South whose populations were 50 percent or more Negro, the number decreased to 221 in 1920, to 189 in 1930, to 180 in 1940, and to 156 in 1950.

In 1930 there was a large and fairly contiguous stretch of territory in the South in which Negroes constituted more than half of the total population. It covered substantial areas of southeastern Virginia, northeastern North Carolina, South Carolina, central Georgia and Alabama, and the lower Mississippi Valley—with extensions into Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida and east Texas. The 189 counties involved constituted the heart of the Black Belt, where 4,790,000 Negroes lived; and it spread outward to embrace some 288 additional counties whose populations were from 30 to 50 percent Negro. Here was the com-

mon territorial base of what our Party conceived as the Negro nation.

By 1950, however, this more or less continuous area of Negro majority population no longer existed. Instead, there are now three smaller groupings of Negro majority counties, geographically separated by substantial corridors of majority white population. One is along the coast of Virginia and northeast North Carolina. Another extends from southeast North Carolina through much of South Carolina, central Georgia and south-central Alabama, and into the northeast corner of Mississippi. The third centers in the Mississippi Valley, extending from north of Memphis down to the east-west border of Mississippi and Louisiana. The Negro population of the 156 counties involved is 2,109,000.

Thus, it is no longer possible to speak of a continuous area of Negro majority population in the South. The former such area has been broken up into three parts; the aggregate territory involved has been greatly reduced; and the Negro population in the remaining Negro majority counties is less than one-half that of the corresponding Black Belt areas of 1930. Moreover, there is nothing to warrant a long-time perspective of stabilization for the existing Negro majority areas in the South; indeed, decisive economic trends suggest quite the reverse.

In the first place, the plantation-cropping system, which operates to retard Negro population movements, has continued to decline sharply during recent decades. Between 1930 and 1950, for example, the number of Negro farm operators in the 1930 Black Belt area decreased by one-third; the number of Negro tenants and croppers decreased from 494,000 to 279,000, or by 44 percent; and the number of Negro farm wage-workers decreased from 293,000 to 163,000, also by 44 percent. Second, underlying this development is the fact that cotton production, in which the former Black Belt area was for a long time supreme, is shifting increasingly to the mechanized, non-plantation areas toward the West (Texas, California, Oklahoma, etc.). In 1950, for the first time, these areas produced a larger proportion of the nation's cotton

Theoretical Material on the Negro Question

In this issue, the Discussion Bulletin is presenting special material on theoretical aspects of the Negro question. These articles are described by their authors as "working papers" reflective of viewpoints now being debated in the Resolution Committee and the Negro Commission preliminary to the preparation of a concise Draft Resolution on the Party's Theoretical Position on the Negro Question.

As will be evident, there are wide areas of agreement expressed in each of these three articles. At the same time there are important shadings of difference and divergent views which require much wider discussion for their clarification and resolution. They are to be seen in: (1) the characterization of the Negro people; (2) the reasons for eliminating the slogan of political self-determination from our Party program; (3) the nature and assessment of the gains made toward freedom of the Negro people.

We publish this material in order that the Party membership will be able to join in the discussion of these questions on the basis of the work done by the committee thus far, and thereby assist it in producing the best possible Resolution.

DISCUSSION COMMITTEE

crop (46 percent) than did the 1930 Black belt area (32 percent). Third, the rapid industrial development of the South since around 1940, opening up some increased job opportunities for Negro workers, has proceeded and continues in the big urban centers outside the old Black Belt area. Fourth, the continued expansion of industry in the cities of the North and West affords even greater employment opportunities for Negro workers.

These and related economic trends are primarily responsible for the recent Negro migrations out of the Black Belt and the break-up of the formerly contiguous area of Negro majority population. It is possible that future setbacks in the economic and political life of the country may halt, or even reverse, these trends temporarily; but the long-range prospect is for continuation of the historic tendency toward dissipation of the Black Belt area of Negro population majority.

