

# The Communist International and the Negro

By ROSE PASTOR STOKES

One of the most significant developments in the Fourth Congress of the Communist International was the creation of a Negro Commission and the adoption of the Commission's Thesis on the Negro Question which concludes with the declaration that "the Fourth Congress recognizes the necessity of supporting every form of Negro Movement which tends to undermine capitalism and Imperialism or to impede their further progress", pledges the Communist International to fight "for race equality of the Negro with the

White people, for equal wages and political and social rights", to "exert every effort to admit Negroes into Trade Unions" and to "take immediate steps to hold a general Negro Conference or Congress in Moscow".

Two American Negroes were guests of the Congress. One, a poet, the other a speaker and organizer, both young and energetic, devoted to the cause of Negro liberation and responsive to the ideals of the revolutionary proletariat. They charmed the delegates with their fine personalities. Both addressed the Con-

gress and won prolonged applause—while Comrade Radek threw his arms about one of them, as he came from the platform, delighted to find such a clear and able comrade representing the oppressed Negro workers.

Among the countries represented on the Negro Commission were America (two; with an additional member later), Belgium, France, England, Java, British South Africa, Japan, Holland, Russia (one each). The two Negro Comrades were in the Commission; one as guest of the Commission invited to address its

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# American Negroes Present the Race Problem to the Fourth Congress of Communist International

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members attend its sittings, the other as members who were elected in the first meeting permanent Chairman of the Commission.

The original draft of the Thesis (presented by the Chairman to the Congress) was returned, upon a motion by Comrade Radek, for "clarification and amplification", his criticism being that the document was "too Marxian in its phrasing". This pleased the American members of the Commission and the member from British South Africa, who were no sticklers for the "Marxian phrase" and who wanted particularly to make it a simple statement that any man reading a newspaper could read and understand. A small subcommittee elected by the Negro Commission produced the Thesis in its final form, the full text of which, purporting to be taken from the "Minutes" follows:

Chairman: I call upon Comrade Sasha to report on the decisions of the Committee on the Negro Question.

### Africa Next Imperialist Prize

Sasha (American): Comrades, the thesis on the Negro Question which was returned for clarification and amplification I shall now read to you and trust that it will be unanimously adopted by the Congress.

1. During and after the war there developed among the colonial and semi-colonial peoples a movement of revolt, which is still making successful progress against the power of intensive capitalization of regions inhabited by black races is becoming the last great problem on the solution of which the further development of capitalism itself depends.

French capitalism clearly recognizes that the power of French post-war imperialism will be able to maintain itself only thru the creation of a French African Empire, linked up by a Trans-Sahara Railway with America's financial magnates (who are exploiting 12,000,000 Negroes at home) are now organizing on a peaceful penetration of Africa.

How bitter for her part dreads the menace to her position in Africa

is shown by the extreme measures taken to crush the Rand strike. Just as in the Pacific the danger of another world war has become acute owing to the competition of the imperialist powers there, so Africa looms ominously as the object of their rival ambitions.

### Negro Workers Aroused

Moreover, the war, the Russian Revolution and the great movements of revolt against Imperialism on the part of the Asiatic and Mussulman nationalities have roused the consciousness of millions of the Negro race whom capitalism has oppressed and degraded beyond all others for hundreds of years, not only in Africa, but perhaps even more in America.

### American Negro Has Important Role

2. The history of the Negro in America fits him for an important role in the liberation struggle of the entire African race. Three hundred years ago the American Negro was torn from his native African soil, brought in slave ships under the most cruel and indescribable conditions and sold into slavery.

For two hundred and fifty years he toiled a chattel slave under the lash of the American overseer. His labor cleared the forest, built the roads, raised the cotton, laid the railroad tracks and supported the Southern aristocracy. His reward was poverty, illiteracy, degradation and misery. The Negro was no docile slave. He rebelled. His history is rich in rebellion, insurrection, underground methods of securing liberty, but his struggles were barbarously crushed. He was tortured into submission and the bourgeois press and religion justified his slavery.

When chattel slavery became an obstacle to the full and free development of America on the basis of capitalism; when chattel slavery clashed with wage slavery, chattel slavery had to go.

The Civil War, which was not a war to free the Negro, but a war to maintain the industrial supremacy of the North, left the Negro the choice of peonage in the South or wage slavery in the North.

### Equality to Kill and Be Killed

The sneers, blood and tears of the "freed" Negroes helped to build American capitalism, and when, having become a world power, America was inevitably dragged into the war, the American Negro was declared the equal of the white man to kill and be killed for "democracy".

Four hundred thousand colored workers were drafted into the American army and segregated into "Jim Crow" regiments. Fresh from the terrible sacrifices of war the returned Negro soldier was met with race persecutions, lynchings, murders, disfranchisement, discrimination and segregation. He fought back, but for asserting his manhood he paid dearly.

Persecution of the Negro became more widespread and intense than before the war, until he had "learned to keep his place". The post-war industrialization of the Negro in the North and the spirit of revolt engendered by post-war persecutions and brutalities (a spirit which the suppressed flames into action when a Tulsa or other inhuman outrages aloud for protest) places the American Negro, especially of the North, in the vanguard of the African struggle against oppression.

### Communists Hail New Negro Spirit

3. It is with intense pride that the Communist International sees the exploited Negro workers resist the attacks of the exploiters, for the enemy of his race and the enemy of the white workers is Imperialism, same Capitalism and Imperialism. The international struggle of the Negro race is a struggle against Capitalism and Imperialism.

