

SWP

**discussion
bulletin**

Published by the
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

Vol. 18 No. 11
September 1957

116 UNIVERSITY PLACE
NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK.

RESOLUTION ON THE NEGRO STRUGGLE --
Presented to the Seventeenth National Convention

Page 1

.....by Richard Kirk

"THE CLASS STRUGGLE ROAD TO NEGRO
EQUALITY" -- Report for PC Draft Resolution
to Seventeenth National Convention.....
by George Breitman

Page 12

25¢

DISCUSSION MATERIAL ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

Material in this bulletin, as listed below, is part of the continuing discussion on the Negro question submitted for internal discussion in accordance with the decision of the Seventeenth National Convention.

The material thus far published includes:

1. Political Committee Draft Resolution: "The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality." (Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 18 No. 8, April 1957)

2. The edited text of "The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality" appeared in The Militant, Vol. XXI, No. 34, August 26, 1957.

In this bulletin:

3. The original draft of the Kirk resolution: "Resolution on the Negro Struggle," as presented to the Seventeenth National Convention. The Kirk resolution was not received in time for pre-convention discussion. Copies were made for convention delegates. The text is now being made available to all party members as part of the discussion material.

4. Editorial changes in the Kirk resolution as submitted by Comrade Richard Kirk.

5. Report for the PC Draft Resolution by George Breitman. References in the report by Breitman are to the PC Draft Resolution and the convention text of the Kirk resolution and do not include Breitman's summary remarks.

6. A record of convention vote on PC Draft Resolution and resolution by Richard Kirk:

Motion of Presiding Committee: To approve general line of Political Committee Draft Resolution on "The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality," and to authorize continued discussion of all aspects of the Negro question.

Motion by Kirk: To approve general line of Kirk resolution.

	<u>In favor of PC Draft Resolution</u>	<u>In favor of Kirk Resolution</u>	<u>Abstain</u>
Michigan	3	0	
Seattle	0	4	
Illinois	4	0	
Buffalo	5	0	
Minnesota	7	0	
St. Louis	1	0	
New York	13	0	1
Newark	2	0	
Milwaukee	2	0	
Boston	2	0	
Los Angeles	8	1	1
San Francisco	1	0	1
Ohio	1	0	1
Pennsylvania	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	-
Totals	54	5	4

Motion to approve general line of PC Draft Resolution carried.

(B)

Consultative Vote

<u>In favor of PC Draft Resolution</u>	<u>In favor of Kirk Resolution</u>	<u>Abstain</u>
33	5	1

Statements of reservations in voting for PC Draft Resolution:

Walter (Los Angeles): Asked that on the question of Federal troops to the South he be recorded as against this, but otherwise supports the PC Draft Resolution.

L. Manning (Los Angeles): Stated that she would approve PC Draft Resolution if the two sections on self-determination and Federal troops are eliminated.

Izzy (Chicago): In favor of PC Draft Resolution with exception to Page 26 about national self-determination, requesting that an analysis be given of the desegregation which has taken place in the armed forces, reasons for it and implication.

Ronald Jones (Buffalo): On behalf of the entire Buffalo delegation, we embrace the general line of the PC Draft Resolution with reservations on (1) Federal troops to the South and (2) self-determination or separatism.

Buffalo's fraternal delegate asked that he be recorded as supporting the Buffalo delegation's reservation.

Bird (New York): For the PC Draft Resolution with the exception of that part dealing with Federal troops.

Gibbs (New York): For PC Draft Resolution with statement that question of national determination be deleted from resolution.

Jordan (San Francisco): For PC Draft Resolution except for Federal troops to the South.

Gross (New York): For PC Draft Resolution except for troops to the South and with no inclusion of self-determination, not because it is theoretically wrong but because politically it is better at this point to omit it.

R. Gale (San Francisco): I abstain; I didn't think we should vote on either resolution at this time since there has not been enough time for discussion in the branches. How can you make up your mind in such a short time?

Wilson (Youngstown): I support the general line of the PC Draft Resolution with a reservation on Federal troops and separatism.

Garber (Newark): I endorse the general line of the PC Draft Resolution with a reservation on self-determination.

Shaw (Newark): In favor of general line of PC Draft Resolution with reservation on point of separatism.

Howard (Philadelphia): I am opposed to the section in PC Draft Resolution on "Federal Troops to the South," and request a revision of the language in the first sentence of the resolution, specifically "integral" in connecting the Negro struggle and the colonial struggle. Otherwise, I am for the line of PC Draft Resolution.

(C)

The (Los Angeles): For general line of PC Draft Resolution with reservation on self-determination.

(A subsequent bulletin will include the discussion material now available on the Troops Slogan. Discussion articles on any phase of the Negro question should be submitted for publication as part of our continuing discussion.)

Tom Kerry
Organization Secretary

(D)

EDITORIAL CHANGES SUBMITTED BY DICK KIRK

TO HIS RESOLUTION ON THE NEGRO STRUGGLE

Seattle, Washington
Sept. 21, 1957

To the National Office

Dear Comrades:

Enclosed find my resolution on the Negro Struggle with the following editorial changes:

Page 1--One word inserted in paragraph three. (Insert the word "imperialist" in second line of paragraph 3 before the words "ruling class.")

Page 2--Delete marked out words. (Words to be deleted are in paragraph 2 beginning with the word "while" and ending with the words "American life.")

Page 3 & 4--Substitute following insert for paragraphs marked out: "In the United States this program has been super-imposed upon the struggle in Montgomery by its petty bourgeois leadership. By thus identifying a dynamic struggle with 'resistance in the spirit of love and non-violence' they blunt the consciousness of the masses who require a program which corresponds with the reality of their militant actions." (The two paragraphs to be deleted are the last paragraph on page 3 which begins with the words "In the United States..." and the first paragraph on page 4 which ends with the words "of the Negroes alone." The above substitute is for these two paragraphs.)

Page 5--Insert one word first line paragraph 4. (Insert the word "class" after the word "ruling")

Page 10--In the next to the last line on this page change the word "cognizance" to "advantage."

Page 11--In the last paragraph change "intelligentsia" to "intellectuals." (First line of last paragraph)

RESOLUTION ON THE NEGRO STRUGGLE

By Richard Kirk

I. The Permanent Revolution in America

The objective conditions have matured for the eruption of the class struggle in the South. The task of this struggle will be to overthrow the fascist-like yoke of White Supremacy.

Since the destruction of popular government in the South at the close of the Reconstruction, the Southern Bourbon oligarchy, in close alliance with the whole American capitalist class, adapted the social relations of chattel slavery to the requirements of property relations and capitalist production.

The Capitalists and Planters achieved ^{imperialist} this Jim Crow system by a method which has been copied by all the ruling classes of the world. They broke up the working masses into hostile racial groups by the use of organized murder and terrorism against the Negroes and all who would stand side by side with them. They degraded labor through the enforced peonage of the Negroes. They created a white middle class which derived special privileges from the degradation of labor in general and the Negro in particular. They eliminated popular government and substituted the rule of a small minority of the privileged, the rich, the powerful: the white supremacists.