SOCIAL ADVANCES OF THE NEGRO PEOPLE

Along with the mass migration of Negroes from rural to urban South and from South to North and West during recent decades, and functionally related to these population shifts, have come very important advances in the economic, social and political status of the Negro people. These changes, especially since the early years of World War II, open up perspectives for the Negro in American life which are quite different from those our Party conceived a quarter-century ago.

First, there has been substantial advance in the Negro's economic status. For example, the proportions of Negro workers employed in non-farm occupations in the South increased between 1940 and 1950 from 50 to 66 percent for men, and from 80 to 86 percent for men (chiefly in the least desirable jobs in southern industry), and from 5 to 10 percent for women (more than half of them in laundries). Increases "above" the level of operatives, service workers and laborers were from 7 to 12 percent for men, and from 6 to 12 percent for women. The proportions employed in service occupations alone remained at 11 percent for men, but decreased from 59 to 45 percent for women.

Although quite limited, these shifts in the occupational distribution of southern Negro workers—especially that from

(Continued on Page 6)

Time to Reappraise CP Position on Negro Question

(Continued from Page 5)

farm to non-farm—reflect very important advances in social and economic status. Not only does the Negro have greater personal security in the large urban centers than on the countryside, along with more ready access to the ballot, he also enjoys a much higher standard of living. In 1954, for example, the median (i.e. most typical) Negro family income was \$2,425 in the urban South, as compared with \$742 in the rural-farm South. Moreover, this increased income of the working class masses operates substantially to raise the income levels of middle class Negroes in business and professional occupations based on the southern Negro ghetto.

The distribution of Negro men among the non-farm occupations in the cities of the North and West is not much different from that in the urban South; and there were only minor gains in relative occupational status between 1940 and 1950. There was, however, a very marked and very important increase in the number of Negro men in occupations "above" the operative-service-laborer level—from less than 110,000 in 1940 to almost 270,000 in 1950, or about 146 percent. Moreover, there were significant relative advances for Negro women workers—increases from 11 to 25 percent in the proportion of operatives, and from 3 to 9 percent in the proportion of clerical and sales workers, along with a decrease from 80 to 57 percent in the proportion of service workers.

Thus, in the decade of the 40's, the urban North and West was able to absorb nearly 2,000,000 Negro migrants—mostly from the South, with little education or industrial experience—and still to sustain some modest improvements relatively and a very big gain absolutely in the occupational status of Negro men, together with substantial relative advances for Negro women. What this implies for the overall economic progress of the Negro people is suggested by the fact that their 1954 median family income in the northern cities was approximately \$3,260—35 percent more than in the urban South, and 340 percent more than in the rural-farm South.

Second, there has been a very big advance, both absolute and relative, in the educational status of the Negro people. This came partly through increased urbanization of the Negro population, but chiefly in direct response to powerful organized struggles by the Negro people.

In the southern states with segregated school systems, where some 2,000,000 Negro elementary and high school pupils constitute one-fourth of the total, there have been very substantial improvements in the extent and financial support of Negro public schools. Between 1940 and 1952, current expenditures per Negro pupil increased from \$21.54 to \$115.08 (435 percent); expenditures for capital outlays per Negro pupil increased almost 30-fold, from 99 cents to \$29.58; the average length of Negro school terms increased from 160 to 177 days (10 percent); and average annual salaries of Negro teachers increased from \$487 to \$2,389 (390 percent).

These absolute improvements were accompanied by a considerable closing of the gap between white and Negro school conditions in the South. Thus, current expenditure per pupil in Negro schools amounted in 1940 to only 43 percent of that in white schools, as compared with 70 percent in 1952. Corresponding relative gains during this 12-year period were from 97 to 99 percent in length of school term, from 23 to 82 percent in capital outlay expenditures per pupil, and from 54 to 87 per-



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cent in the average annual salaries of teachers.

