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STATEMENT ON THE EDITED VERSION OF THE P.C.

RESOLUTION ON "THE CLASS STRUGGLE ROAD TO NEGRO EQUALITY."

By Richard Kirk

The P.C. resolution adopted by the Convention has been edited and published. Some rather substantial changes in certain parts were made. I was the main critic of this resolution and in view of the fact that many of the changes are in line with the criticisms which I and those comrades who supported my resolution made, it is incumbent upon me to state my opinion of the resolution in its altered form.

I refer to the following changes: 1. The editors have dropped the idea that "the Negro struggle is an integral part of the colonial revolution," and returned toward the party programmatic position that the Negro struggle is an integral part of the class struggle in the U.S. 2. The resolution now designates the relation between the colonial revolution and the Negro struggle in the U.S. as based upon mutual racial oppression as contained in the minority resolution and advocated in my convention speech. 3. The resolution has dropped the reference to Negroes as a "national minority." 4. The resolution no longer says that the civil rights movement gained "basic" momentum from the rise in industrial employment for Negroes. 5. The section on the Role of the Church has been virtually eliminated. Its estimate of the religious appearance of the Negro movement is drastically revised; it criticizes the clergy, its mysticism and pacifism. It qualifies its support of the program of "passive resistance" and warns of its dangers. It eliminates its ambiguous reference to women. 6. The section on the Communist Party is both more concrete and more critical. 7. Some of the parts which tended to negate the relative political advancement of the Negro people have been revised.

These are important revisions, each one of which is extremely welcome. This reveals that it is quite possible that if the Political Committee had published its resolution at an interval before the Convention which would have permitted some discussion of it within the National Committee, then at least the area of difference of opinion might well have been narrowed considerably and the Convention discussion taken place upon a different level. The party would have been embarrassed by the publication of the original text of the resolution, and although I consider that the present version still contains sections which are wrong, ambiguous or inadequate, and has serious omissions, it is a definite improvement over the original.

It remains, however, saturated with the residue of the ideology of Negro nationalism, half rejected, but yet in sufficient evidence to deprive its authors of a consistent scientific approach to the question in keeping with the traditions of Marxism.

The changes made have removed some of the most far reaching and extreme examples of what I characterized as an adaptation to reformism. The critical remarks about the clergy in the Southern movement are good and to the point.

But in taking care of this problem, the editors create others. The resolution warns against the Ghandist program, but in the very process of doing so, lends credence to the idea that the Montgomery bus boycott was, in reality, "passive resistance." That "passive resistance" is an ordinary tactical weapon of struggle which can be good or bad depending on who uses it and how. I do not believe that this contention can be sustained.

To be truthful, I do not know what the P.C. means by "passive resistance." I doubt that its meaning can be legitimately divorced from its origin and classical usage: the Indian nationalist movement. Here it is defined as "resistance in the spirit of love and non-violence." There is a specific reference to it in another document adopted by the convention, the resolution on the "Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie:" "His [Ghandi's] doctrine of non-violence, passive resistance, etc., served to restrain the revolutionary awakening of the Indian peasantry, the first phases of which are marked by passive resistance."

Can we call the Montgomery bus strike passive resistance? I don't think so; anymore than you can call a strike action against the bosses at the point of production "passive" resistance. It doesn't correspond with any of the above references, and in view of the above programmatic condemnation of it, it would seem to be inconsistent to use it in the way the resolution now does.

Whatever its need for defensive formulations, the temper of the Southern movement has little in common with "resistance in the spirit of love and non-violence." And the movement there is obviously on an extremely more advanced plane than the first awakenings of the Indian peasantry.

However, this may be, the present resolution does provide a better basis for the further discussion of the question as it has narrowed the area of debate.

September 22, 1957
Seattle, Washington

PRESENTATION IN SUPPORT OF

"RESOLUTION ON THE NEGRO STRUGGLE"

At the Seventeenth National Convention

By Richard Kirk

Comrades, it may seem peculiar to some of you that I stand before you tonight as a defender of the 1948 resolution, as against the crystallization of a definite and sharp turn in fundamental policy as expressed in the Political Committee resolution.

I am aware that many of the delegates present here have not read my resolution. I cannot apologize for the lateness that you received it. This was conditioned by the lateness of the beginning of the discussion with the issuance of the Political Committee resolution. I believed that insufficient discussion was possible and, therefore, felt I should propose that no decision be reached. The National Committee is of a different opinion and I have been persuaded if not convinced, that this is necessary -- that they must have a decision and a line. Consequently, I offer no objections to taking a vote on the line although the circumstances are very unusual.

We look upon the coming period as a period in which we may discuss all aspects of the question, not the mainly conjunctural ones which are at stake tonight.

The symbols of the change in line represented by this resolution are contained in the very first sentence of the resolution and on the second page. The 1948 resolution says: The Negroes are a basic part of the American people. The P.C. resolution on page 2 says they are a national minority. The resolution of 1948 says that the Negro struggle is an integral part of the struggle of the American proletariat for socialism. This resolution says in its opening statement that the Negro struggle is an integral part of the colonial revolution.

The 1948 resolution has important defects and failings which I have noted. They are largely errors of omission. The main line of that resolution is organized around the basic conception of the integral relation of the Negro struggle to the Working class struggle for socialism. My criticisms were of those inconsistencies and deviations which go in what I conceive to be an opposite direction and the omissions which indicate that opposite direction.

* * *

We are confronted with the needs of the moment. There are questions which press upon us. Two important ones. First, the unfolding struggle in the South which has created a transformation of political life in and around the labor and radical movement. We see here for the first time in 70 years a successful struggle against white supremacy being carried on over an extended period of time and ending in the creation of a stable organization. This is something new. This heralds the unfolding movement of the struggle in the South against the whole system there. This is important and we have to take cognizance of it.

The other problem which presses upon us is the anti-Stalinist campaign and the campaign around regroupment and the role that the Negro question plays in this campaign.

Around these two problems, the two pressing questions, the resolution fails and it is for this reason and this reason only that I undertook to write a resolution; hurriedly written and incomplete it is, but it contains a line which I believe is correct, and indicates the differences which exist.

Behind the failure of the resolution to solve the practical questions there is revealed in this document an adaptation to reformism. An adaptation to the program of the Negro petty-bourgeois leadership of the Negro movement. Second, an adaptation to the Social Democrats, pacifists, and Stalinists, with the result that the resolution is saturated with paternalism.

There are in addition the following facets of this adaptation to reformism. (1) A denial of the role of the Negroes in the struggle for their own emancipation. (2) A negation of the independent character of this struggle, and although the resolution states on two or three occasions that it is independent, what it describes, what it analyses, is a dependent movement. (3) It negates the advanced character of this movement. (4) It justifies the reformism of the white pacifist liberals and Social Democrats of the South. (5) It removes the Negro struggle from the class struggle at the point of production in the north and west. (6) It divorces the Negro question from the question of building the Socialist Workers Party.

Empiricism is the method of the Political Committee in this question and it has had devastating results.

Let us take up first the question of the integral relation between the Negro movement and the colonial revolution. The whole first section of this resolution is apparently organized around this colonial conception of the Negro question. This is not by any means a new idea. But it is new in our program. This idea has enjoyed a considerable popularity in rather divergent circles during recent years, which would demand an explanation of anyone putting it in a resolution in our party. There is neither proof nor analysis or any justification of the plumping of this proposition into the point of greatest prominence in the resolution and organizing the whole resolution around it.