By creating a living hell for the Negro people, the ruling classes were thus able to achieve a super-exploitation of all Southern labor, bringing in profits which could be compared with those from colonial exploitation.

Thus, a whole social system became organized around the degradation of the Negro -- a system which became an integrated and indispensable part of the economic, social and political structure of American Capitalism.

The emancipation of the Negro people through social, political and economic equality is the fundamental condition for this liberation of all the oppressed in the South. This requires the destruction of the whole Southern system. Short of this there can be little change and few democratic rights for anyone.

However, the Permanent Revolution in America reveals itself in the following manner: The Southern system represents massive survivals of chattel slavery. These survivals take the form of great social problems unsolved by the Civil War and Reconstruction: an antiquated system of land tenure, the absence of democratic rights, segregation and racial discrimination. The solution of these questions was the responsibility of the capitalist class when it took the national power from the Slaveowners in 1860. But they proved incapable of this. So these survivals of an antique system of exploitation have become integrated into the capitalist structure and form a component part thereof.

Capitalism could not solve these problems during its youth and virility, even under conditions of waging a bitter war against the slave power. Now, when amidst the decay and death agony of Capitalism, these problems have become integrated into its very structure, the

capitalist class will positively not prove able to solve them. This circumstance leads to the inescapable conclusion that although the tasks of the liberation of the South are of an elementary democratic nature, they have no solution within the framework of American capitalism: they become a part of the Socialist struggle of the proletariat to overthrow the whole capitalist system of production.

The second manifestation of the permanent revolution lies in the question of leadership of the Negro struggle. The goal of the Negro struggle has been determined historically: the elimination of racial discrimination lies through the struggle for economic, political and social equality. The axis of this struggle is the fight against segregation. At the present time the leadership of this struggle is in the hands of the middle class. This Negro middle class suffers social, economic and political discrimination because of skin color. It is a far more terrible discrimination than is the usual lot of privileged layers of an oppressed group. This circumstance has produced a great galaxy of Negro scholars who have brilliantly analyzed and plumbed the depths and sources of racial oppression.

But, at the same time, ~~while the Negro middle class intelligentsia resists and exposes this terrible anachronism, this scar on American life, the position of the middle class as a whole derives from and feeds upon segregation, the axis of the social force which oppresses them as Negroes.~~

This conflict between their racial and class interests causes the middle class leadership to act in a hesitant and treacherous manner. They will prove totally incapable of giving adequate leadership to the movement as it develops on to higher planes of struggle.

But the Negro workers have no such conflict of interest. They receive no such economic privileges from segregation. On the contrary they are super exploited at the point of production and in all economic spheres. Discrimination against them as Negroes is intimately connected with their exploitation as workers. Finding themselves below the standard of living of even the white workers, they must of necessity open up a struggle for racial equality as the key to raising their standard of living as workers.

So, as it falls to the American working class as a whole to solve the basic contradictions of American society, so does it fall upon the shoulders of the Negro proletariat to take the lead in the struggle for equality.

II. The Significance of Montgomery

The successful struggle of the Negroes of Montgomery shows a changed relationship of forces in the South. This is the first successful sustained mass struggle of the Negroes of the South in nearly seventy years. It demonstrates the decay and disintegration of the power of white supremacy and reveals that the situation is ripening for the liberation of the people of the South from the Jim Crow system.

The changed conditions have been brought about by the industrialization of the South and the deepening of the penetration of monopoly

capitalism into all spheres of life. The salient features of this change have been: (1) The urbanization of the Negro population which now finds its center of gravity shifted from the dispersed rural areas into powerful mass forces in the cities. (2) The undermining of the mass base of the Southern system through the partial destruction of the white middle class and the proletarianization of large contingents of this former mass petty bourgeoisie.

This changed relationship of forces results in the inability of the white ruling classes to crush at will the aroused and organized Negro masses. The magnitude of the Negro struggle, reaching National and even International proportions, has rendered the U.S. government helpless to intervene decisively in behalf of the white supremacists.

These objective conditions have been ripening for decades and provide the groundwork for the outbreak of the Montgomery masses. The immediate factor preparing the masses for the actual struggle was the Till case and its aftermath, which demonstrated to the Negroes that the Federal Government would do nothing against the Jim Crow system, that any feeling that the Negroes had an ally in the National Capital was an illusion, and that if anything was to be done they would have to do it themselves.

The struggle is now beginning to unfold. As it develops, all the resources of the American capitalist class will be aligned against it: all the forces of reaction, all agencies of government, the army, the avenues of information and the schools, churches and courts. Yet, the victory of the masses will be assured under two conditions:

1. That the struggle of the Southern workers, led by the Negroes, will rekindle the fires of the class struggle throughout the country and bring into play the great powers of the American proletariat in solidarity with them.

2. That the Southern masses will produce a revolutionary Socialist leadership fully conscious of its aims, the road of struggle, the magnitude of the task.

The Montgomery Boycotters forecast the unfolding movement which will take the lead in the emancipation of the Southern masses.

We support the courageous internationalism of their sympathy for and self-identification with the struggles of the dark-skinned colonial masses. This kinship arises from the common bond forged by years of common struggle against white supremacy. It is our elementary duty, however, to warn the Negro people away from Ghandi's program of "passive resistance" as a means of their liberation.

This program, fostered by the Indian bourgeoisie, paralyzed the action of the masses of people, kept the Indian capitalists at the head of the movement for Indian independence and made it possible for the native bourgeoisie to reap all the rewards of the struggle against imperialism at the expense of the masses.

In the United States this program is put forward by the Negro petty-bourgeois leadership with the object of holding in check the

pent-up fury of the masses, preventing a revolutionary solution to the question, and to evade a militant, class struggle program.

It must be understood that the Southern system will fall only through struggle: the united struggle of the Southern workers, white and black, and not through the passive resistance of the Negroes alone.

We hail the emergence of the proletarian militants in the Montgomery struggle. They are the coming leaders of the struggle of all the Southern masses. It is they who have nothing to lose and the world to gain. Their class position gives them courage and insight, for it is they who have the fundamental stake in the struggle against the Jim Crow system.

We salute the women of the South both black and white for their heroic role in the struggle.

The unbounded revolutionary energy of the triply oppressed Negro women is making itself manifest in the initiative and leadership which they have given to the movement in its initial stages.

The decay of the Southern system which foretells its doom is expressed by the defection of the white women away from the forces of white supremacy and by their organized appearance in greater and greater numbers in joint struggle with the Negroes. This is the proof that they recognize that they, too, are the victims of the system of white supremacy. They understand that the so-called "chivalry" of Southern tradition degrades them: that the pedestal of "sacred" white womanhood is in reality a prison for chattels which denies independence, the rights of citizens and the status of human beings.

They are aware that the myth of "sacred" (i.e., segregated) white womanhood is one of the focal points of the ideology of white supremacy and ties the struggle for the emancipation of women directly to that of the Negroes.