One of the most significant reflections of the Negro's overall educational progress is seen in the difference in amount of schooling between the "older" and "younger" generations of Negroes living in the South in 1950. A recent study showed that 49 percent of the Negro men who were born between 1905-09 had completed less than five years in school, as compared with 19 percent for those born between 1931-32. Only 5 percent of the older generation, as compared with 15 percent of the younger generation, graduated from high school.

The Negro people's widespread struggles to win these educational gains in the South, together with the effects of improved education in strengthening their demands for still further advance, are a very important part of what led to the powerful and victorious movement to outlaw segregated schools, and now actually to achieve the integration of white and Negro education in the South. By last fall, this struggle for integrated schools had been won for about 300,000 Negro pupils and 2,500,000 white pupils in 723 school districts of nine southern and border states and the District of Columbia; and its ultimate triumph throughout the South is certain to come.

Third, the status of Negroes has been improved in most other areas of American life. Some 2,000,000 Negro workers, for example, are now an integral part of the organized labor movement; and in addition to considerable representation on secondary levels of union leadership, they sit in the top councils of the AFL-CIO.

There has been a big increase in the number of Negroes registered to vote in the South, especially since the Supreme Court outlawed the white primary in 1944. In all states of the Deep South, for example, the number of Negro voters increased from 150,000 in 1940 to 1,110,000 in 1952; and for the whole South the number approximates 1,300,000 today. Small but increasing numbers of Negroes are being elected to local public offices in the South; and the Negro vote outside the South represents the potential balance of power in 61 congressional districts.

Remarkably rapid progress has been made during the past decade toward the elimination of Jimcrow practices in the armed services. The extent of mob violence against Negroes in the South has waned considerably. Racial segregation has been almost eliminated in inter-state transportation, and is progressively being destroyed in municipal parks, swimming pools, golf courses and other public places

in the South. Important advances have been made in breaking down the still dominant pattern of residential segregation. And along with this weakening of the Jimcrow social structure—in shops and unions and the community at large—millions of white and Negro people are beginning to develop normal relationships with one another, and thereby to undermine the influence of racist ideology on the masses of white Americans.

These gains on many fronts are a product of concerted struggle by the Negro people and their allies in an extended period of relative economic prosperity and social advance for the whole American population. They must be appraised in the light of the wide range of special caste-like discriminations which continue to hold Negroes far behind their advancing white countrymen.

The old Black Belt area of Negro population concentrations, now narrowed and partitioned, still persists much as it has been for generations; and the declining plantation system on which it rests continues to display remarkable tenacity in the old slave areas of the Southeast and the Mississippi Delta. Some 5,000,000 Negro Americans still reside in this and similar areas of the rural South. Most of them live under conditions of extreme poverty, with grossly inadequate schools, faced with the constant threat—and the frequent actuality—of physical violence from such forces as the Klan and the Citizens Councils, and barred from any participation, whatever, in the political life of their communities. The general social progress of recent decades has had very little meaning for them.

Even in the rest of the country there remains a great gulf between the economic and social status of Negro and white citizens. Very few new jobs have been opened up for Negro workers by the recent industrial expansion in the South; and employment opportunities for Negroes in the North and West are severely restricted by flagrant racial discrimination. As a direct result, the 1954 median family income for Negroes in the United States (\$2,876) was only 60 percent as much as that for the whites (\$4,827); and 54 percent of all Negro families (as compared with 29 percent for whites) were forced to live on less than \$3,000 a year. The super-exploitation of Negro workers remains the major source of extra-profits for the monopolies which dominate the economy of our country.

Despite the recent improvements in Negro school conditions, the proportion of "younger generation" Negro men in the South with less than five years of schooling (19 percent) is still more than three times as large

as for young white men (6 percent). For every \$1.00 southern public school systems spent on the average white pupil for current operations during 1952, they spent only 70 cents on the average Negro pupil. If educational opportunities and facilities for Negroes approximated those for whites in the South, in 1950 there would have been 74,800 (instead of 30,600) Negro high school graduates and 13,200 (instead of 5,800) Negro college graduates. Two and one-half years after the Supreme Court outlawed Jimcrow schools, approximately 90 percent of all Negro pupils in the South still attend "legally" mandatory segregated schools. Even in the North, where school segregation has long been "prohibited" by law, the practice of racial segregation and other forms of discrimination against Negro pupils is extremely common.