Now the main sources of the proposition that the Negro question is an integral part of the colonial revolution have been: First, Dr. DuBois. Second, the Stalinists. Third, Rev. King. Where does the resolution stand in relation to these main propositions?

DuBois' statement of this question, which is the proposal which Daniel Guerin seems to favor in the introduction to his book "Negroes on the March," is a sort of a vague internationalism based upon racial solidarity. It is based upon racial solidarity and a common oppression by white supremacy of the colonial world and the Negroes in the United States.

Although his conception is not scientifically exact, Dr. DuBois' formula has a certain agitational charm and it is difficult to say whether its negative feature -- that of being unscientific -- outweighs the advantages which he has been able to wring from the use of this slogan. In any event, it is wrong. It is standing on its head. The Negro question is not part of the colonial question. Rather the colonial struggles partake of the racial discrimination which has its home in the U.S. and this is the fundamental relation; relation which the resolution reduces to a secondary or tertiary point.

So, the resolution clearly doesn't stand with DuBois who sees this relation as mainly a racial one. The resolution places the racial aspect in a secondary position.

This theory has become quite popular among the Stalinists recently. But this derives from another and different source. It is their way of evading the class struggle in the United States; to point to the solution to all problems by the colonial revolution.

They are friendly to this whole idea because the colonial revolution helps co-existence and they are quite willing to place the Negro struggle in this category too because it absolves them of any responsibility to do anything about it. Their analogy which links up the Negro question with the colonial question is only a tail to this phony internationalism which we first encountered with the Cochranites.

Now while the resolution does not differentiate itself from the Stalinists in this matter, it is obvious that it doesn't specifically stand with them, but explicitly with Rev. King whom it supports, without a word of comment. His statement about the colonial revolution, in fact, expresses, says the resolution, the most militant sentiments of the Negro people.

Rev. King isn't just talking about a vague racial solidarity. He is not talking about nationalism or a revolutionary struggle. He is talking about a program for the elimination of racial discrimination in the U.S. He conceives of the colonial revolution as Ghandism. That is his conception of it and that is the reason for his analogy. He associates the Negro struggle with the passive resistance, the non-violent passive resistance movement, of India. That is his program. We are not concerned here with the question of non-violence as a tactic to put the responsibility for violence on the employers and the reactionaries. Everyone is familiar with this tactical necessity. What we are concerned with here is the program of the movement. Now, the question of the role of the church.

This is a very surprising section in the resolution. It has a great many errors in it, some important, and some not so important. For instance, it says that what gave rise to the organized Negro church was conditions of the life of the Negroes. This doesn't happen to be true. What gave rise to the organized Negro church is the fact that the Negroes were driven out of the white Baptist and Methodist churches. That is the factor which gave rise to the organized Negro churches.

The resolution says that it is natural that the Negroes hold their meetings in churches. What has nature got to do with it? The resolution says that it is consistent with the religious nature of the Negro people that they hold their meetings in churches and that it is natural, therefore -- according to their nature -- that they respond to the idea of non-violence.

In other words, the religious character of the boycott movement derives from the religious nature of the Negro people. Is this true? What about the March-on-Washington movement of the forties? It did not have this religious character as the present March-on-Washington prayer meeting had. The great movement to organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters which at one time was a great achievement of unionism and one of the greatest achievements of the Negro community, did not have a religious character. Although it had the same religious people in it, they were not one bit more or less religious than the citizens of Montgomery, or any other southern city.

The reason for the religious character of this movement as typified by this Prayer Pilgrimage is not the religious character of the Negro people but the petty-bourgeois character of its leadership. And it is wrong for the resolution to allude to natural phenomena; here we are not dealing with natural phenomena.

Further, it is wrong to describe the dynamic role that women play in this struggle in a tail-end paragraph in the section on the religious character of this movement. What is it doing there? What is the reason for this relation? The only implication that can be drawn from it is that this movement is a religious movement and the women are certainly the most religious. They have, therefore, a justified place in the leadership of the movement because of its religious character. That implication is wrong. The reason that the Negro women move in this situation is because they are triply exploited. That is the source of their motion.

Now, what is this business of non-violent passive resistance? Of the church, and religion? That is the program of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. They are the moving political force in this situation, they and the Social-Democrats, and we do not distinguish ourselves politically from them in the resolution. We solidarize ourselves with this kind of leadership and we say it is all right for this movement to have this character because it is natural for it to have this character. And this is an adaptation to reformism.

The petty-bourgeois pacifist, religious leadership of this movement is its greatest danger. There is a danger in the isolation of the Negro movement. Don't fool yourself! There is a danger that it will be cut to pieces. It is in a far extended position and there is a great danger to it. This movement is not going to attract the labor movement to it by prayer pilgrimage. That is the fact of the matter.

The inclusion in this resolution of the slogan for troops to the South is another adaptation to the petty-bourgeois Negro leadership. We had a long discussion of this in the National Committee which lasted for the greater part of the past year. The justification for this move is that in one way or another it will dispel illusions. Those of us who opposed it say, in the first place, that you have to take responsibility for what happens if your slogans are carried out.

The South represents a situation which is going to erupt in revolutionary struggle. Sooner or later the federal troops are going to be sent there. Not when we want them but when the Southern white supremacists ask for them. When they can no longer control the situation with their own police and military forces, then you will see federal troops there. Regardless of what ostensible reason they are there for, they will be there to suppress and beat down the movement that is arising there. That is what is going to happen when the federal troops go to the south. And that is when they're going, and it is wrong for us to call upon the government to send them there under any circumstances, because we will bear responsibility for their being sent there.

We build up a big movement for federal troops sometime. It takes a long time. When, finally, things begin to come to a head, a different situation arises in the South than the one we had anticipated and the government wants to send troops to put down a Negro revolt. What are we going to do?

The demand to send federal troops to the south is a means by which the Negro middle class attempted to transfer their responsibility for action to the government and find a solution to this question outside the realm of mass action. It was a short circuit on the question of mass action. If we ask for federal troops to be sent to the South on behalf of the Negro struggle there is no reason why we must not then ask that they be sent to any strike struggle where it seems advisable. And we know what the consequences are. We have never done it. We have condemned everybody that monkeyed around with such a proposition.

* * *

On the question of the role of the Negroes in their own emancipation. The resolution says on page 3: The rise in industrial employment for Negroes was brought about by the needs of the capitalists in the war industries, and that this gave basic momentum to the Negro movement. What created the influx of Negroes in the war industries -- were the needs of the capitalists. It's not true! It was the March on Washington movement that enabled Negroes to enter war industries. It was not the need of war industry for workers -- it was the Negroes who forced their way into it.

You say this is a small question. Comrades of the Political Committee, you would not say that the growth of the CIO or the strength of the labor movement at some given time in the past ten years was due to the fact that in the 1930's the capitalists needed workers in their plants. You would say that it was due to the great strike wave and the great struggles that took place. Why do you deny to the Negro Movement the same place in its own struggle that you would not think of denying to the labor movement? When you talk about the achievements of the Negro Movement they have to appear as an automatistic economic process. This is wrong!