Other large sections of the white population hide their disgust with the Southern system in fear of reprisal. We recommend the example of the women and urge them to give organized support to their courageous struggle.

III. The Labor Movement

The existence of the Southern social system is a constant mortal threat to the entire labor movement in the U.S. Every factor of political and economic life shows that the extension of Unionism into the open-shop South is a life and death question.

But unions cannot exist on any mass scale in the total absence of elementary democratic rights. On the other hand labor unions will grow hand in hand with the successes of the Civil Rights movement. Consequently the Labor movement must dedicate itself to the destruction of white supremacy as the only way to assure the extension of Unionism into the South.

We call upon the officials of the AFL-CIO to begin the campaign to organize the South with a repudiation of their political alliance with the liberal Democrats who are the protectors and defenders of the Southern Bourbons. We call upon them to take the next step in the Southern drive: to declare for the formation of a political party of Labor which would become the political and organizational center of the struggle against Jim Crow.

IV. The Advanced Position of the Negro Movement

The struggle for racial equality is an integral part of the struggle of the American working class for Socialism. The connection between these two goals is so fundamental that one cannot be envisaged without the other.

This connection has been implicit from the very beginning of the anti-slavery struggle and found clearest expression in Karl Marx's dictum to white American workers: "Labor with a white skin cannot be free so long as Labor with a black skin is branded." The consistent logic which led many abolitionist leaders such as Douglass and Phillips to embrace Socialist principles confirmed this connection.

The power of the ruling/^{class} and the pernicious influence of the Southern system has kept the American working class divided along color lines for long periods of time. However, the past twenty years have demonstrated again in life the identity of interest which had been implicit all along.

The close connection between the Negro struggle for equality and the labor struggle became one of the paramount features of the great struggles of the 1930's. One of the greatest achievements of unionism during this stormy upsurge was the successful conclusion of the long struggle to build the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. This achievement was capped by the emergence of the CIO which represented the first mass joining of the two movements in modern times.

Together during the 30's the two movements made giant strides. But with the preparation for World War II they diverged: the CIO under the pressure of a newly created bureaucracy capitulated to the bosses and the government and it wasn't long before the Communist Party did likewise. Together they sacrificed the interests of the working class to the needs of the U.S. imperialist war machine. But the Negro movement, under the stimulus of workers arising from great depths of super-exploitation, refused to be taken in or intimidated by the patriotic hysteria.

Ever since the beginning of 1941 the Unions have taken one backward step after another and the bosses have followed through with body blows. Although the labor movement was able to mobilize briefly in 1946 for a successful defense when mortally threatened, it soon gave in again and as a result has endured a never ending string of humiliating repressive measures inflicted on them by the government and the employers.

But all through this period and even at the height of the worst wave of reaction which has been unleashed against the American workers in many decades -- the Negro movement has registered steady

advances. The source of this difference in achievement lies in the divergent lines of development which were laid out in 1941 when the Negroes were organizing for a March on Washington in defiance of the needs of the government for domestic tranquility at the very time that the Labor Bureaucracy was giving no-strike pledges to this same government. The Negroes were able to withstand the patriotic pressure upon them and to see through the lies of American imperialism because of their advanced consciousness derived from super-exploitation and discrimination.

Upon this background the Montgomery uprising propels the Negro movement into a greatly advanced position which, coinciding with the ebb tide of the labor movement, approaches isolation.

And this poses a dual danger: First, that this great movement may remain isolated and be crushed for lack of needed support from the labor movement. Second, that such a defeat inflicted upon this dynamic sector of the working class would set back the development of the labor movement.

It is the duty of all Socialists to spare no energy in rallying the working class and the Labor movement to the aid of the Negroes struggling in the South and to connect and integrate the struggles.

But the decisive force in determining the future course of events, and relations of the Southern fighters with the Labor movement in the North and West, is the Negro movement itself. In this vital movement just unfolding there is great attractive power: in the relations between the Negro movement and the labor movement the Negroes hold the initiative. But only a proletarian leadership of the Negro movement will be able to utilize properly this strategic advantage and to draw the labor movement into support and intervention. Such a leadership will grasp the political significance of the situation.

Above all, the Negro movement must beware of the "isolationist" feeling that if the Labor movement doesn't seem to move, and if, as a consequence, the working class as a whole appears unmoved by and unconcerned with the heroic struggle in the South, then the Negro movement can turn its back and go its way alone. Such a course would be disastrous, would end in the crushing defeat of the Negroes and retard the whole labor struggle.

Such proposals arise from an underestimation of the task ahead and from the dangerous illusion that racial equality can be achieved without the overthrow and complete destruction of the Southern social system. In this struggle, the Negroes will be the initiators, because of their super-exploitation and advanced consciousness. But the fight can be won only by the united struggle of all toilers.

V. What Political Road?

The advanced consciousness of the Negro movement expresses itself politically. First, by their refusal to be taken in by patriotic war propaganda. Second, by their willingness to launch broad struggles in spite of the reaction. This political understanding also encompasses the knowledge that the problem of civil rights

is neither a moral question, one of law, or of the "hearts and minds of men," but that it is a political question which must be fought by means of political party.

The Negroes are also quite aware that the Democratic and Republican parties are their enemies, and that serious advancement of the struggle for equality is impossible through these channels.

But the Negroes are the captives of the Labor bureaucracy: the alliance between labor and the Negro people finds its degenerate expression in the captivity of the Negro middle class leaders in the Democratic Party. We have every sympathy with the Negroes in this political bondage and with the dramatic move of Roy Wilkins, shortly followed by Representative Powell, to the Republican Party, as signifying a protest against the hypocrisy of the liberals and the labor leaders rather than support to the Republican Bankers.

But this situation dictates bolder action by the Negro leaders: the isolation of the Negro movement demands that it give full scope to its advanced position to raise the workers in the labor movement toward it: we call upon the Negro leaders to reject the degenerate alliance with the labor fakers in the party of the Bourbons as well as the ineffectual bolts to the Republican Party. We urge them to join with the Socialist Workers Party in the demand upon the labor unions that they form a party of the working class.

We call upon them to emulate the qualities of leadership of a Frederick Douglass, who was not afraid to break even with William Lloyd Garrison and to split the Abolitionist society when an opportunity appeared to prepare the way for the coming political party of emancipation.

VI. The Communist Party

The Communist Party, at one time the most successful of the socialist organizations in attracting Negro militants, has by now dissipated its influence in the Negro community and lost the large majority of its once powerful Negro cadre. This cadre was won by the prestige which the Russian Revolution commanded among peoples who seriously wanted a social change, and by years of devoted work by the rank and file of the party.

The basic reason for the present isolation of the Communist Party in the Negro community lies in the following political circumstance: the leaders of the CP have never hesitated to sacrifice the interests of the Negro people to the interests of maintaining alliances with privileged sections of the white population who might temporarily be of use in furthering the interests of the Soviet Bureaucracy.