Negroes are still murdered in the South and their homes bombed in many parts of the nation for nothing more than efforts to exercise their constitutional rights. Jimcrow still defines the basic position of Negroes in the social structure of our entire country. The President and Congress persist in refusing to take decisive action to protect the persons and the democratic rights of the Negro people. And racial prejudice is still deep-rooted and widespread in the white population of both the South and North.

In short, Negro Americans still remain, very definitely, the "second-class citizens" of our country; and that basic fact, together with its manifold harmful consequences for the nation as a whole, has been changed only in degree by the many democratic gains of the Negro people have won during the past quarter-century.

What is "new" and extremely important about recent progressive trends in Negro life is that once relatively stable patterns of oppression are now in flux. Racial barriers have been breached at many points; and the whole Jimcrow edifice is threatened with destruction. There now is a realistic perspective for the Negro people to win truly decisive victories in the fight for democratic rights in the period immediately ahead; and this happy outlook—for an early qualitative leap forward—is quite different from that which prevailed when our Party's theoretical position on the Negro question was formulated in 1930.

TRENDS IN THE NEGRO PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

The dramatic upsurge of the Negro people's movement during the past two decades is one of the most significant political developments in our country; and the emerging new features of this movement have profound implications for our Party's theoretical outlook on the Negro question.

In the first place, the center of gravity of the Negro people's fight for equal rights has shifted from the northern metropolitan areas to the Deep South. Whereas the spotlight once focused on Harlem, Southside Chicago and similar ghettos in the North; the main struggle now proceeds in the big cities and rural Black Belt areas of the South—Montgomery, Tallahassee, Columbia, Clarendon County, to mention only a few. Marxists always understood the necessity and inevitability of this development; because there can be no real solution of the Negro problem in the United States without destruction of the roots of the Jimcrow system in the South. Recent developments have now placed this task on the agenda of history.

Second, new and advanced demands are being pressed by the Negro people on all fronts.

The decades-old fight for "equal" facilities in the Negro separate school has been transformed into a powerful struggle for the complete and immediate end of school segregation. And so it is in public transportation, recreation, housing, jobs, the armed services, trade union leadership, voting, representation in public office, and every other area of American life. Objectives are now actively fought for that seemed utopian only two decades ago. Destruction of the whole Jimcrow system is now posed by the Negro people as an immediate and attainable goal. What is becoming the dominant mood of the entire Negro people was effectively expressed by Rev. Martin Luther King, dynamic young leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association, in his simple declaration: "We have decided we can no longer live with Jimcrow."

Third, there is developing a new high level of direct participation by the masses of Negroes in the fight for civil rights. Witness, for example, the local mass demonstrations in Prince Edwards County, Virginia, and Clarendon County, South Carolina—both Negro majority areas—which yesterday kicked off the triumphant campaign to have the Supreme Court outlaw segregated schools; and today, in many parts of the South, the heroism of Negro children and their parents in defying the white-supremacist mobs which are trying to prevent their realizing the benefits of this court victory. Recall the great mass demonstrations throughout the country last fall and winter in protest against the foul murder of young Emmett Till. Consider what is happening when the entire Negro populations of large southern cities organize and sustain for months on end the virtually complete boycott of segregated busses. Note the vast dimensions attained by the still growing right-to-vote movement in the South. The day is passing when a small, militant Negro minority carries the brunt of the struggle for the Negro masses; the prevailing trend now is toward involvement of the majority of the Negro people directly in the struggle.