And this approach goes all through your section on the basic momentum of the Negro movement. What is the basic momentum of the Negro movement? The basic momentum of the Negro movement, the resolution says, comes from the rising industrial employment. No, the basic momentum of the Negro movement was generated in the struggles of the Thirties which created the Pullman Car Porters, the CIO, which was climaxed by the March-on-Washington movement which did not lie down before the government during the war preparations and play dead; by the whole movement which took advantage of the war effort to keep on struggling. This is the source of momentum. This is the source of industrial employment.

I do not say that the rise of industrial employment had nothing to do with the situation, but when you're speaking of the basic momentum of the struggle, you have to be precise. And the PC, rather than give the Negroes credit for their role in the development of their own movement, explains the movement by this automatic molecular process of industrial development. The PC would never apply this approach to struggles other than the Negro struggle.

This is also revealed in the PC characterization of the cause of the Montgomery struggle. What are the conditions which were necessary for the Montgomery struggle to erupt? They were the growth of the demonstrations in the North after the Till murder. This gave the Negroes in the South encouragement and they started to struggle. This is fantastic! There was no indication whatsoever in that struggle that this was an important factor whatsoever in making up their minds to struggle.

On the contrary, there is every evidence that what the Till murder and its aftermath did was to dispel any illusions that the Negroes may have had about the Government, its Courts; laws, Congress, or executives. This episode convinced many Negroes that whatever friends they may have had in the North were powerless to intervene in their behalf and that any amelioration of their conditions would be by their own struggle.

So, the main relation between what happened after the Till murder and the eruption of the Montgomery struggle is just the opposite of what the resolution says.

Comrade Breitman says he's thankful to the colonial people for educating the American Negroes. The resolution gives its Northern supporters the credit for creating the "matured" conditions for Montgomery. Everybody gets into the act except the ones who are doing the struggling: the Southern Negroes. This is one of the examples of how the resolution, while stating the independent character of the Negro movement, uses a method of analysis which shows it to be dependent. Let us give the Negroes their proper credit for their role in the initiation of their own struggles.

This brings us to the question of what kind of illusions the Negroes have and what their relative political advancement is. In the section of the resolution on "The Role of the Negro Workers" the resolution first analyses their present conditions which result from the migrations. Then it says: "These present conditions force the Negro militants toward an examination of the nature of governmental power. They find the main bastion of white supremacist rule among the Southern Democrats." They find that the Democrats aid the white supremacists, that the Republicans make coalitions with the Southern Democrats. That "recognition is therefore dawning that to break the power of the white supremacists the masses must enter the political arena as an independent force."

That they are just now finding out that the white supremacists are Southern Democrats and that they have great power. This is absurd! The Negroes found this out over a century ago and have never been allowed to forget it. But just now, according to the Resolution, as a result of these immediate experiences, the militant Negroes are coming to the realization of this. They are finding out about the Republicans just now. The 1948 resolution doesn't say that or anything like it or imply it; the whole spirit and letter of that resolution is that the Negroes are the most advanced section and that they are ready for socialism.

The militant Negroes are destined to be the vanguard of the proletariat and that's the truth. The militant Negroes have been under no important illusions about the Democrats and Republicans for decades. The important thing in the relations between the Negro militants and the Negro people and the Democrats and Republicans is not even mentioned in the Resolution and that is the role of the liberals, the liberals of the Democratic Party.

This is a more subtle thing -- the role which the liberals play as the buffers, as the protectors of the southern Democrats. Their demagogic role as a civil rights bloc in Congress is used to catch votes and fool people; at the same time they do everything to make the Southern bourbons look good and keep them in power, as The Militant has demonstrated. This is the thing which the Negroes understand quite well. The tremendous pressure upon this question is the thing which spurs Wilkins and Powell in their bolts from the Democratic Party.

The resolution furthermore justifies -- is too indulgent, has too indulgent an attitude toward -- the cowardice of white liberalism in the South. It has the wrong propagandistic approach to this phenomena. The resolution almost sympathizes with the plight of the white southern sympathizer who hides his sympathy because the result is going to be heroic action followed by reprisals. This is wrong! It is wrong that the white resistance and support of the Negro movement is largely characterized by individual heroics followed by reprisals.

Women in large numbers and students over a long period of years have been openly engaging in struggle in support and defense of the Negroes and in defiance of segregation.

There is in The Militant an illustration of the line of the resolution on the white heroes who are persecuted.

March 18th: "White steel worker sets example in Birmingham." A story of how a steelworker was victimized because of showing solidarity with the Negroes. But at the very end, at the tail-end of the story, we have a reference to the Association of Southern Women Against Lynching, which has been in operation since 1930. During the first days of the victory of the Montgomery bus strike when there were bomb threats all over the place, there was a white woman riding on every bus in that city. Mrs. Tilly said: "If you use my name, you've got to make it clear that I'm not the only one in this. If something has to be done in any community in the South, I can put my hands on a woman there who will do it." In any community of the South.

This is the language of organization and struggle. The Militant, instead of emphasizing it, tacks it on at the end of a story featuring victimization and the resolution doesn't even see it, doesn't even take cognizance of it.

It is surprising the way in which the resolution divorces the Negro struggle from the class struggle in the North and West. The resolution makes the amazing assertion that the reason the labor bureaucrats fear the Negroes in the rank and file of their unions and the reason they channelize their support to the conservative Negro leaders is that they fear the Negroes in the ranks on account of the question of the South.

That's not true! Union leaders fear the unleashing of the Negroes in the rank and file of the unions first and foremost because they'll start fighting the employers. They represent the most exploited and newest sections of the industrial proletariat. In the automobile and steel industries, they are among the most militant sectors who want to fight the corporations. That is the reason for the collaboration between the union officials and the conservative Negro leadership. For some reason, the resolution states plainly and definitely that the main reason -- and the only reason it mentions -- is that the labor union leaders fear the struggle in the South.

Now to the fundamental question in relation to the Stalinists, the question of the fundamental character of the Negro struggle. This resolution is not going to convince Stalinists of anything. We will convince Stalinists and we will convince Stalinist Negroes but it will be in spite of this resolution. The resolution is soft on the Stalinists. The only criticism of the whole war-time policy of the CP is that the CP opposed the March-on-Washington, and that is the only political criticism that there is of Stalinism altogether on the Negro question unless there is an organizational criticism.

And that is because the PC evidently agrees with the basic Stalinist conception of the Negro question. That is, that it is a national question. Now we have discussed this before. We have analysed it. The resolution says that the Stalinists were wrong in their advocacy of self-determination for the black belt because it went against the integrationist aims of the Negro movement. That is, advocacy of self-determination is related only to the aims or consciousness of the Negroes. There is nothing wrong with the slogan as such, says the PC, but the Stalinists used it bureaucratically because the Negro masses themselves weren't advocating it.

We say that the slogan for self-determination for the Negroes is wrong because it went against the fundamental direction of motion of the Negro movement. Not against its immediate consciousness. That is the difference which we have. The PC says that direction is dependent upon consciousness. We say that consciousness is dependent upon the fundamental nature of the Negro question. Because of its particular racial, not national, character, its fundamental line of motion is the struggle for assimilation.