This was most horribly demonstrated during World War II when the CP openly denounced struggles of the Negro people as being disruptive of the "war effort" of American Imperialism which was in alliance with the Soviet Government. Betrayals of a like nature have followed the various twists and turns of policy until the Negro militants have become completely disaffected.

A second cause for the dissipation of the influence of the CP has been the persistence with which it clung to the erroneous idea that the Negroes constitute a nation and that their consequent political development would lead them to assert the right to nationhood and national self-determination. The authors of this doctrine envisaged that their theoretical contribution was, therefore, to prepare the ground for this inevitable separation.

This whole line of thought is in diametric opposition to the real nature of the Negro struggle and its historical tradition. It is segregation by skin color which is the traditional and present enemy of the Negroes, not national oppression.

The movement of the Negro people is the oldest social movement in existence in the United States. It is over 300 years old, and since 1818, the beginning of the struggle against the American colonization society, this movement has had a virtually uninterrupted existence and one fundamental direction: integration. Ever since then, the fundamental course of the Negro struggle has been to reject the demand of the ruling class that they become a separate subordinate nation, through segregation, and to demand the full rights of American citizenship and nationality. It will take a social catastrophe, more devastating than any yet visited upon the Negro people, to change the fundamental course of their struggle.

The Negroes considered that it was impudent, stupid, and against their interests for the Stalinists arbitrarily to brush aside this great tradition of struggle and say to them in effect: "You'll take self-determination and like it. When you develop out of your great political backwardness, the CP will be vindicated." The Negroes replied that they already had segregation which was their worst enemy, and that the plans for a segregated Socialism didn't appeal to them. In spite of this almost universal reaction in the Negro community, the Stalinists blindly hung on to this theory.

Another consequence of this theory was that it created an almost gravitational attraction between the CP and sections of the Negro middle class. This was the only social group in the Negro community in which there seemed to be any expression of nationalism. This nationalism took the form of a willingness to accept segregation, the economic foundation of the Negro middle class and to confine the struggle to gaining improvements for its position within the framework of segregation.

Even during the "left" periods, this alliance between the CP leaders and the Negro middle classes resulted in the frustration of efforts of the rank and file communists, both white and black, to undertake serious struggle.

The present policy of "peaceful co-existence" is similar to the World War II jingoism in its betrayal of the Negro struggle. We call the attention of the Communist Party to the following actions and policies of the past year which tend to place the whole radical movement in bad repute in the Negro community:

1. Support of the "Louisville Plan." This reactionary scheme to compromise the demand of the Negroes for immediate desegregation of

the public schools, through "voluntary segregation" was blatantly supported by spokesmen for the Communist Party. (See Front Page illustrated story P.W. Sept. 21, 1956.)

2. Support of the Louisiana Right to work law. This amended version of the original law, condemned by the National Agricultural Union and other spokesmen for Negro workers in Louisiana as a measure which gave to the largely white skilled workers certain immunities from the law at the expense of the Negroes and other agricultural, lumber, processing, etc. workers. The leaders of the CP committed the party to its support as an example of a "peoples' anti-monopoly coalition" and even placed this support in its Draft Program. (See Draft Resolution for 16th National Convention of CP presented by NC, page 32, 1956.)

3. Support of the Liberal betrayal of the Civil Rights Struggle at the 34th Congress. This betrayal, now exposed by Rep. Powell, and many others, consisted of devices whereby the Liberal Democrats could guarantee the Bourbons that nothing would come of the Civil Rights legislation, but that the liberals should be permitted to appear as partisans of the legislation. In order to do this, however, they needed a smokescreen. The Daily Worker and the Peoples' World provided this admirably for them, and every time the liberals betrayed by giving in to the Bourbons, the CP leaders provided the smokescreen by endless fulminations against Eisenhower or the "Dixiecrats."

4. Support of the "moderate" wing of White Supremacy. The so-called moderate wing of the Southern White Supremacists, represented by such figures as Lyndon Johnson, is also part of the projected "anti-monopoly coalition." (See Political Affairs, June 1956.) But this group is just as completely anti-Negro and anti-union as the rest of the Southern Bourbon politicians.

The support of these reactionary policies by the leaders of the CP disqualifies them completely from speaking with any authority on the civil rights struggle. We call upon them to repudiate these policies and join with us in a united front of action in defense of civil rights and the Negro struggle around the following propositions:

1. That we jointly memorialize Congress to refuse to seat the Southern Bourbon politicians, and continue to so refuse until it has been demonstrated that their elections are not carried out in violation of the civil rights of the people of the South.

2. That we demand of the President of the U.S. a second Emancipation Proclamation, proclaiming the workers of the South free from the white supremacist rulers and proclaiming an immediate and unconditional end to all segregation, discrimination, terrorism, etc.

3. For joint action in all local struggles against discrimination.

4. For a joint program for all socialists in the trade union movement on the civil rights question:

a. Demand of the International Unions that they conduct a campaign in their Southern Locals to bring them into conformity and support of the Negro struggle.

b. For the elimination of all Jim Crow locals and other discriminatory practices.

c. Against the extension of wage differentials and the privileges of skilled workers bought at the expense of the unskilled.

d. For a campaign to solve the discrimination inherent in the fact that Negroes are the last hired, first fired. This discrimination is perpetuated and frozen in most prevailing seniority systems. Seniority lists can be revised to advance the seniority of that number of Negroes required to maintain an equitable proportion of Negro workers in a plant at any given time, as is the policy of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers.

e. For all-out aid to the southern struggles and to demand that the Labor movement intervene directly, linking the problem of the organization of the South to the struggle against white supremacy.

5. To prepare for the overthrow of the Southern System by a continued democratic discussion of all issues at stake in the Socialist movement with the object of creating a new Revolutionary Socialist Party which is the only assurance of victory.

VII. Negroes and the SWP.

The Negro people have long been preparing for the opportunity to open up the final struggle against white supremacy. Their preparations have been, in the South, painstaking and systematic. As their opportunity comes closer in time and more tangible in form, they must review their preparations and consider what element is lacking or in insufficient quantity or inadequate quality.

They must consider that they are a vital part of a great world revolutionary process which has as its goal the reorganization of the whole globe along lines of complete equality for all, through Socialism.

They must recognize the crisis of this world revolutionary movement: that while the masses of the world have demonstrated their willingness to struggle for this aim, the leadership has not responded in kind, and therefore the movement fails to fulfill its historical goals. This has resulted in the historical crisis of leadership which is the basic problem of our epoch.

The critical point of all preparation for struggle in this era is the creation of adequate leadership. The struggles of all peoples and all classes require the organization of leadership into a political party. This is the means by which leadership can be tried and tested and is the means for unifying program with practice, leadership with ranks -- and keeping them all in proper balance.

We call upon all Socialist-minded Negroes to take ^{advantage} ~~cognizance~~ of the ideological ferment in the general socialist movement around the

question of the Regroupment of Socialist Forces. This discussion holds forth the possibility of clearing the political atmosphere and creating the foundation for a more powerful Socialist party through the regroupment of the revolutionary currents.