Fourth, the Negro people are strengthening as never before the internal bonds of cohesion which makes them a distinct people. The burgeoning movement in the South finds echo in militant supporting struggles in the North. Negro workers in the shops, small farmers on the countryside, students and teachers in the schools and colleges, churchmen of all denominations, professionals in other fields, and the small but important stratum of capitalists—all are now moving in an ever greater concert of struggle for the attainment of common goals. We are now witnessing the development to a very high level of that Negro people's unity—transcending class and geographical barriers—which led our Party long ago to characterize the Negro question in the United States as a national question, that of an oppressed people. It was and remains a correct characterization.

Fifth, the Negro people are rapidly building up their organized strength. Negro trade union membership has doubled in the past 15 years, bringing into being a vital and influential Negro caucus movement in the unions, and imparting a new quality of working class militancy to most all of the Negro organizations. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, now re-emerging as the fighting vanguard of the whole Negro people.

(Continued on Page 7)

Time to Reappraise CP Position on Negro Question



(Continued from Page 6)

ple, is rapidly growing in membership (by 65 percent during the past year) and extending its influence throughout the nation, especially in the South. Negro fraternal societies—most notably the 500,000 Elks, the several church denominations, scores of women's organizations, college fraternities and sororities, and professional associations of all kinds are strengthening their organizations and entering increasingly into the economic and political arenas of struggle. Even the social-work Urban League is taking on a militant hue and beginning, for the first time in its long history, to build up a mass membership.

Moreover, these many Negro organizations are moving more and more to coordinate their struggles. The N.A.A.C.P. has played an increasingly important role to this end. But probably the highest expression of this growing inter-organizational unity came with emergence of the State of the Race Conference last April, when 73 leaders of the main Negro organizations met for the express purpose of concerting their efforts. Not since the National Negro Congress was launched in 1936 has there been anything approximating this new coordinating center, which embraces practically the whole of the Negro people's movement and promises to issue in a new stage of organized unity in struggle.

Sixth, the Negro people are consciously reaching out for—and winning—important white allies in their fight for civil rights. This is most evident in the N.A.A.C.P.'s recent development of close ties with the labor movement, its even closer working relations with the American Jewish Congress and the American Civil Liberties Union, and its coordinating leadership of some 50 white and Negro national organizations which are brought together periodically for joint action on specific civil rights issues. But this trend toward closer relations with labor and other liberal white allies is becoming even more general in the Negro people's movement; and it is getting results. Never since the day of Civil War and Reconstruction have the struggles of the Negro people received such active support as they are getting today from predominantly white labor, church, professional, civic and other organizations throughout the country.

Moreover, there is growing realization among the Negro people that their democratic struggles here are closely linked with—and strengthened by—the anti-imperialist, national movements of the colonial and recently liberated peoples of Asia and Africa, and by the growing strength of the socialist world. Bandung had profound repercussions among all strata of the Negro people. And Negroes

sense that increased competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for leadership of the so-called "uncommitted two-thirds of mankind" operates enormously to enhance their civil rights bargaining power here at home.

Finally, there has developed an overwhelming unity in the outlook of the Negro people. It is summed up in the term "integration." Negroes definitely do not want any separatist line of development, politically or otherwise apart from the main currents of American life. Although some tendencies toward separation still exist, they are but pale shadows of the big nationalist upsurge of the Carvey Movement in the 1920's; and their influence is inconsequential. Nor do Negroes seek an undifferentiated "white" society. There are fringe tendencies along this line also; but they by no means reflect the prevailing consciousness of the Negro people. What the overwhelming mass of the Negro people clearly want is full respect for their dignity as Negro Americans, together with their unfettered right to equal participation, as individuals and as organized groups, in the economic, political and social life of their country. This is the real meaning of "integration"; and this is unquestionably the dominant and controlling aim of the Negro people's movement today.