The resolution and I fundamentally disagree at this point. Its authors, in an off-hand way, characterize the whole thing at the end of a sentence dealing with another question: the Negroes are a nation -- they are a national minority. And later when it speaks of self-determination it recognizes the validity of the present consciousness of the Negro movement, but, it says, at some future time it might be different. We don't know exactly what circumstances will prevail. That is because the authors conceive of the direction of the movement as a problem of consciousness. And it is not a problem of consciousness.

Is the Negro question knowable? Can it be analyzed and dealt with as a social phenomena? That is the problem which is before you. Can its main directions of motion be determined with any accuracy? To all other social questions, we say yes! What's the matter with the Negro question that it doesn't claim the same criterion?

We show you a history beginning with 1818 in which the fundamental direction of motion of this struggle has been toward integration. An almost uninterrupted struggle of 150 years. You treat that as if it is unimportant; as if consciousness is the only important thing! Therefore, you cannot predict. We say that the consciousness derives from the fundamental nature of the struggle and it will take a great social catastrophe to change, to jar the movement out of its present direction and send it upon a more backward direction toward nationalism.

When you just pass off this problem, it is not an insult -- to me, at any rate, it is not an insult. You pass off 150 years of Negro struggle and say it doesn't mean anything, it doesn't determine any direction of motion. You pass off the last 60 years of Negro scholarship. But you can't just pass these off.

All of the fundamental theories of the struggle for integration have been laid down by a galaxy of great scholars. All I have done is to utilize them (with what tools I and others have had given to us by the party) for our analysis.

Dr. Cox, the Negro scholar, gives an exhaustive analysis of every race relation in the world, of national relations and the Negro question. He has a definitive work on the subject, "Class, Caste and Race." He comes to the fundamental conclusion that the solution to the Negro problem is through an American Lenin.

One of his main subordinate conclusions is very simple. After an exhaustive analysis of the whole question, he writes, "The solidarity of American Negroes is neither nationalistic nor nativistic. Its social drive is toward assimilation." You're going to just pass that off and at the end of a sentence say that they are a national minority, in spite of Cox and the others.

Comrade Breitman has used Dr. Cox as an authority for articles in the F.I., using the background which Cox used for his own conclusion, but he hasn't differentiated himself from Cox's conclusions. In order to justify his attitude on this question, he has got to take up the Negro scholars and show where they are wrong.

Now, this is the answer which the Stalinists require. They require the answer of the permanent revolution related to the fundamental racial character of the Negro question, and then they begin to understand. They want to understand this question above almost any other question in domestic politics. They want to understand this because the rank and file communist workers have put years of their life in the work around this question and they see nothing gained; they want a theoretical explanation for the question.

This resolution doesn't begin to give it. It gives a few organizational criticisms of the CP and lets it go at that -- and you're not going to win any Stalinists with that approach.

Now there is one important item in this discussion -- and that is, it is quite obvious that the fundamental program of the party controls the secondary questions. For a number of years it is my belief that the paper and the PC have been treading a tight-rope because of their eclectic approach to this question, because of wrong theory, and because of an empirical approach. The symptoms are quite discernible.

On the Negro question, The Militant rarely propagandizes; it only agitates. Every other question is the subject of propaganda and analysis -- but the Negro question -- no.

Look magazine had an article about the Till murder case. It was an insidious, sly, journalistic, half-fiction, half-truth attempt to justify the murder in a dramatic pseudo-factual manner.

Anyone who is sensitive to the propagandistic duties of our movement in the Negro community, or of the Negro movement itself, would have recognized it for that. But we are concerned with agitation and the only reference The Militant makes to this article was as a source of fact in the Till case! This is the kind of symptom I am speaking about and it is dangerous.

The important thing is that in spite of empiricism on this question and wrong orientation, the fundamental party program, until now, has controlled it and prevented serious conjunctural error. But today, the symptoms of an adaptation to reformism are increasing and must be overcome.

SUMMARY REMARKS ON NEGRO DISCUSSION

At the 17th National Convention

By Richard Kirk

A study of the first discussions of the Negro question in the American political movement reveals that the question which was originally quite simple has become extremely complicated. The Negro struggle for equality was an obvious type of movement, as viewed by the IWW, a matter of equality for all workers. They would not tolerate any ideas of segregation. They would go into the deep south and hold integrated meetings there. It was simple, but incomplete. It required Marxism to clarify the question.

Of recent years, since the introduction of the nationalist conception of the Negro question by the Stalinists, the problem has revolved around the question of what is the nature of the Negro question. Dan says it is a national question and it isn't a national question. So, if it isn't a national question, what is it? It is a racial question. It is a question of racial discrimination. This is a unique category of special oppression which is different from national oppression.

Religious oppression, which Dan relates it to, is closely associated with national oppression. It is oppression of a part of the culture of a people; but that is not what the Negro question is like. The Negro question is only like itself. That is, it is a unique phenomenon arising fundamentally in the United States, and emanating from there in various forms throughout the world.

Color discrimination is a unique problem and requires an analysis of its own. Upon close examination the first thing which you find in the Negro question are its diametric opposites to the national question. Not in the whole history of the national struggle of Europe or Asia, did you ever see a national minority a nation, whose fundamental struggle was the right to assimilate into the dominant culture. You never saw it. It is the diametric opposite of all the national struggles.

The national struggle is characterized by the desire for self-segregation, the desire to withstand the pressure of the dominant nations to force them to assimilate, give up their economy, give up their language, their culture and their religion. All of the militant tendencies of the nationalist movement stress the requirements of the nation to organize itself and to segregate itself from the nation that oppresses it. The conservative, conciliatory elements are on the side of assimilation and integration. That is absolutely characteristic of the national struggle. That is one of the fundamental characteristics with which Marxists were historically confronted.

This was the problem in dispute between Lenin and Luxemburg, and Lenin and everybody else who dealt with this problem of nationalism. It is the precise opposite of the Negro struggle. From the very beginning of the modern Negro struggle 150 years ago, all tendencies of a militant, revolutionary, progressive nature in this struggle, have tended to find as the axis of their struggle, a resistance against racial separation because this is the weapon of racial oppression.

Comrade Dan, you say that you want to leave the door open for self-determination at some future time. Will you not permit the Negroes a self-determination now based upon 150 years of struggle? Everything points to this fact. They do not want to be designated a nation. Why do you demand to place this designation upon their struggle? It is not a national struggle. It is a struggle against racial discrimination. That's from whence it derives its independent and dual character, i.e., its independence from and identity with the class struggle.

It is the feature of the permanent revolution in American life. What is involved is the vestigial remains of color slavery, an antique social system unsolved by the capitalist revolution in the Civil War and reconstruction. These vestiges, the social relations of chattel slavery, color segregation, color discrimination, white supremacy adapted to and integrated into the whole economic political and social life of capitalism, become one of the important driving forces of the movement for socialism because capitalism can no longer even be considered as a possible ally of the Negro people in the solution of this question. The capitalist class has decided this long ago. They integrated their system with the Jim Crow system, it is one and the same thing now.

Consequently, the Negro struggle for equality, in its independence, arises out of racial oppression, attacking a Southern social system which is the result of these vestiges incorporated in the capitalist system. This struggle begins on the plane of elementary consciousness. Equality is an elementary democratic demand which has no solution under capitalism and therefore becomes, because of its nature, a transition to the struggle for socialism.