We call upon them to participate in the discussions which are taking place. They will bring to these discussions the militance, realism and character of the Negro struggle and at the same time broaden their own understanding of it through a heightened consciousness of socialist ideology.

The Negro militants have the following ultimate responsibility in this situation: to determine the program which corresponds to the objective needs of the whole struggle and to make it theirs.

We call upon the militant Negro workers to join the Socialist Workers Party, the party of the American Revolution. We stand before them as the party of the proletariat, of the poor and oppressed. We stand upon no economic, political or social privilege, but consider that the oppressed of the world must act together to gain peace, prosperity, security, equality; with abundance for all but special privilege for none. This is the only way to save the world from the catastrophies unleashed by decaying capitalism.

The SWP stands before the Negro people as the only party in the U.S. which has never under any circumstances foresaken or subordinated the needs of the Negro struggle in the interests of alliance with privileged groups or enemy classes.

We call upon the Negro ^{intellectuals} ~~intelligentsia~~ to cast their lot with the proletariat. This is the class which will lead the Negro struggle to victory. But this means, first of all, to adhere to the program of Revolutionary Socialism -- which is the only road of the victorious proletarian struggle.

May 25, 1957.

DISCUSSION ON NEGRO RESOLUTION

Convention Report on PC Resolution:
"The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality"
By George Breitman

The basic, primary and decisive antagonism promoting the socialist revolution is, of course, the antagonism between the capitalists and the workers. But it is by no means the only one. The experiences of the last forty years, confirming the theory of the permanent revolution, have shown that other forces and other conflicts originating out of the specific forms of capitalist rule in different countries also contribute greatly to the development and victory of the socialist revolution.

To mention only a few of these, in Russia there was the agrarian question and the oppression of the nationalities; in Yugoslavia, the struggle for national liberation; in China, the fight for national unity and independence and the very acute oppression of the women. None of these, by themselves, would have produced the results that were actually produced in those revolutions. They all had to be -- and were in one way or another -- linked to the struggle between capitalists and workers before they could be won. But what is equally important to remember is that they all stimulated and contributed to the successful prosecution of the class struggle of the workers against the capitalists. What we are discussing now is a question of a similar order in connection with the coming American revolution.

For the sake of an image, let us think for a moment of the struggle for socialism in the United States as a great river flowing down to the sea. A river is usually fed by many streams, its level, tempo and course depending upon the number and nature of those contributory streams. In the case of our image, the chief contributory stream is the class struggle of the American workers and capitalists. Without this source, it would be wrong to speak of it as a river at all; but there are other streams feeding the river too; sometimes even when the main source slows down to a trickle, becomes partially dry or even stagnant. The most important of these other streams in our country, of which there are many, is the Negro struggle for equality, which, like the class struggle, has its origins in the hills of capitalism, but independent origins; and which, like the class struggle, flows to the great river but which takes its own route there and has a momentum of its own and introduces into the river a quality and a flavor of its own.

Without attempting to pad this image any further, because all figures of speech have their limitations, I think it can safely be said to describe a central feature both of the resolution before us now, "The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality," and of the earlier resolution called "Negro Liberation Through Revolutionary Socialism," whose general line was approved by the 1948 convention and was adopted after editing in 1950. That is, the struggle for socialism and the Negro struggle for equality have a tendency to fuse, and their successful fusion is the key to the victory of both these struggles.

It would also be in order at this point to say a few things about the relation between these two resolutions. Both, I believe, are animated by the same general conceptions; I'm not aware of any general contradiction between them. But, of course, the two are not the same resolution. The second is not merely the first rewritten. If that were the case the new resolution would hardly be worth discussing. If we had nothing different to say after nine years, if we had

learned nothing from the events of the last nine years, then we would be indeed in a bad way.

The 1957 resolution, I believe, reaffirms and, at least in part, restates the central ideas of the 1948 resolution, explicitly or implicitly, but it doesn't try to do that alone or that primarily. The 1948 resolution was our first attempt to write a rounded resolution incorporating our general outlook, our basic theoretical conceptions and the fruits of our experiences in the Negro struggle during the preceding decade. The 1957 resolution, instead of trying to cover the same ground, takes the 1948 resolution as its point of departure in a certain sense, and proceeds from there, seeking to assess the present conjuncture and direction of the movement, to draw conclusions for our present work from the events of the past several years, from the developments that can be properly called new; developments that it was simply impossible to speak of in the same way, in the same concreteness, nine years ago, or even four years ago.

The resolution examines briefly certain processes and tendencies in operation -- industrialization, urbanization, migration, political trends and so on -- and how they have affected, and are affecting, the development of the Negro struggle today. Most of these tendencies we have called attention to in the past, in the 1948 resolution, among other places, and on them we have based a good part of our perspectives. But now we see some of these tendencies manifesting themselves more concretely and are able to grasp them and their significance better than before. That's a gain of course; but we would be negating part of the gain if we did not recognize at the same time that the specific way in which some of these processes have developed and matured had different forms and tempos than some of us anticipated.

We knew in 1948, we spoke of it then and before, of the interrelation between the international situation and the American Negro struggle; between the colonial struggle for independence and the civil rights struggle for equality in our own country. But what was partly an abstraction before has acquired richer meaning and concreteness now, thanks to the events themselves.

The colonial rebellions and revolutions made a deep impact on the consciousness of the Negro people, encouraging and inspiring them to intensify the struggle for their own objectives. But they did more than that, as the resolution points out. Because the Negroes are mainly workers, and becoming more and more integrated into the working class, the repercussions of the colonial rebellions were not confined to the Negro people alone, but were introduced and filtered into the working class as a whole.

The one section of the American population that was least influenced by the anti-communist hysteria which the ruling class sought to spread while it was exploiting the events in Hungary was the Negro people. Their response was one of skepticism. Like Liza Doolittle in the popular musical, "My Fair Lady," their attitude was "Show me." "Don't talk to me about the need to defend democracy in Budapest, show me, show me that your talk about democracy is serious by what you do in Birmingham." And in those plants where Negroes represent any significant part of the work force, that is especially in the big industrial plants, skepticism was not restricted to Negroes alone, and the patriotic flim-flam and collections fell flat despite the appeals of the Reutherites. We owe a debt of gratitude to the colonial people for helping to educate the Negro people, and to the Negro people for helping to educate the rest of the working class. Together, they have significantly strengthened the anti-war moods and sentiments of the American people.

We owe them a debt not only for helping to educate us but for also creating conditions that compelled the American capitalists to grant concessions that they did not expect to grant nine years ago, and, I will add, that I did not expect them to grant either.

It's not that the 1948 resolution excluded or ruled out the possibility of concessions from the ruling class and gains by the civil rights struggle. On the contrary. And yet, some of the concessions actually granted -- the ending of the rigid segregation in the armed forces, the Supreme Court decision on the schools, and some others -- did surprise at least some of us, who underestimated the effects of the colonial revolution on this sphere of American politics and perhaps also overestimated the ability of American capitalism to resist the anti-war, anti-Jim Crow pressures at home and abroad.

