

THE SOUTH—THE NATION'S PROBLEM*

By JOHN GATES

IN 1938 a national conference on economic conditions in the South met in Washington and made a survey of conditions in the South. President Roosevelt sent a message to this conference, in which he said:

It is my conviction that the South presents right now the nation's No. 1 economic problem—the nation's problem, not merely the South's. For we have an economic unbalance in the nation as a whole due to this very condition in the South. It is an unbalance that can and must be righted, for the sake of the South and of the nation.

Ten years have passed. Has the economic picture changed? We can find the answer to this question in *The Raleigh News and Observer*, prominent Southern newspaper, which published on June 20 of this year a special report on the progress of the South from 1938 to 1948. This report states:

Despite remarkable achievements in war production, it is doubtful whether Southern industry had advanced its pre-war position in the national economy, when, with 27 per cent of the nation's population and 28 per cent of the land area, it possessed 17 per cent of the country's wage earners and accounted for 14 per cent of the value of its manu-

factures. Despite the increase in industrialization during wartime, the relative position of the South in the nation's economy shows only slight improvement. During the period of peak wartime employment, Southern industry expanded almost as rapidly as the United States as a whole, but by 1945 it had again returned to the pre-war ratio.

Thus, industrialization advanced in the South, especially during the war, but it was part of war expansion in the country as a whole, and the South has not improved its relative position with respect to the nation's economy as a whole. The economic unbalance referred to by Roosevelt continues in force. The South remains the nation's No. 1 economic problem.

Nor has there been any basic change in living standards. The total income for the South was 20 per cent in 1938 (28 per cent of population) and 22 per cent in 1948 (27 per cent of population); the average per capita income in 1938, \$315, and in 1948, \$797; industrial wages, \$865 annually in 1938, and \$1798 in 1948. The soaring cost of living has wiped out these gains, and, of course, these average figures conceal the disparity between Negro and white and the fact that Negro standards are below

* The report on the South to the Negro-South Panel of the Convention.

the sub-standard general average of the South.

Health, housing, and educational standards remain frightful and barbarous. There has been no substantial improvement other than relatively higher employment today than ten years ago. When mass unemployment again develops, conditions will be far worse than they were a decade ago. Meanwhile, the gains of Negroes during the war in securing jobs in industry, in getting more skilled jobs, are being wiped out and their situation is becoming increasingly desperate. Police terror and mob violence against the Negro people is on the increase.

THE HEART OF THE UNBALANCE IN THE SOUTH

Why did Roosevelt fail to change this economic unbalance? The answer is that not even a Roosevelt could strike at the root of Southern backwardness and bring about a fundamental change. The heart of the unbalance of the South is the national oppression of the Negro people. Until the national liberation of the Negro people is achieved, until the democratic revolution is carried through in the South with the granting of land to the Negro tenant farmers and share-croppers, and until the Negro people enjoy full suffrage, self-government, and the right to national self-determination, the backward and semi-colonial status of the South will remain and continue to be our nation's No. 1 problem. The South itself cannot advance, nor can

the nation as a whole, until this basic problem is solved.

Who oppresses the Negro nation in the Black Belt and keeps the whole South, Negro and white, in semi-colonial backwardness? It is the enemies of the entire nation, the trusts and monopolies, in alliance, with the Southern white rulers in industry, government, and on the land. Two examples will serve to illustrate this fact. The first example is to be found in the fountainhead of Southern reaction, in Birmingham, Alabama. Here, United States Steel rules with an iron hand and merges completely with the most rabid Ku Kluxers in the South. The second example is Assistant Secretary of War Gray—a native of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and one of the chief personages in the Reynolds Tobacco Co.—the makers of Camel cigarettes, and one of the worst anti-union, anti-Negro corporations in the South. Is it any wonder that the War Department holds on so fiercely to segregation in the armed forces? Gray symbolizes the essential unity of Big Business, the Federal government and the Southern white-supremacists, and is a living exposure of the hypocrisy of the Truman civil rights program. The enemies of the people, of the nation, and of the South are thus one and the same.