Comrade Dot accuses me of accusing the PC of being pro-Stalinist and pro-reformist. (Note by Kirk: The following interchange was not picked up in the transcription. I have reconstructed it as it occurred according to my memory:

Interruption from the Presiding Committee: That what you said yesterday?

Kirk: That's not what I said.

Presiding Committee: Then you implied it.

Kirk: I implied nothing of the kind.

Presiding Committee: Let's have plain speaking here.

Kirk: I say that your program is an adaptation to reformism.) That means that you do not differentiate yourselves from the reformists in the southern movement. The critical problem of the moment, the crisis of leadership in the Negro movement, revolves around the question of reformism or revolution, and the resolution does not differentiate between these two tendencies. If it did we would have a different situation today in the convention. I would not have written another resolution.

The resolution does not differentiate. It supports the basic line of the religious pacifist leadership of the Negro movement in the South.

Comrade Breitman and the Resolution say that the Southern Leaders Conference is the differentiation, that this is the differential force in the Negro movement; and that's not true. The S.L.C. is just another wing of the petty-bourgeois leadership. This is not the decisive differentiation. The differentiation will come as a result of our being able to inject the revolutionary proletarian program into

that struggle. And the struggle will not have its over-all religious character then, as the workers take the power in the Negro movement.

Comrade Jones says we are not, never have, and never will be separatists. We had a resolution in 1939 which Comrade Breitman said was the guiding line of the party for 10 years, which is essentially a nationalist document on the Negro question. It is entitled "Self-Determination and the American Negroes." And it is organized around the concept of self-determination. That was the program adopted by the 1939 convention. "It is not improbable, therefore, that the bulk of the Negroes have absorbed their lesson far more profoundly than is superficially apparent and that on their first political awakening to the necessity of revolutionary activity, the first political awakening, they may demand the right of self-determination, that is, the formation of the Negro state in the South."

The 1939 Resolution analyzes the Garvey movement as representing the desire for a Negro state, and speaks about the opponents of the Negro state as follows: "The opposition to a Negro state comes mainly from the articulate and vocal but small and weak class of the Negro intellectuals concerned with little else besides the gaining of a place for themselves in American capitalist society, fanatically blind to its rapid decline." This is the characterization in the resolution of the theoreticians of assimilationism who have been now vindicated by the whole course of the Negro struggle. That is a wrong formulation and it has not been vindicated by the course of events, but nevertheless this is an important part of our history and it is wrong to say that it never existed.

Now, Comrade George Lavan accuses me of twisting words when I say the resolution designates the Negroes as a national minority. That's what it says and Comrade Dan agreed that it did; he said, what are you going to call it if you don't?

Comrade George says that there is no such movement as I described as quoted in The Militant as a movement of Southern women. There's no movement, there's no struggle. There is! The item in The Militant is only one aspect of it, only one facet. There is a movement which has been in continuous existence since 1930, in overt struggle against the system of segregation.

A very exceptional book on the movement in the South, Lillian Smith's "The Killers of the Dream," describes this organization and what role it plays there. She speaks about the Southern women and what their stake in this struggle is. She describes them as follows: "Culturally stunted by a region that still pays nice rewards to simple mindedness, in females they had no defenses against blandishment. The gullied land of the South, washed out and eroded, matched the washed-out women of the rural South whose bodies were often used as ruthlessly as the land; who worked as hard as animals; who were segregated in church, sitting in separate pews from the men; who were not thought fit to be citizens and vote until three decades ago and who, in some states in the South, cannot own property except in their husband's name. Who even now cannot officiate as ministers in most of the churches though they are the breath of life of the church."

These women, she says, decided to make a war upon their oppression. These "lady insurrectionists," she calls them, "these ladies went forth to commit treason against Southern tradition. It was a purely subversive affair but as decorously conducted as an afternoon walk taken by the students of a female institute. It started stealthily in my mother's day. Shyly these first women sneaked down from their chilly places, did their sabotage and sneaked back up, wrapping innocence around them like a lace shawl.

"They set secret time bombs and went back to their needle work, serenely awaiting the blast. Their time bombs consisted of a secret underground propaganda movement which was developed from mothers to daughters and through the years spreading out to encompass vast sections of the white female population. And so degraded was the position of women in Southern society that white men of the South could not conceive of their women having ideas and had no inkling of the insurrection until it happened.

"The lady insurrectionists gathered together one day in one of our Southern cities. They primly called themselves church women but churches were forgotten by everybody when they spoke their revolutionary words. They said calmly that they were not afraid of being raped and as for their sacredness, they could take care of it for themselves. They did not need chivalry or a lynching to protect them, they did not want it. Not only that -- they continued that they would personally do everything in their power to keep any Negro from being lynched and furthermore, they squeaked bravely, they had plenty of power and this was the foundation of the Association of Southern Women Against Lynching in 1930." It began a struggle against segregation, as the fundamental hereditary enemy. They claimed that the Lord's Supper was a holy sacrament which Christians cannot take without sacrilege unless they also break bread with fellow-men of color. They systematically set out to break down one of the most important conventions of segregation and engaged in inter-racial feeding.

This organization has been in continuous existence since that time, has been active and has now become a tremendous factor developing support of the movement against segregation.

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SUMMARY REMARKS ON NEGRO DISCUSSION

At the Seventeenth National Convention

By George Breitman

Comrade Kirk began the discussion last night by charging the Political Committee with adaptation to reformism, Social Democracy, pacifism and Stalinism; with paternalism toward the Negro people, paternalism being a polite term for white chauvinism; with denial of the independent character of the Negro struggle; with revision in a dishonest way of the main line of our 1948 resolution, and with other crimes. If he believes half of what he charges, he had better prepare not only to discuss but to fight, because no party, no party leadership guilty of what he charges deserves an ounce of confidence from revolutionary workers.

But for his fight to have any success, he's going to have to use a different and better method of argument than the kind he employed here. He's going to have to prove his charges. He expresses great concern here about the need to influence Communist Party members with our views on the Negro struggle. Well, I'll tell you one thing, Comrade Kirk you're not going to win them in our direction by your method of argument -- misrepresenting, omitting and using quotations out of context. They've had their fill of that method in the Stalin school of falsification. To win them, you've got to show, among other things, that you debate in good faith, that you don't distort, you try to understand what the other side is saying or trying to say, you don't put words in their mouths in order to make a point. Anyhow, that's how you've got to debate if you want to educate and win the support of the members of our party.

Let me give a few examples of Kirk's selective method of quotation.

Discussing the entry of Negroes into industry, he quotes the sentence on page 3 of the PC draft resolution: "The civil rights movement gained basic momentum from the rise of industrial employment for Negroes forced on the capitalists by the needs of the war economy." He then interprets this to mean that the resolution claims Negroes really played no role in the fight against Jim Crow in employment, that it claims there was a sort of an automatic industrial process at work; that we wouldn't speak that way about the role of white workers; and that this is evidence of paternalism toward the Negro people by the P.C.