I mention this matter with a little hesitation, not because I think a mistake in prediction or expectation is disgraceful, or the acknowledgement of it shameful. On the contrary, mistakes are an essential part of the educational process; when we find someone who never makes mistakes, we have also found someone who never learns anything. I mention this with some hesitation, because there is often a tendency to react to a mistake in one direction with another in the opposite direction, and that could be dangerous in this case.

The mistake in the opposite direction, against which we must be on guard, especially because it is becoming more prevalent in the radical movement generally, is the mistake of assuming that because the capitalists have been forced to grant concessions which some of us did not expect, therefore, anything can happen and maybe they will be compelled to grant genuine equality eventually.

I don't think there is anyone in our party who holds such a view, but we have to be very clear about it because it is one thing that distinguishes our party from all other tendencies. We deny that this is possible, our resolutions deny it, and we seek constantly to convince others that it is not possible. Its possibility can be accepted only by those who ignore the contradictions in the American social and political structure and who base themselves on the perspective of American capitalism having a long extended lease on life. We, of course, base ourselves on an entirely different perspective, and must work unremittingly to recruit cadres permeated with the consciousness of the limits of concessions that can be won under capitalism, and with the conviction that Jim Crow can be ended only by ending capitalism, no matter how many partial gains may be won on the way.

Of course, we don't refuse meanwhile to fight Jim Crow side by side with those forces that still have illusions about the possibilities of progress under capitalism, because we know that if they fight for even partial gains, they will learn the correctness of our conclusions in the course of the struggle. And for the mass of the people that's the only way that they will learn it. But even as we participate in the struggles for equality and partial and transitional objectives we always do so with our eyes on the final goal and in such a way as to raise the level of revolutionary consciousness among our fellow fighters.

The resolution takes due note of the concessions won in recent years, and properly calls attention at the same time (on page 6) to the fact that along with these concessions there also "has come significant new evidence that it is impossible to secure full Negro equality through reliance on the capitalist

government." I think that's the correct way of handling the concessions. We must be careful not to estimate them wrongly. Even if partial, we hail them because they are in the final analysis products of struggle and resistance, and we hail them because of the effects they will have. It is true that the capitalists and their apologists seek to use these concessions in order to create confidence in capitalism and its government -- and that we must fight. But the more certain result of concessions is that they encourage the struggle to get more. That's the dilemma of the ruling class.

Instead of satisfying the Negro people, the Supreme Court decision inspired them to make greater demands and to fight better and harder to win them. We don't have to worry about the lessons that the masses will learn from these fights. The dynamics of mass struggle are always favorable to us. The important thing for us is that the fight be conducted and expanded. We must do everything we can to combat illusions, but if it depended upon us alone, and our relatively small propagandistic efforts and forces, not much would be accomplished along this road. But, of course, it doesn't depend upon us alone. Capitalism, the source in one sense of the concessions that may breed illusions, also is the source of destruction of illusions. And the resolution points this out very well under the section headed "White Citizens Councils."

What we have been witnessing in the last three years is a reactionary as well as a progressive mobilization: the White Citizens Councils, the witch-hunts against the NAACP, the banning of the NAACP through state subversive lists, the utilization of racist terror and economic pressure and so on. The lesson of these developments is being learned, that nothing is gained or kept without struggle, and this lesson is being learned, and acted on, by millions of people who previously were not seen or heard from on the national political arena.

A large part of the resolution, as I said, is devoted to what is new in the Negro struggle, and that of course is the developments in the South. We referred to the South in our 1948 resolution, but we couldn't do it the way we can now. You probably remember that in his book on the American Negro struggle, Daniel Guerin devotes a few pages to our party, praising us for some things, criticizing us for others. One of the things that he wrote was that the Socialist Workers Party "has somewhat neglected, or underestimated, the immense potentialities of the South." I felt sorry about this passage, sorry that we hadn't been able to convey to him an understanding of the practical difficulties facing a small revolutionary party in a vast country; but more sorry of course that we don't have live and thriving branches in the South. The main cause for this, I am positive, was not neglect or underestimation on our part but the objective conditions in the South, which only recently have begun to change.

The resolution traces the causes of the changes, doing a good job in demonstrating the inter-relations between the development of the struggle in the North and the South. Briefly, the processes of social change in the country as a whole speeded up migrations to the North, helping to create powerful Northern Negro communities that were able to make firm ties with the industrial union movement and win important gains in the 30's and 40's. When the union movement became conservatized, especially after the outbreak of the cold war, the Northern Negroes continued to play the part of a vanguard in some ways, but were prevented on the whole from doing more than marking time. Then things began to move again a couple of years ago, particularly after the Emmett Till murder.

Without much encouragement from the conservative Negro leaders the Northern Negroes turned out in the greatest demonstrations they had ever staged in this country in protest against the revival of the white supremacist terrorism that followed the Supreme Court decision. These demonstrations, lacking a serious organized leadership, didn't seem to lead anywhere, but they had profound effects in an unexpected quarter. They encouraged the Southern Negroes, also undergoing deepgoing changes during these last two decades, inspiring them with the feeling that they had powerful allies in the rest of the country, and encouraged them to take action of their own, beginning with the Montgomery boycott which has been well analyzed in our resolution and press and which I won't repeat here.

And this Southern movement showed a power, tenacity, boldness, grasp of organization and flexibility that would be truly inexplicable of anything but a deeply-rooted mass movement. The resolution says that "Beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott, the Southern Negro movement assumed a vanguard role in the civil rights struggle and changed the course of events." I don't think there can be any doubt about the accuracy of this statement, or of the conclusion that as a result "strategic and tactical policies, organizational forms and leadership patterns have been affected."

The ability of the NAACP leadership to limit and restrain mass action has been breached. New forces have entered the scene and they are accomplishing things not done before. Region-wide coordination of planning and action have been made possible through the formation of the Southern Leaders Conference and for the first time a march on Washington has not only been threatened, but carried through. No matter that its execution was far from ideal. The new thing is that a march was really held this time. This was a historic achievement. And in the conception, planning and initiative for this march, it wasn't the Northern Negro movement, or the labor movement, but the Southern Negro forces that played the leading role and occupied the center of the stage. What was previously potential, what was previously a promise, is now beginning to be a reality. Only a beginning, it is true, but a real beginning.

Now what will be the repercussions, the reaction of these events in the South on the movement in the North? They may be a little hard to see as yet in some places. Maybe the resolution is a little premature in speaking of these repercussions in the present rather than in the future tense. But I don't think there can be any maybe about the expectation that the Northern movement, beginning first of all with the ranks, will be influenced and stimulated by the Southern struggle and Southern victories. If mass action can win victories in the South, it surely can do no less in the North. That is how the ranks will reason and that is why they will exert an increasing pressure on their leaders for a change of policy in the direction of more mass action in the North. On this development we can count confidently and in it we must attempt to play our part.