What is the importance of the South to the nation? On the one hand, the present setup in the South is of enormous importance to reaction. The greater exploitation primarily of the Negro workers and

farmers, but also of the whites, is the source of greater than usual profits (super-profits) for the monopolies and land-owners. The denial to the people of the South of democratic rights enjoyed by the rest of the nation ensures the rule of vicious reactionaries throughout most of the South and sends an almost solid reactionary bloc to Congress from that region. The oppression of the Negro people is the source of the vilest chauvinism and helps to create a mass base for the development of fascism today. The general economic, political, and social backwardness of the South is a drag upon the democratic progress of the nation, a heavy weight on the shoulders of the working-class movement.

On the other hand, the struggle of the Negro people in the South for their liberation, for land and democracy, of Negro and whites to break through their backward status, represents an indispensable and decisive alliance to the working class and all progressive forces. This all-important fact is not yet understood by wide enough masses, not even sufficiently by the most advanced workers.

THE SOUTHERN "REVOLT"

Today the so-called Solid South is beginning to be broken up before our very eyes. This is taking shape with the birth of the Progressive Party in the South and above all with the growing struggle of the Negro people. Nothing proves the validity of this analysis more than the so-

called Southern "Revolt" in the Democratic Party. This represents the determination of the most chauvinist elements in the South, backed by Wall Street, to smash the growing democratic movement in the South by naked terror and violence. So great is their desperation that they cannot even tolerate the feeble demagoguery of Truman; for while they know he has not the slightest intention of really fighting for Negro rights, they fear the growing democratic movement will be able to take advantage of even this obvious hypocrisy.

Here it should be said that Truman's demagoguery is highly irresponsible and dangerous to the Negro people because it serves as a pretext for the Ku Kluxers to increase their terror while the Truman Administration does absolutely nothing to protect the Negro people against such attacks. It should also be noted that the present violence against the Negro people is not merely the terror customarily exercised against them, for it takes place in the context of the process of fascization and is a part of this process. The Southern "Revolt" is thus a reactionary conspiracy, and its danger both to the people of the South and to the nation should not be underestimated. The answer to it lies in the further strengthening of the very forces it is trying to smash.

THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY IN THE SOUTH

There are a number of new and

vital features in the developing democratic movement in the South. The founding of the Progressive Party in most Southern states represents the first real mass challenge to the one-party system in the South in the 20th century and takes place in a setting of rising struggles of the Negro people as well as of a growing number of whites. This is reflected in the increase of the number of Negro and white workers in trade unions and, above all, in the fact that Negro unionists are the most militant and progressive workers in the South and constitute the vanguard of the Southern working-class and Negro liberation movement. It is reflected in the fight for the right to vote by Negroes and whites. In 1940, there were 211,000 Negro voters who qualified to vote. This figure grew to 610,000 in 1947. Simultaneously with this there was an increase in the white vote, at an even faster rate. But the ratio of white to Negro voters is still overwhelming—Florida 14 to 1, Virginia 20 to 1, Louisiana 100 to 1. This growth in the Negro vote has resulted in the election of Negroes to office in Winston-Salem, N. C.; Richmond, Virginia; and San Antonio, Texas; and in the running of more Negroes as candidates.

It is likely that despite intimidation, terror, and repressive laws, one million Negroes may qualify as voters in 1948. This increase in the Negro vote has resulted in the growth in the political influence of the Negro people, as shown by appointment of Negro policemen in

several Southern cities. Of great importance are the struggle against segregation in universities, in which considerable support has come from white students, and the fight against segregated mass meetings, in which Wallace, Robeson, and Taylor have played a leading role. Also of great significance are the numerous instances in which Negroes have organized mass armed self-defense when faced with mob violence, a development which is bound to grow and which has the greatest significance for the future, and which must receive aid and assistance from the labor and progressive camp.

The Progressive Party has therefore come into being at a very favorable moment and has the historic opportunity and mission to promote the right of Negroes and whites to vote and to facilitate the whole fight of the Negro people for their liberation. It will become, not only the mass political instrument of the Negro people, but the vehicle that will unite Negro and white around a common program.

An essential part of the people's upsurge in the South is the activity of our own Party, which has contributed greatly to it, and whose role I shall deal with at length later on.

LABOR AND THE NEGRO PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE

The leading role in the national liberation movement of the Negro people must necessarily be played by the working class and in the first

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place by the Negro workers. In this connection, the Southern organizing drive of the C.I.O. and A. F. of L. is very important and requires analysis.