I call your attention to page 3 because there's a paragraph that comes just before the one cited by Kirk, which he must have read too. It says: "On the home front the colored people have implicitly tended to reject the notion that the imperialist war was their war. Militant elements began to look instead for opportunities to use the war as a means to push ahead a bit in their own battle for civil rights. In 1941 the March on Washington Movement sprang up, receiving such strong mass support that the Roosevelt government felt compelled to make temporary concessions toward an FEPC. The 1943 Harlem outbreak sharpened the mass pressure, forcing some further concretization toward an FEPC in New York state policy."

So that when you read the preceding paragraph, Kirk's interpretation of the sentence that he read is shown to be invalid and not honest.

He made a point about the P.C.'s analysis of what worries the union leaders -- on page 24 and 25 -- and said that the resolution misrepresents what's really worrying the union leaders, and what explains their refusal to support the civil rights

struggle as it should be supported. He said that the resolution said that the only thing they're worried about is the South, and that it omits or denies the role of the Negroes in the class struggle outside the South. Let me read the whole passage he refers to:

"Official union support of the civil rights movement, is deliberately channeled through the conservative leadership dominating the NAACP. This policy flows from fear that mass action in the civil rights struggle will cause ferment among Negro workers in the unions nationally, and help precipitate mass action to unionize the South."

I said last night we owe a debt of gratitude to the colonial revolutions for helping to educate the Negro people, and to the Negro people for helping to educate the rest of the working class. Kirk took what I said, left the second half of it out, and then interpreted it to mean that we consider the Negroes so backward that they have to be educated by the colonial people. This method of discussion which Kirk has employed for three years now, gets me so angry that I lose appetite for the discussion.

There's a difference between the two resolutions about the conditions that led to the emergence of the Montgomery movement. The P.C. resolution places great emphasis on the encouragement that the Southern Negroes got from the demonstrations that swept the North after the Till murder. The Kirk resolution says that the Till case and its aftermath demonstrated to the Negroes that the federal government would do nothing against the Jim Crow system and 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. This could be a useful difference for discussion, but it gets fouled up, as far as I'm concerned, when Kirk introduces again the question of paternalism; when, not content to claim that the Northern demonstrations played a relatively small part in inspiring the Southern struggle, he insists that our emphasis on that point means that we think that the Southern people are so backward that they're incapable of doing anything on their own. These insinuations and charges of his create the kind of atmosphere where it is extremely difficult to discuss the questions themselves, where it's hard to get the real differences clarified, where everyone speaking begins to feel obliged, as in the Communist Party, to engage in a hunt for "deviations," signs of white chauvinism and so on, or to defend yourself against such charges. And I hope that for the remainder of this discussion we won't have any more of it.

Now, Kirk charges that there is a sharp turn away in the present P.C. resolution from the line of the 1948 resolution, ("Negro Liberation Through Revolutionary Socialism," F.I. May-June, 1950) which he appears here to defend. At first I found that rather amusing, since for several years Kirk has been denouncing the 1948 resolution, and pointing to it as the source of "nationalism" and all the other errors and faults that he sees in our position on the Negro question. But he says he comes here now to defend that resolution against those who he claims are abandoning it.

The evidence of this abandonment he offers is from page 2, about which I want to say a little. In his remarks here last night he said that the P.C. resolution refers to the Negroes as a nation. At this point I interrupted him and asked, "Where does it say that?" He amended his statement and said, "They speak of it as a national minority" -- on page 2. So, I turned there and did find a reference to Negroes as a "national minority." And I must confess that I was surprised to see it there, because I hadn't noticed it. I hadn't noticed it because I had read the

passage in a different sense that he did. He read it in the sense that the resolution holds the Negroes are a nation, a nation-seeking, nation-oriented minority. I read it as a minority of the nation, as a numerical minority of the country, which I took to be the intention of the P.C. Let me read the sentence, and the one before: "In addition the colored peoples in the colonial and semi-colonial spheres constitute a majority of mankind. By making common cause with them, the Negro people help to reduce the handicap of being a national minority."

Now, unfortunately, this expression "national minority" is interpreted in two ways, and that's why we generally have been careful not to use it without explanation.

The 1948 resolution nowhere designated the Negro people as a "national minority" as such. It referred to them in the opening paragraphs as a minority within the country, an oppressed minority within the country, because we don't regard the Negro question as a national question in the sense of the national question in Europe. They are not a nation, but an oppressed minority. I would like to suggest to whoever edits the P.C. draft resolution that the word "national" be dropped from this passage. Because that is not what the differences are about in our theoretical discussion.

It is impossible, under our time limitations, to discuss the theoretical differences here and it is frustrating to try to do so. This is the result of trying to discuss theoretical questions and a conjunctural resolution at the same time. I can only urge you to get hold of the 1948 resolution which presents the basic position of the party, especially the younger comrades who were not in the party at that time and were unfamiliar with that position and the development of our thinking on it. I urge you to get hold of it and study it, at least as attentively as you do the two resolutions which we have been discussing at this convention, and to read the discussion articles that were written about it around three years ago.*

The theoretical differences concern our estimate of nationalism, self-determination, etc. The P.C. favors a discussion in the party of these questions -- after the convention; in the present P.C. draft resolution, the position that the party has had on them is merely restated, briefly on page 26, in the section criticizing the Communist Party. Perhaps too briefly. It has been proposed that we delete this section from the resolution. But to do that would mean to abandon the party's position before having a thorough discussion of the reasons offered for doing so. I think that would be wrong. This is the line that has guided the party's work, propaganda and agitation since 1948 at least. Unless the majority of the party has changed its views, and there is no evidence of that, it would be a mistake for us to abandon the line that has guided us up to now, and to leave ourselves without a line. Let us postpone changes on this question until after we have had our discussion of them.

Just a few more points: Kirk sees a great contradiction between saying that the Negro struggle is an integral part of the world revolutionary upsurge, as is done in the P.C. resolution, and saying that it's an integral part of the working class

* "The Negro Struggle and the Proletarian Revolution" by Richard Fraser, Discussion Bulletin, August 1954. "On the Negro Struggle, Nationalism and Self-Determination" by George Breitman, Discussion Bulletin, September 1954. "For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question" by Richard Fraser, Discussion Bulletin, August 1955.

struggle in the United States, as we did in 1948 and we do again now. But I don't see that as any kind of contradiction or problem. It's an integral part of both struggles. Maybe the word "integral" is wrong when used this way. I'm not sure, but the sense is correct, I believe; the Negro struggle is a component part of both these struggles. And the resolution, although it may not use the term "dual nature," is a living example of a presentation and understanding of the dual character of the Negro struggle; it is permeated with it from beginning to end.

Some comrades are concerned that we don't have something about pacifism in the resolution. As I indicated yesterday, I wouldn't object to including this point in the final version of the resolution, although I wouldn't want it to be handled as it is in the Kirk resolution. I am pretty sure the P.C. wouldn't object either; they didn't regard the draft as the last word and intended it to be edited in the light of the convention discussion in any case.

I understand that the Presiding Committee has a motion to offer for our consideration. Yes, here it is: "To approve the general line of the Political Committee draft resolution on 'The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality,' and to authorize continued discussion of all aspects of the Negro question."