On the question of the organizational forms that the movement will develop in the future, the present resolution, like previous ones, does not attempt to make any predictions, and wisely, I think most of us will agree. A struggle is going to take place over policy, between reliance on the government and struggle against it. If the NAACP is able to adjust to the new needs and opportunities of the struggle then it will remain the chief organizational vehicle of the struggle; if it fails to adjust and be transformed, then it will be superseded by other organizations. But here we must be careful not to misinterpret the recent developments in the South. New organizations have appeared there, but not primarily out of dissatisfaction with the policy of the NAACP. The main reason for the creation of the new organizations in the South,

so far, is the witch hunt, the outlawing of the NAACP by the white supremacists. In most cases, these new organizations are really legal substitutes for the NAACP, and not fundamentally different in policy from the NAACP.

I'm not talking now about the Montgomery Improvement Association, which is something new, but about some of the other groups formed out of legal and tactical necessity rather than out of a rejection of NAACP policy from the left. This point merits emphasis, I believe, because it would be wrong to assume that the NAACP is about to be replaced as the national organization of the struggle, least of all outside of the South. We must combat all tendencies to dismiss the NAACP and discontinue our efforts within it. On the contrary, now more than before, we must look to the NAACP and encourage all the militants in the Negro community to join and remain in it, to work within it. Because if our analysis of the effects of the Southern movement on the North is correct, we are just now approaching the time when a struggle within the NAACP to decide the future direction and methods of the struggle is bound to gain momentum and head toward a showdown.

The central question today, of course in this as in all other fields, is the question of leadership. The present national Negro leadership has repeatedly demonstrated its inadequacy. It is predominately middle-class in nature, displaying the vacillating traits classically associated with the middle class, although it is distinguished from the rest of the middle class by one important ingredient, that it too is a victim of race prejudice. Instead of leading the masses in an uncompromising struggle against the white supremacists and their government, it uses its position of leadership to appeal to the government for concessions to appease the masses and restrains and discourages the masses from independent action wherever possible. Unwilling to look outside the framework of capitalism, which it wants only to reform, it either abstains from political action, or more often, supports one capitalist party against the other, and opposes independent political action that could smash the two-party system.

Another important feature of this leadership is that it is bureaucratic, and this is not an incidental feature but virtually a necessary one, since the Negro bureaucrats don't have the same economic power for controlling the ranks that the labor bureaucrats have, and can maintain their policies and maintain their positions only by discouraging the participation and initiative of the ranks. Part of the explanation for the difference between a typical Northern NAACP branch and the Montgomery Improvement Association is the essentially democratic character of the Montgomery Improvement Association, as well as the different situations that the middle class leaders find themselves in in both places.

But the biggest obstacle inside the mass movement to the development of the Negro struggle is not the Negro leadership, however inadequate it may be, but the union leadership. Standing at the head of powerful organizations, they are in a position to change qualitatively the entire status of the fight for civil rights. With the resources at their command it would be possible to create a unified and enthusiastic labor-Negro alliance and to pass almost at once from the defensive to the offensive. But the top union leaders are cowardly and treacherous. Instead of encouraging the struggle they try to ignore it, contain it and keep it within safe bounds. Even those who pay it lip service, and not all of them do that much, try to sit on the struggle and subordinate it to the interests of their coalition with the Democratic Party.

The word "treacherous" applied to them is not a polemical epithet but a scientific description. The policy of the union leaders is criminal -- not only

for what it fails to do about the Negro movement, which after all is an independent movement -- but what it fails to do about the union movement itself. The indictment is fully presented in our resolution. The Meany-Reuther policy goes counter to every need of the white workers as well as the Negroes, styming and preventing the solution of pressing economic, social and political problems -- the wage differential, the open-shop, unionization of the South, runaway plants, right-to-scab laws, White Citizens Councils, control of Congress by the most rabid, anti-labor forces in the country, etc.

Consequently, it is our duty, inside the unions and outside, to center our fire against these policies. It would be a good thing both for the socialist movement and the Negro movement if our party becomes known as the most irreconcilable opponent of the bureaucracy on these questions and the most active advocates among the white workers for a labor-Negro alliance based on the principle of the identity of interest between white workers and the Negro people. To acquire such a reputation, of course, we must earn it in practice.

I'm going to skip over the programmatic sections of the resolution or rather skip over all of them except one, the others being fairly familiar and continuations of what we have proposed before. The section is the point on page 29 advocating that we initiate united front actions in solidarity with the Negro people, wherever we can and attempt to involve all the radical forces in them. This is not altogether new but it deserves special attention now because it will help promote not only the Negro struggle but also the process of revolutionary regroupment, to which we have devoted so much attention in the last year.

Our press did a good job on the march on Washington, but I'm sure that some of our branches at least could have done more than we did locally and with benefit to our regroupment work as much as to our civil rights work. Through such activity we can make contact not only with Negro militants not yet politically affiliated, but can also make and improve our contacts with rank-and-file radicals, both white and Negro.

What lies ahead should be discernible to those who have rightly grasped what has happened up to now. In the last few years, during which the lull in the union movement has not been interrupted decisively, the Negro movement again demonstrated both its independent and progressive character by continuing to move forward, making certain gains, raising the level of the consciousness of the working class as a whole and thereby creating conditions favorable for the coming upsurge and politicalization of the working class as a whole.

There are limits to what the Negro movement can do by itself. But that these limits have not yet been reached is demonstrated by the appearance of new forces on the scene, particularly in the South, which are capable of modifying patterns and accelerating trends within the national labor as well as the Negro movements. The recent march on Washington movement, which dragged along sections of the labor leadership that manifestly had no appetite for such a project, is a token of other and bigger things to come.

This process, which will culminate in the fusion of the labor and Negro movements on a consistently anti-capitalist basis, will continue, with inevitable ebbs and flows; will continue basically because the capitalist class will be unable to grant sufficient concessions to stem it. We can fulfill our role as revolutionary socialists, only by participating in the struggle side by side with the rank-and-file, helping them to draw revolutionary conclusions from their experience, convincing them of the correctness of our class-struggle program and methods, working

with them to build a left-wing leadership in the Negro and labor movements and recruiting the more advanced workers to the party that represents the socialist future free of all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

In order to convince others of the correctness of our program and policy, including our theoretical analysis, it is necessary, naturally, that we be convinced of their correctness ourselves first of all. The resolution recognizes this need on page 30, when it advocates "planned educational programs" to acquire "a thorough understanding of the historical, theoretical and practical aspects of the fight for Negro equality." The present resolution does not pretend to supply that kind of "thorough understanding." Judging from the discussion of recent years, the great majority of the leadership and the membership of the party believe that we have developed the correct analysis and theory in previous documents and positions -- generally correct, that is, and superior to that of any other political tendency. As one result of this conviction there is little attempt in this resolution to argue such questions as self-determination, although the party's traditional position on this question is very briefly restated on page 26, in connection with the role of the Communist Party.