Very important progress was made in union organization in the South. Generally, however, the organizing drive did not fulfill its promise, despite the large sums of money and personnel poured into it. Why did it fail to realize its full potentialities and why has it now come to a dead stop? In the first place, the leaders of the drive were themselves pro-imperialist and pursued a class collaboration rather than a class struggle policy. Secondly, they Red-baited and split the workers when they had to be united, thus playing into the hands of the anti-union employers. Thirdly, and most important, they had an incorrect policy toward the Negro workers. They were either openly chauvinist, refusing to organize Negro workers at all or only on a Jim-Crow basis, or they pursued the Social-Democratic line of denial of the special oppression of the Negro people. Coming up against the widespread prejudices planted in the minds of the white workers, they capitulated to these prejudices instead of fighting them, and in the end landed in the camp of open chauvinism themselves. In such a situation and with the Taft-Hartley Law and state anti-labor laws on the books, it was an easy matter for the employers to impede the success of the organizing drive.

Despite efforts of the trade-union

bureaucracy to exclude the Left-led unions from the drive, a number of these unions made serious attempts to organize in the South, with some important results. It must be said, however, that with some notable exceptions, these unions have not understood the basic importance of organizing the South. Today a very serious situation is arising, in that several Left-led unions, faced with real difficulties elsewhere, are retrenching in the South. This tendency to abandon the South, if continued, will have the most dangerous consequences, not only for the South, but for the labor movement nationally. It surrenders the South to reaction and to reformist union leaders. It is a shortsighted, opportunist policy arising from a lack of understanding of the national question and from capitulation to difficulties and white chauvinism. These unions must understand that if they do not fulfill their duty toward the South, the resulting victory of reaction will return to plague them in the North; whereas by giving much greater assistance to the South than they have given in the past, they will create conditions that will strongly reinforce the cause of militant trade unionism generally.

The chief obstacle to the further unionization of the South is the white chauvinism with which the minds of the Southern white workers have been poisoned. But this fact has led some to project the false "theory" that the white workers are hopelessly reactionary, that they cannot be won

for Negro-white unity. In practice, this "theory" leads to the abandonment of the fight to win the white workers and to a capitulation to their white-chauvinistic ideas. This "theory" is based on fear of, and lack of confidence in, the white workers. It is not true that white workers and farmers, even in the South, cannot be won for Negro-white unity. Negro-white unity was achieved during the Reconstruction period and during the Populist revolt and it is being achieved now. The participation of whites in the Progressive Party, their fight against segregated mass meetings, the activities of white students against Jim-Crow education, the support of whites for the Negro vote (in Richmond, Va., the successful Negro candidate for City Council received 9,000 votes of which 3,000 were white), all testify to this fact.

The exploitation of the white workers and farmers, their entire experience, creates objective conditions that make it possible to win them. The key to winning them is to convince them, not on a moral basis solely, but on the basis of their self-interest primarily. The key is to convince them that Negro-white unity is essential in order to advance their own economic, political and social interests, that they must fight for the rights of the Negro workers in order to advance their own rights. In short, it is necessary to convince them of the great truth uttered by Karl Marx over eighty years ago: "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." We

must point out to Southern white workers that the wage differentials between North and South are again widening now—with workers in the North getting increases ranging from 8¢ to 15¢ per hour, and those in the South receiving from nothing to increases of 5¢ per hour—and that this is due to their failure to fight to raise the standards of their Negro brothers. We must show them that much of Southern labor is still unorganized, especially in the textile industry, because of the lack of Negro-white unity; that great masses of poor whites are disfranchised because they do not unite with the Negroes to win the vote for all; that health, education, housing, and recreation lag far behind the rest of the nation. The white workers in the South can and must be won!

While it is true that the slowness in winning the white workers for a correct policy acts as a brake upon the further development of the Negro liberation struggle, it would be a fatal mistake to slow up the organization of the Negro workers and farmers until the lag among the whites is overcome. The Negro people's struggle must go forward at a more rapid rate; it is itself a major essential instrument for winning the white workers as allies in that struggle.