It is on the basis of this struggle that the world Negro movement must be organized in America, at the center of Negro culture and the crystallization of Negro protest; in Africa, the reservoir of human labor for the further development of Capitalism, in Central America (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Colombia, Nicaragua, and other "Independent" Republics), where American Imperialism dominates; in Porto Rico, Haiti, Santo Domingo and other

islands washed by the waters of the Caribbean, where the brutal treatment of our black brothers has aroused the protest of the conscious Negro and the revolutionary white workers everywhere; in South Africa and the Congo where the growing industrialization of the Negro population has resulted in various black fellow-men as essential to the Proletarian Revolution and the destruction of capitalist power. The Fourth Congress accordingly declares it to be a special duty of Communists to apply the "Thesis on Colonial Questions" to the Negro problem.

### Struggle Against Imperialism World-Wide

4. It is the task of the Communist International to point out to the Negro people that they are not the only people suffering from the oppression of Capitalism and Imperialism; that the workers and peasants of Europe and Asia and the Americas are also the victims of Imperialism; that the struggle against Imperialism is not the struggle of any one people, but of all the peoples of the world; that in China and India, in Persia and Turkey, in Egypt and Morocco the oppressed colored colonial peoples are rising against the same evils that the Negroes are rising against—racial oppression and discrimination, and intensified industrial exploitation; that these peoples are striving for the same ends that the Negroes are striving for—political, industrial and social liberation and equality.

5. The Communist International, which represents the revolutionary workers and peasants of the whole world in the struggle to break the power of Imperialism; the Communist International, which is not simply the organization of the enslaved white workers of Europe and America, but equally the organization of the oppressed colored peoples of the world, feels it its duty to encourage and support the international organizations of the Negro people in their struggle against the common enemy.

### Special Duty of Communists

5. The Negro problem has be-

come a vital question of the world revolution; and the Third International, which has already recognized what valuable aid can be rendered to the Proletarian Revolution by colored "Asiatic" peoples, in semi-capitalist countries, likewise regards the co-operation of our oppressed white and colored workers who are willing to form a united front and carry on a new campaign to compel inclusion.

6. 1) The Fourth Congress recognizes the necessity of supporting every form of Negro movement which tends to undermine or weaken Capitalism or Imperialism or to impede its further penetration.

2) The Communist International will fight for race equality of the Negro with the White people, for equal wages and political and social rights.

3) The Communist International will exert every effort to compel trade unions to admit Negro workers to membership or, where the nominal right exists, to agitate for a special campaign to draw them into the unions; failing in this, it will organize the Negroes into unions of their own and especially apply the United Front tactic to compel admission.

4) The Communist International will take immediate steps to hold a general Negro Conference or Congress in Moscow.

### United Front of All Labor

Comrades, I want to add a word on the Negro Question. On the clause dealing with the Negro and the trade unions. In the American Federation of Labor Negroes are nominally admitted to membership in most unions, but there is absolutely no effort made save in extremely few cases to draw the Negro into the unions.

In the United States we can bring pressure to bear upon the American Federation of Labor to admit the Negro workers. There we must enter into a definite campaign to ac-

complish this thing. Campaigns should be carried on in every country, concerned clearly, definitely, bravely, and if we fail it will be our duty to organize the Negroes into separate unions, bring together the white and colored workers who are willing to form a united front and carry on a new campaign to compel inclusion.

In the industrial field, where the black and white workers toil side by side, and suffer together thru the industrial oppression of capitalism—there chiefly can we hope to create that unity, that understanding, that binding tie, that will bring them thru common organization into the struggle.

The Congress is taking a wonderful first step in moving to hold a general Negro Conference or Congress in Moscow. But our chief work (as Sections) lies in getting the industrialized Negroes into the unions where they can fight together with the white workers for their equal emancipation.

We must not allow this Thesis to become a dead letter, but must carry it into life and make the Negro worker a vital part of the Communist International.

The Resolution was unanimously adopted. Credit is due America for introducing the question of a Negro Commission. I understand there was no opposition to the motion in the Presidium where it was offered, and the creation of the Commission was voted unanimously and immediately named.

The Negro Question is not one that was suddenly precipitated at the Fourth Congress. Jack Reed had reported on the American Negro at the Second Congress. Last year a comprehensive report had been received by the C. I. Executive. The question was being considered. Nor is the idea of calling a general Negro Conference or Congress in Moscow some time in the near future, an inspiration of the Commission. In Asia, in Turkey, in Egypt it is the Communist International that inspires the revolutionary struggle of

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In presenting the above Thesis to the Congress for action, the Negro Commission made a report also to the Presidium, more private in its nature, which called for action by the C. I.

This report was detailed and contained the following recommendations for the creation of a Negro Bureau in Moscow, and a Negro Commission with a specific Negro Organizational Department, a draft of instructions (as coming from the C. I. to the Sections concerned), detailing the specific tasks of the Sections in their relation to the Negro Question. One indication of the significance the C. I. attaches to the Negro Question, lies in the fact that, immediately upon the receipt of these recommendations, a member of the Presidium was selected to head the proposed Negro Bureau.

The C. I. desires action in this matter. It is taking action. One of the living tasks of the American Comrades is to "carry on" on behalf not alone of the foreign-born workers who are oppressed and discriminated against, but also on behalf of that American worker whose black skin is a greater bar to Trade Union membership and the general fellowship of American labor than the lack of an American birth certificate.

"White whisperer" warn against the "rising tide of the darker races" that will overwhelm and dominate the white race. Communists have no fear for such Ku Klucks! Communists have nothing to fear from the liberation of oppressed peoples. Communists know no race or color differences, as they know no national boundaries lines. Common oppression ultimately places all workers in one camp for the struggle against the oppressors. And the Proletarian Revolution will make them one in Communism as we are all biologically one.

Long live the revolutionary workers and peasants of every color and every race! Long live their power in union!

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