However, there are some comrades, such as Comrade Kirk, who hold that the party's theoretical position has serious flaws, gaps and contradictions that cannot help injuring our work in the mass movement. Comrade Kirk has advanced some of his ideas on this question in the party's discussion bulletins since 1954. Comrade Kirk has also appealed some time ago for a discussion of these questions by this convention. The Political Committee, agreeing that such a discussion would be useful, proposes that it be held after this convention, without any haste or rush, but also without any undue delay, and submits that proposal to this convention as its recommendation, after action on the resolution we are discussing now.

Meanwhile Comrade Kirk, after seeing the PC resolution, prepared another resolution as a substitute. I want to say a few words now about his resolution, on which he will report in a few minutes. Its nature is a little puzzling to me. I don't take it to be the presentation of his views on the theoretical questions which he considers to be in dispute, although it contains the essence of his line on those questions. That is, I doubt that it is the "theoretical" resolution that he has been advocating. At the same time, while it deals with the conjunctural situation also dealt with in the PC resolution, it does so in what seems to me an incomplete and unsatisfactory way. To me it is neither a "theoretical" nor a "conjunctural" resolution, but a mixture of the two minus the benefits that would accrue from keeping them separate.

I have been asked what are the differences between the PC resolution and the Kirk resolution. Last night I heard Comrade Kirk state in effect that they are incompatible and no doubt he will tell you why he thinks so. As for me, I tried in the short time available to compare the two resolutions, laying aside the differences over theoretical questions that the PC recommends be discussed separately, and attempting to note what the Kirk resolution says that the PC resolution doesn't say, and therefore to understand the main differences between them, in their estimate of the present situation, or conjuncture. I don't claim I have selected out all of them, but I think a few are worth discussing now, because they show how much more correctly the PC resolution handles the conjunctural estimate.

On page 3 of the Kirk resolution, where Montgomery is handled, we are told that it is our elementary duty "to warn the Negro people away from Ghandi's program of 'passive resistance' as a means of their liberation." Then follows some discussion of the role of Ghandism in India, and the statement that in the U.S. this program is put forth by the Negro leaders for the purpose of "holding in check the pent-up fury of the masses, preventing a revolutionary solution to the question and to evade militant, class-struggle program." And there is an additional statement that the Southern system will fall through the united struggle of the workers, white and black, and not through the passive resistance of the Negroes alone.

The Kirk resolution therefore sees a serious danger, which needs to be combated now, of the Negro struggle being derailed into the trap of pacifism. The PC resolution doesn't seem to see this as much of a danger now, or in the immediate future. Of course, we are not pacifists, but opponents of pacifism. If there is a question about this, we ought to spell it out in the resolution. But we must be careful not to get confused by the meaning of words as they are used in different situations.

"Passive resistance" is not necessarily the same thing in all places. When somebody advocates boycotts, sit-down strikes, or organized mass action to make it possible for thousands of people to keep from riding Jim Crow buses, and calls that passive resistance, I can't help wondering if that's what is traditionally meant by passive resistance. And I can't help concluding that whatever it's called, it's a good thing, because it promotes mass action, mass struggle, and we'd like to see more of it. It may actually be that a boycott of the Montgomery type is designed by the middle class Negro leaders to hold in check the pent-up fury of the masses. But if that is the intention, they haven't chosen a method that is compatible with their aims. It might also be, as the PC resolution suggests, that the Montgomery Improvement Association leaders are making tactical use of passive resistance as a defensive struggle, skillfully, to build a mass movement, rather than leading a crusade for pacifism to hold the masses in check. I don't know how many of the leaders of the MIA are genuinely pacifist, but we do know that in the conduct of the boycott, the participation and initiative of the masses were not curbed, but mobilized -- and effectively. And that's a pretty important test.

If there is something needed in the way of a caution against pacifism in our resolution, then I'm in favor of adding it to the PC resolution. But not along the lines laid down in the Kirk resolution, because its approach is fundamentally wrong. The choice it poses is the united struggle of white and Negro workers or passive resistance of Negroes alone. In other words, it counterposes passive resistance to struggle. But passive resistance of the Montgomery type is not at all the opposite of struggle; it can be one of the means of promoting struggle and eventually a united struggle. It is struggle itself, mass struggle, mass action with revolutionary implications that all of us should recognize. We would disqualify ourselves completely, we would abandon all possibility of influencing the future development of this movement if we were to pose the question the way it is done in the Kirk resolution. I don't know if it should be called sectarian or dogmatic or quite know how to describe it at this point, but I do know it is negative and barren, and would be completely ineffective, even as a way of warning against pacifist illusions.

A second danger that the Kirk resolution thinks should occupy our attention now, and which occupies most of page six of that resolution, is the danger that as

a result of the failure of the labor movement to come to its support and of the failure of the middle class Negro leadership to utilize opportunities for drawing labor support -- as a result of these there is the danger of the Negro movement becoming "isolationist" and "going its way alone."

I have thought about this matter many times since Comrade Jean Blake raised it first some five or six months ago. I have tried to discover evidence that it is a real and live danger, but for the life of me I couldn't find any. The Negro movement in the South is just beginning to organize. It is organizing independently, as it has to. It has appealed for white support, although not sufficiently along class lines. It appealed for and compelled the labor bureaucracy to grant a limited measure of labor support to the Washington march. It is going its way alone, right now, not in any sense that Comrade Kirk would object to, because there is no alternative. But so far it is doing this in a not at all isolationist way. In the North, meanwhile, the danger is just the opposite of isolationism. There the Negro leaders are usually afraid to act independently at all, and are slavishly dependent upon the labor bureaucrats and the liberals. In short, the only "isolationism" that exists now is the isolationism of the labor movement from its responsibilities to the Negro movement, not the other way around.

Of course, it's possible to foresee, theoretically, or rather abstractly, the danger that worries the Kirk resolution. But it's possible to foresee other things too, one of them being that a resolutely independent course by the Negro people, going their own way alone if necessary for a while, including among other things discontinuing support of the Democratic-labor coalition in politics, can have effects opposite to the catastrophes foreseen in the Kirk resolution. It can have the effect of producing a crisis inside the labor movement and lending weight to the pro-Negro forces inside. The Harlem events of 1943, to cite one example of going it alone, compelled the union leaders to take a greater interest in the anti-Jim Crow struggle afterward.

But I wouldn't want to put this variant into a resolution, anymore than I would want to stress the Kirk variant, because it's speculation at this point, rather than a clear or present danger. It reminds me a little of a chess player who becomes excited about a possible move five or six plays ahead. A good player has to foresee things like that, but he also has to be careful not to get so excited about it that he forgets what's to be done in the next one or two moves. Otherwise, he may not last for five or six moves.

The resolution we need now is a short-range one. The Kirk resolution doesn't meet that need. It is so concerned about remote dangers that it pays insufficient attention to an analysis of current developments and problems. I think this is due in part to a false estimate of the tempo of development, seeing the middle or end where there's only the beginning, and underestimating the effect of the struggle itself on the developments and the participants in them. This is probably related in some way to the theoretical conceptions held by Comrade Kirk although I must confess I don't see how at this point. However, maybe I will see it better after hearing his report.

May 31, 1957