None of these interrelated trends in the Negro people's movement has yet reached full maturity—all are still emerging; but their over-all impact upon the movement has already decisively shaped its general line of development in the period ahead. The struggle will center increasingly in the South; and it will press for ever more advanced demands, with major emphasis on the right to vote and for full representation in the councils of government. The Negro people will continue to build up their organized strength throughout the country, and further to augment their striking power by ever-widening alliances, first of all with the labor movement. Their fight for civil rights will merge increasingly with the democratic struggles of labor and other progressive forces—to break the stranglehold by which the Wall Street-Dixiecrat alliance now obstructs the forward movement of our whole country, to restore the Bill of Rights as the effective law of the land, to consolidate peace, and to raise the living standards and strengthen the economic security of the masses of all people, on the countryside and in the cities. Negroes will also come to realize, in time, that monopoly capital is the main enemy of Negro freedom, the decisive buttress of the whole Jimcrow system; and when that time comes they will take their place as a major component

of that anti-monopoly coalition which will one day command the machinery of our government.

In the process of the great democratic struggles which alone can issue in these historic developments, the Negro people will achieve, indeed, their cherished goal of "integration." And farther down the road, their decisive sectors will join forces with that inevitable revolutionary movement—led by the working class and guided by its Marxist vanguard—which is destined to effect the socialist reorganization of American society.

This seems to be the general strategic line of march forecast by recent developments in the Negro people's movement, and inherent in its relations to the over-all class struggle of which it is an inseparable part. It is a course of development toward ever more integral participation in the economic, political and social life of our country as a whole. It definitely is not the autonomous course of development which our Party envisioned when its theoretical position on the Negro question was formulated 26 years ago.

SECTARIAN IMPACT OF OUR THEORY

The recent upsurge of the Negro people's movement has been paralleled by the diminishing role and influence of our Party in its development. This is, indeed, a sobering contradiction, especially in view of our vital and leading role in the movement in the past, and our continuing understanding of the prime political significance of the Negro question for the working class and our country as a whole.

There are many causes of this progressive isolation of our Party from the Negro people's movement, particularly the lag in adjusting our tactical line to the emergence of many different organized centers giving leadership to the struggle. Our concern here, however, is for the role which our theoretical outlook played in helping to further our isolation from the Negro masses. Its influence has been definitely sectarian, in several respects.

First, the overwhelming majority of the Negro people abhor and reject any outlook for their separation—in any form whatever, even temporarily—from the American nation as a whole. Our Party's once high level of prestige and influence among the Negro people was developed in spite of—not because of—our little-understood slogan of "self-determination"; and it was based chiefly on Communist leadership in militant struggles for Negro rights in our country, and on the liberating national policy of the Soviet Union on a world scale. I cannot think of a single Negro leader outside our Party who has been even tolerant of our outlook for the establishment of a Negro nation. Our dogmatic insistence that the Negro's development must proceed along lines which ran counter to the aspirations and actual experiences of the Negro masses could not but tend to isolate us from them.

Second, we correctly understood "self-determination in the Black Belt" as a revolutionary demand, pointing to completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution in the South. But in our emphasis on this strategic objective—which still defines the major democratic task before our country, many of us tended to look upon "mere reforms"—relatively minor improvements in the social conditions of the Negro people—as of little consequence. Indeed, some of our comrades seemed over-ready to deprecate the gains being won by the Negro people, as if they somehow ran counter to our

revolutionary outlook. Such attitudes, of course, were theoretically incorrect; for they overlooked the fact that big qualitative leaps in social development come through the accumulation of small quantitative changes. But the main point here is that such negative attitudes toward the reforms being fought for and hailed by the Negro people served to further our isolation from them.

Third, these negative attitudes toward the gains being won by the Negro people became translated into open hostility toward their "reformist" leaders. Many among us could hardly mention the names of these leaders without attaching such choice epithets as "betrayers," "lackeys of imperialism," and many more. Thus did we earn the active opposition of precisely those leaders with the greatest influence among the Negro masses; and in so doing we furthered our isolation from the whole of the Negro people.

Fourth, our strategic orientation on the Negro question also contributed to our pre-occupation with Left-led organizational centers in the fight for Negro rights. Only we, with our true revolutionary outlook, could really be trusted to lead the Negro masses to ultimate victory; and we sought vainly to attract them from the established, main-line organizations through which they continued to operate. The inevitable result was to leave our Party standing largely on the side-lines, while the Negro people's movement forged ahead at an ever-increasing tempo.