THE LAND QUESTION

The heart of the national oppression of the Negro people in the Black Belt is the land question. As a result of the relatively high employment in industry, there has been a decline in

the farm population. This has resulted in a growth of mechanization on the farms which in turn drives Negroes off the land and intensifies their exploitation. At the same time, the shortage of farm labor creates favorable opportunities for organization of farm workers, sharecroppers, and tenants. On the other hand, it leads to an increase of violence and terror in order to force Negroes to stay on the land when they might find more favorable opportunities elsewhere.

But while there has been a decline in the farm population, the overwhelming majority of the Negro population in the South live on and around the land, and the bulk of them remain share-croppers and tenants, so that the old basic relationships have not changed at all. The one new feature we must take note of is the further growth of a Negro agricultural proletariat resulting from mechanization, as well as the growth of processing industries, etc., in the Black Belt and a proletariat in these industries too.

In the light of this situation, we must face the serious fact that not the slightest progress has been made, not the slightest step has been taken, to organize the share-croppers and tenant farmers in the Black Belt or even to formulate a program for them. The successful carrying through of the national liberation of the Negro people is impossible without such organization. This situation can no longer be tolerated. There is absolutely no reason why organizing

committees should not be organized immediately among the most advanced sharecroppers and tenants, which can then make approaches to such organizations as the National Farmers Union and the Food, Tobacco, and Agricultural Workers Union for assistance. The time is also ripe, I believe, for a national conference of unions, Progressive Party organizations, and all organizations interested in the South, to organize economic, political, and personnel assistance to the share-croppers and tenants in the Black Belt. It is quite clear that attempts at organization will meet with ferocious resistance, but they can and must be made. Special attention should be given to the organization of the Negro proletariat in the Black Belt, as well as the white workers, as a force that can play a leading role in the organization of the farm population. In this general connection, our National Committee, in consultation with our comrades in the South, should immediately draw up a land program for the South.

THE PARTY IN THE SOUTH

The key to the successful carrying forward of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the South, and for the South to play its role in the struggle for socialism, is the building and strengthening of the Communist Party. Since the Emergency Convention of 1945, we have succeeded in reconstituting our Party in the South. This is an historic achievement and has contributed no little to the demo-

cratic people's upsurge in the South. Our comrades in the South work under the most difficult conditions, and their work is truly heroic. Our Party has grown in numbers, in activity, and in influence in the South since its reconstitution. Our Party as a whole is not yet fully aware of the contributions of the Southern comrades and of the tremendous asset they are to the Party and to the building of the people's coalition nationally.

But the Party in the South has tremendous tasks and responsibilities and cannot rest on its laurels if it is to live up to them. It must be built into a much bigger Party. It must, above all, root itself in the working class, in basic industry. It must be built among both Negro and white workers, but above all the Negro workers, as well as among Negro and white share-croppers and farmers. The Party must lead in overcoming the basic weakness of lack of organization of the share-croppers and farmers. It must extend greatly the circulation of the Southern edition of the *Worker* as well as of the *Daily Worker*.

The Party in the South has succeeded in developing a number of open Party spokesmen. This process must be continued and expanded. The greatest single weakness with respect to open Party activity is the fact that outside of Texas there does not exist a single outstanding open Negro spokesman of our Party anywhere in the South, despite the wealth of Negro comrades. Despite

all difficulties, and they are great, a beginning must be made to change this situation.

The Party should initiate campaigns such as for the destruction of the K.K.K., to oust Rankin, and to cut down the Congressional representation of states which disfranchise large masses of Negro and white voters.

As our Party has done on a national scale, our Party in the South has supported and contributed greatly to the birth of the Progressive Party, which has been established in almost every Southern State. We must understand that the creation of this new people's party is of the greatest historic significance especially in the South, and will serve as the main mass vehicle through which the Negro people and their white allies will fight to achieve their democratic goals.

Precisely because we base ourselves on scientific socialism and because we understand the heart of the Negro question to be the oppression of the Negro nation in the Black Belt, our Party has a special contribution to make to the building of the Progressive Party. We must work to the end that the Progressive Party in the South be solidly based upon, and increasingly led by, the progressive labor movement. We must help insure that it becomes a party of struggle, that in the South it places in the forefront the fight for the right of Negroes, as well as whites, to vote, the fight for land, for Negro and white unity to eliminate the back-

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wardness of the South in all its aspects, against segregation, lynching, police brutality, etc. We must fight against all expressions of white chauvinism, both in our own Party as well as in the mass movement. We must fight for Negroes to share the leadership of the New Party; and for Negro candidates to be nominated. Special mention should be made here of the historic candidacy of Larkin Marshall, Negro editor of Macon, Georgia, in the heart of the Black Belt, for the U.S. Senate from Georgia, which must be made into a national campaign. As the first most important immediate task, we must help the Progressive Party in its efforts to get on the ballot in every state possible.