As you can see, the recommendation is to vote on the general line of the resolution. This will allow for editorial improvement of the resolution before being published. It will enable our new P.C. and our editorial staff to have a line to guide it during the coming period, and during the discussion that will take place after the convention. And it will in no way restrict anyone from participating freely in that discussion, whether you are for or against the P.C. resolution.

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CONTRIBUTION TO DISCUSSION OF NAACP

By Richard Kirk

(Note: The discussion to which this letter refers took place in the P.C. in the summer of 1955. It is published at the request of Comrade Kirk.)

September 2, 1955
Los Angeles, California

To the P.C.

Dear Comrades:

I should like to participate in, or at least comment on your discussion of the NAACP which occurred around the convention report. Some very far-reaching and thought-provoking questions were raised. For example, does the NAACP merely float on the surface of the Negro movement? Can we expect to recruit from it? Should we adjust the line of the paper to accommodate the strategic needs of the NAACP leadership?

It is obvious to me that what is involved is our basic perspective in relation to the NAACP and consequently our analysis of the Negro petty-bourgeoisie, for the NAACP is the instrument of this class. The tentative and empirical character of many of our discussions of the NAACP indicates to me that there is something lacking in perspective.

So I ask you to consider my views on the class relations in the Negro community and how they bear upon the NAACP, at least as a basis for further discussion.

1. The Negro bourgeoisie bases itself fundamentally upon the status quo of race relations in the U.S. There has never been an opportunity for Negroes to enter the ranks of the Anglo-American capitalist class. The only capitalist institutions which Negroes have been allowed to develop arise from segregation. Negro business operates exclusively in the Negro market and there in the field of consumer's goods, services and insurance. It might be contended abstractly that the end of segregation would open up the doors of big capital to the Negro capitalist and consequently this class might have an important stake in the destruction of segregation. However, the following facts nullify this as a serious aspiration for Negro capitalists:

First, that the Jim Crow system is so intimately woven into the fabric of American capitalism that the overthrow of the capitalist class will be required to eliminate it. In one way or another the Negro businessman knows that there can be no equality even for him in the U.S. under capitalism.

Second, that the actual structure of Negro business and all of its profits derive exclusively from segregation which gives Negro business a monopoly of some goods and services and a competitive advantage in others.

But while the class interests of the Negro bourgeoisie are tied up with segregation, there are difficulties. For the Negro businessman is also a victim of discrimination. He may find that it is impossible for him to get a license to operate a business, even in the Negro district because of color. He finds that banks will not advance him money on an equal basis with Anglo-American business, and that,

consequently, he is at a competitive disadvantage due to inadequate stocks, equipment, etc.

This reveals a contradiction between the class and racial interests of the Negro capitalist and is an important clue to the problem of leadership in the Negro movement.

This capitalist class has, on the one hand, contempt for the mass of workers and has interest only in holding on to its monopolistic privilege and/or favorable competitive position by which it dominates sections of the Negro market. So the Negro capitalist tends to want a continuation of segregation. But on the other hand, the capitalist does not dare to incur the wrath and enmity of the worker. Partly because of his complete dependence on the worker as consumer. Also because he finds it necessary to call upon the Negro worker to struggle against discrimination against Negro capital -- for his own protests avail him nothing.

2. The Negro petty-bourgeoisie is in the identical class-race contradiction as is the bourgeoisie proper. Because of the plebian character of the majority of the petty-bourgeoisie and in most cases greater immediate dependence upon and contact with the working class, the contradiction is more acute. This class is composed of professionals and small proprietors and in daily contact with this contradiction. A notable exception is to be found in that section of the middle class in the entertainment field.

3. The Negro proletarians face the racial issue squarely and without any fundamental conflict of interest. It is well known to you that my belief is that the Negro question in the U.S. is purely a racial question -- a matter of color discrimination. If this is true, surely only the Negro proletariat has a fundamental interest in the elimination of segregation, which is the source of discrimination and indeed is the form of the race question.

The class interests of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie are in antagonism with their interest in the struggle against segregation. But it is different with the workers, for their racial interests as Negroes are identical with their class interests as proletarians.

There is an important difference, however, in the comparison of the Negro question to the National and colonial questions in this matter of class relations. The Negro bourgeoisie and proletariat do not face each other in commodity production in any important degree. The basic relation is exclusively in the realm of distribution. There is virtually no capital-labor relation except insofar as the Negro capitalist is the agent of the industrial and financial Anglo-American capitalist for the distribution of products among Negro workers.

Consequently, although the classes have different and conflicting interests, the conflict is mitigated by the absence of class conflict at the point of production as far as the mass is concerned.

For example, it is not at all against the interest of the Negro bourgeoisie that the worker get higher wages. On the contrary, the more money coming into the Negro community, the better the businessmen's chance of getting some of it. Negro business is exclusively preoccupied with distribution on a small scale, services and insurance and are not employers of labor in any magnitude.

But it is not only a question of higher wages, but primarily of job discrimination and discriminatory wages. So the question of more wages for the Negro worker resolves itself from the very beginning into a question of a struggle against segregation one way or another.

At this point the petty-bourgeoisie encounters the contradiction. For his capitalist inclination is to stop at this point. But his connection with and dependence on the mass of Negro workers will not permit him to. This is the class source of the hesitant, weak, treacherous and compromising character of the petty-bourgeois leadership.

The relative absence of class conflict in the Negro community is one objective reason for the slow emergence of proletarian leadership. The petty-bourgeoisie in spite of its inner contradiction, pushed by the workers along the path of racial struggle will give way only to a revolutionary leadership. This is the only proletarian leadership conceivable.

There is a powerful tendency towards complacency in the Negro petty-bourgeoisie today. The nonchalance of the middle class toward Powell's betrayal of the Negro struggle at Bandung is a startling example of this complacency. Such an attitude is rooted, however, not in a genuine belief in the Negro middle class that the question of discrimination is solved. Rather it is a result of a condition of relative well being in the Negro middle class which has been brought about by the successful struggle of the Negro workers and by the general economic prosperity of the country.

At all levels of the Negro struggle this conflict of class interests reveals itself. On the question of discriminatory employment for instance: The Negro worker pickets a store under the slogan of "don't buy where you can't work" because he wants an opportunity to work there and is serious about his willingness to buy there if fair employment is practiced and prices are right. The Negro businessman may support this struggle, but with mixed feelings, for an important part of his consciousness hopes that it may not be successful and that as a result of defeat he can utilize this discrimination to call attention to his own slogan of the Double Duty Dollar: patronize Negro business. Thus he may gain a competitive advantage in business through the defeat of the workers' struggle against discrimination.

Obviously, the bourgeois tendency in the Negro movement is the fundamental source of separatism and nationalism. For the slogan of the Double Duty Dollar envisages a capitalist solution to the Negro question through building some sort of independent economy, beginning at the level of a monopoly of the distribution of consumer's goods and the creation of a light goods manufacturing industry on the basis of capital accumulated through this monopoly.

At one turning point in his career Dubois embraced this cause, expressed in his memoir "Dusk of Dawn." His proposition, however, was the capital accumulated by the organization of the segregated market would be used (by the "Tenth") presumably to institute an education campaign against segregation in the white population.

The fundamental difficulty, however, is that this semi-nationalistic yearning of the Negro capitalist is in diametric opposition to the requirements of the Negro people for a solution of the race question: eliminate segregation. This bourgeois yearning is founded squarely upon Jim Crow and its continuation.