I think there is no question that our Party's present extreme isolation from the Negro masses is, in very large measure, a function of our theoretical outlook for the Negro "nation" in the Black Belt to develop in the direction of some form of political autonomy. We simply have been pointing in a direction opposite to that in which the Negro people were actually moving.

THE FIGHT AGAINST DOCTRINAIRE MARXISM

Our Party's recent re-examination of its approach to the application and further development of Marxist theory is leading us to conclude, as stated in the Draft Resolution for the 16th National Convention, that we have "suffered historically from dogmatic application of Marxist theory to the American scene," and that "insufficient development of the theoretical work of our Party over the past decades has contributed toward our doctrinaire acceptance and mechanical application of many theoretical propositions." Surely it is that our Party's theoretical position on the Negro question affords a prime example of these dogmatic and doctrinaire errors.

There is no question that the basic theoretical principles of scientific socialism on the national question have universal validity. The teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin on the emergence of nations with the rise of capitalism, on the class roots of national oppression, on the right of nations to self-determination, on complete equal rights for national minorities, on the leading roles of the bourgeoisie and of the proletariat at different stages of the national movement, on the alliance between the working class and the oppressed nations against imperialism, on the two-front struggle against great-nation chauvinism and narrow nationalism—their teachings on these and many related questions have been proved, time and again, to illuminate and afford effective guidance for national developments throughout the world.

It was with good reason,

therefore, that our Party acted on the premise that Marxist theory on the national question has meaning for the Negro question in the United States; it certainly does. Where we erred was in the tacit assumptions, (1) that the development of Marxist theory on the national question had been completed, and the answers to all questions safely written down where we could find them in the classics; and (2) that the application of this theory to the Negro question in our country consisted largely in adopting forms and slogans that proved successful in the Soviet Union. The one is the essence of dogmatism, the other of doctrinairism; and both operated to stifle concrete analysis and creative generalization on the basis of the peculiarities in the development of the Negro people—which is the essence of true Marxist methodology.

There are similarities, indeed, between the relative brief development of the Negro people in America and the far longer development—going back to ancient times—of the Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian and other peoples of the Soviet Union; but there are also vast differences. It was not our task, as Marxists, to proceed as if the formulae by which the Bolsheviks solved the national question could be transplanted fully-blown to American soil. Rather, our task was to examine concretely the differences between the development of the Negro people in our country and national developments in other lands, to test our general principles in the light of American experience, to determine what there is in these principles that applies to the Negro question in the United States—and how differently they must be applied, and also, if need be, further to develop the theoretical propositions of our science in this field.

There have always been many comrades among us who sensed—as did the Negro people—that our concept of an "oppressed Negro nation" and our slogan of "self-determination in the Black Belt" were patently alien to the American scene, that they simply did not correspond to the actual or prospective development of the Negro people. It is a tragedy that our movement did not welcome their skepticism, and encourage their theoretical exploration of more fruitful hypotheses; for the tasks of creative analysis which we should have undertaken long ago still remain largely undone.

CONCLUSION

Thus, for the past quarter-century our Party has been hobbled by a theoretical position on the Negro question which is contradicted by its actual and prospective course of development, which operates to further our isolation from the Negro people, and which we are now coming to understand was an incorrect, doctrinaire application of Marxist principles on the national question in the first place. We do, indeed, need to "re-appraise"—in fact, to abandon—this unreal and disorienting theoretical outlook.

The Negro question is, as we have long understood, a national question, involving the oppression of a distinct people. Moreover, as with national questions generally, it is closely bound up with and will find its ultimate solution in relation to the broader struggles of the working class and its allies to curb the reactionary power of monopoly capital, and eventually to reorganize our society along socialist lines. Our task now is to define a theoretical outlook on this question which is consistent with developing reality, and which enhances our ability to help strengthen the Negro people's movement and cement its ties with the working class.