The main fire in the South must be directed against the monopolies and their white-supremacist allies. At the same time, the sharpest criticism must be leveled against the former white liberals who are capitulating to the Ku Kluxers—the Arnalls and Thompsons and also the Folsoms and Peppers. They illustrate the basic truth that anyone who does not face the Negro question boldly and squarely and does not wage an uncompromising fight against the Jim-Crow system, must inevitably capitulate to the Ku Kluxers and eventually land in the enemy camp. There is no middle course.

TASKS BEFORE OUR PARTY

In the course of this struggle, we must not submerge our own Party, but build it at all costs. There must

be a real struggle, in practice, against white chauvinism. A major expression of white chauvinism in our ranks in the South is the fear to approach and win prejudiced white workers for Negro-white unity, for our Party and for the people's democratic coalition. We should note the example of the Texas State convention of the Communist Party which unanimously expelled McIntosh, a port agent in the N.M.U. in Port Arthur, who in face of the goon terror of Joe Curran and the police, ran away and left the Negro and white members of the union to face the music, even though they were ready to fight. There were some comrades in our Party who were content merely to censure McIntosh because he had been a long-time member of the Party; but the Texas Party acted correctly. There is no room in our Party for cowards and deserters from the class struggle, and especially for people who abandon their Negro brothers. We Communists are people who defend the rights of the Negro people to the point of laying down our lives when that becomes necessary. We must also combat petty-bourgeois Negro nationalism—which expresses itself in tendencies among the Negro people to give up the fight to win the white workers and farmers as allies and which sees all whites as enemies of the Negro people.

Recognizing their common problems, the Party districts in the South have begun a policy of close collaboration and consultation. This needs to be strengthened greatly, with much

greater assistance from the national office of the Communist Party and from the Party as a whole. More of the national leaders of the Party should visit the South. Organizers must be found for Tennessee, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Our comrades in the South are conducting a magnificent struggle, but they are not receiving the necessary assistance from the Party as a whole. This is because our Party nationally does not yet fully appreciate that the core of the Negro question nationally is the national oppression in the Black Belt, nor understand the tremendous significance that the completion of the democratic revolution in the South will have for the building of the general anti-monopoly coalition.

Recognizing that the movement for the liberation of the oppressed Negro nation in the Black Belt and for the democratic reconstruction of the South is a vital sector of the struggle of the working-class and people's movement throughout the country for peace, security, and progress, *this Fourteenth National Convention of the Communist Party should go on record as setting aside the week of December 6-13, as an annual Solidarity Week with the Fighting South*, with the following ends in view:

1. To educate our Party and the labor, Negro people's and third-party forces throughout the country on the significance of the Negro Liberation movement and the struggle for unity of white and Negro workers in the South.

2. To raise to a higher level mass political action throughout the country against lynch terror, for the right to vote, for the organization of the sharecroppers and farmers, and against Jim Crow and segregation in the South.

3. To hold Party recruiting meetings throughout the country during Solidarity Week.

4. To develop a system of solidarity and other forms of direct, practical, and material assistance by Party organizations of the North and West to Party organizations in the South.

5. To raise the sum of \$20,000 for the Party in the South during this week.

6. To prepare, in connection with Solidarity Week, educational and other materials; to publish in our press appropriate articles; and to issue a special edition of *The Worker*.

7. To establish solidarity relations between the large Party districts with the Southern districts, following the example of California, which has selected Alabama, and Brooklyn, which has selected Texas.

There must be a fundamental change in our Party with respect to this question, with a great educational campaign conducted, and concrete struggles and assistance organized. We must create a new atmosphere in which the great truth is made known to our whole Party and to the whole progressive movement that the labor movement can make no basic advance, that our

Party cannot advance, that the national people's coalition cannot advance, that the nation as a whole can make no basic progress, unless

a struggle is waged for, and material assistance given to, the national liberation movement of the Negro people in the South.