* * * * *

Our point of departure in evaluating the NAACP must be first of all its petty-bourgeois character. One of the participants in the P.C. discussion remarks that the NAACP floats on the surface of the Negro movement and that it is not to be expected that our recruits will come from here, but from the underlying movement.

I tend to agree with this idea, but it is certainly at variance with the statement of the last political resolution which dealt with the NAACP specifically. In either the 1952 convention resolution or the political resolution of the split plenum (I forget which) we characterize the NAACP as being like the AFL of the 1920's.

I have never been very comfortable with this analogy for a number of reasons. First because it ignores the difference in the class character of the AFL of the 20's and the NAACP. It was on the basis of its class character that the Trotskyists predicted that the AFL would be the first channel through which the future mass movement would flow.

It is true that there is a superficial similarity between the role of the Labor Bureaucracy in the working class movement and that of the petty-bourgeoisie in the Negro struggle. However, this similarity is offset by the divergent class interests in the case of the Negro movement.

Second, the analogy is faulty in that it assumes that the Negro movement is today in the chaotic and totally unorganized condition of the working class of the 1920's.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Negro community is the most highly organized section of the whole population. Churches, fraternal organizations, labor unions, local organizations of great variety and profusion exist. In one way or another nearly all of these organizations express the struggle against discrimination. The NAACP is essentially an apparatus which attempts to lead the mass movement through coordination of the various organized sectors.

From another point of view it is a petty-bourgeois apparatus and is the means by which the middle class holds hegemony over the working class movement.

Although formally the NAACP is a membership organization, in reality it operates much more like a federation or delegated body of some kind. This is true in different degrees from top to bottom. A union official or minister from a powerful congregation whether sitting on an executive board or in a general membership, operates not as an individual but as a representative of the organization to the NAACP. And generally such a representative is accorded rights, privileges and influence in policy questions in more or less direct proportion to the size, strength, influence, and the amount of money donated by his organization.

The basic finances of the NAACP derive not from its individual members, except in the case of a few large donors, but from outright donations from these organizations or thinly disguised forms of this practice, such as the buying of block memberships, etc.

Among the most important financial supporters of the NAACP at the present time are the powerful CIO unions. Through this medium and through the powerful position of these unions, they have bought a large piece of the NAACP.

The dominant characteristic of the relation between the Negroes and the labor movement at the present time is that the Negro middle class is the political captive of the (white) labor bureaucracy.

While at times elements of this captive middle class become resentful of this captivity, they must nevertheless maintain it. For it is this relation which is a most important means by which the middle class is able to maintain its role of leadership of the mass movement. It is an insurance policy against the emergence of a working class leadership. For the CIO bureaucracy stands as a buffer between the Negro middle class and the Negro workers.

While it would be suicidal for us to ignore the fact that the NAACP is the titular head of the Negro movement, we must be aware that our task is the building of a proletarian leadership which will contest that of the middle class.

From the point of view of the mass movement, the middle class can and is occasionally pushed in the direction of struggle or support of struggle. Time after time the NAACP has been goaded into supporting mass actions against its will and original intentions. In many instances that support has been indispensable for the success of the undertaking. But in most cases a change in attitude of the NAACP is directly or indirectly traceable to pressure being applied independently by the working class from the outside, rather than as a result of an upheaval in the apparatus.

I believe that while there is an important work which we can do in this apparatus, our ability to influence the policy of the organization is determined primarily upon our strength outside the organization proper. Principally in the strategic unions which have a majority or large plurality of Negro members, secondly in the radical churches and other community organizations and finally in our own cadre in the Negro community.

Your discussion commented upon the somewhat different appearance of the NAACP in the South as compared with the Northern and Western cities. The important feature of this difference is (as was pointed out) the absence of a strong labor movement through which the Negro workers can express themselves. Positively, it also results in the local organizations being relatively free from the pressure of the labor bureaucracy. But its class character remains.

The NAACP was quite willing in the beginning of its present campaign to enter the South on the basis of an acceptance of the proposition of "separate but equal." But the stubborn resistance of the masses forced the leadership to abandon this course and come out against segregation.

* * * * *

The future organizational course of the Negro movement is very difficult to determine. Short says that the NAACP is like the British labor party in its hegemony of the Negro struggle. This analogy certainly has very narrow limitations at best. The British workers unquestionably think of the Labor Party as their own party. But while the Negro workers acknowledge the NAACP as the dominant organization and present leadership of the Negro struggle, they regard it pretty much for what it is: the property of the middle class.

At a time when the Negro proletariat really decides to take matters into its hands things are different. The middle class now not only holds the labor bureaucracy as a buffer between it and the working class, it holds a very strict and fundamental programmatic barrier: its exclusive concern with legal action. It says to the workers: "if it is a legal matter we will take it and fight it on a legal basis, if you want a vulgar display of mass action go to the rabble-rousers."

Thus the day to day struggle on the local level is carried out by largely independent local organizations operating sometimes spasmodically or through other established organizations. The ease with which the March on Washington Movement completely bypassed the NAACP should be a warning against the prognosis that the NAACP is the only way.

Some comrades have the opinion that the NAACP learned its lesson during the MOW episode and will stem off such a future militant tide with mass action of its own. I seriously doubt this. The program of the NAACP derives not so much from the whims of its leaders as from its class composition.

The idea that it is our main and present task in the Negro struggle to reform the NAACP, as the old AFL, means that about the only struggle that we are likely to participate in is a struggle against the Negro petty-bourgeois which has the organized community and the labor bureaucracy at its disposal to back it up. It would be different if this were the only arena for the expression of the Negro struggle, but this is not the case.

In one way, the limitations of the NAACP in its single devotedness to legal action is a considerable advantage for us, by the very fact that it isolates the middle class from the workers. It thus gives us a considerably greater elbow room to develop working class action without direct hindrance of the middle class and without coming into headlong conflict with this leadership at every single step of the way.

There is another consideration in our tactical problem: the NAACP does not usually provide a realistic arena of operation for the majority of Negro workers -- both recruits and contacts we have now and will get in the near future. Its class composition repels them, and the semi-professional level of the apparatus work deprives them of genuine participation in the life of the organization.

My conclusions are as follows:

1. The Party program should not overlook the specific demands of the Negro petty-bourgeoisie for equal opportunity to do business. Workers government for them would mean the extension of credit on a liberal basis, etc.
2. While the Negro middle class and proletariat have in common the problem of racial discrimination, their class interests are divergent and even antagonistic.
3. Only the Negro proletariat will provide the leadership for a fundamental struggle against the Jim Crow system. While we support the NAACP as the titular head of the movement of an oppressed sector of the population, we do not for one minute fail to recognize its basic class inadequacy, or of the treacherous role of the middle class.
4. Whatever the future channels of the Negro movement, our role and influence in it will not be determined by our specific strength in the NAACP apparatus but upon our forces in the basic organizations of the community and in the labor unions.
5. The historical alliance between the proletariat and the Negro people today finds a degenerate expression in the alliance of the middle class with the labor bureaucracy. It is our task to establish this alliance on the basis of an independent proletarian leadership operating on a program of uncompromising struggle.

Comradely,

R. Kirk