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PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

by J. R. Johnson

- I. The 14 or 15 million Negroes in the U.S.A. represent potentially the most militant section of the population. Economic exploitation and the crudest forms of racial discrimination make this radicalization inevitable. We also have historical proof, first in the part played by the Negroes in the Civil War and in the response to a Marcus Garvey. Superficially, the Negro accepts, but that acceptance does not go very deep down. It is essentially dissimulation and a feeling of impotence, the age-old protective armor of the slave. It has been stated that the C.P. in organizing the Negroes in the South got such response that it had to check the campaign. The reason given was that owing to the number of Negroes joining and the fewness of whites, the result would soon be a race-war between the Southern workers and sharecroppers.
- II. The Negro responds not only to national but international questions. It is stated that during the Ethiopian crisis, thousands of Negroes were ready to go to Ethiopia as fighters and nurses. Since the trouble in the West Indies, Jamaicans in New York have formed a Jamaica Progressive Association. They drafted a memorandum demanding a democratic constitution for the West Indies, sent a delegate to meet the Royal Commission and to visit Panama and Colon to organize membership of the association.
- III. Finally, I am informed that a new spirit is moving among the Negroes, in Harlem and elsewhere today. People who knew the Harlem Negro fifteen years ago and know him today state that the change is incredible. The Negro press today, poor as it is, is an immense advance on what it was five years ago. The Pittsburgh Courier, with a circulation of over 100,000 weekly, though a bourgeois paper, bitterly attacks the Roosevelt administration for its failure to deal with the Negro question. The younger generation in particular aims at equality, not to be discriminated against simply because they are black. To sum up then
- a) The Negro represents potentially the most revolutionary section of the population.
 - b) He is ready to respond to militant leadership.
 - c) He will respond to political situations abroad which concern him.
 - d) He is today more militant than ever.
- IV. The Fourth International movement has neglected the Negro question almost completely. If even the Party personnel were not of a type to do active work among the Negro masses, the Negro question as an integral part of the American revolution can no longer be neglected. The Negro helped materially to win the Civil War and he can make the difference between success and failure in any given revolutionary situation. A Negro department of some sort should be organized (consisting, if need be, entirely of whites) which will deal as comprehensively with the Negro question as the Trade Union Department deals with the Trade Union Question. If the Party thinks the question important enough this will be done. The Party members and sympathizers must be educated to the significance of the Negro question.

This is not a question of there being no Negroes in the Party. That has nothing to do with it at all. This work can begin immediately. The main question, however, that of organizing or helping to organize the Negro masses, is one of enormous difficulty for a party like the S.W.P. The main reasons for this are of course the discrimination against the Negro in industry by both capitalists and workers, the chauvinism of the white workers, and the political backwardness of the American movement. Each of these are fundamental causes inherent in the economic and social structure of the country. But an already difficult situation has been complicated by the funereal role of the C.P., especially during the last few years. It is stated, and there is every reason to believe it, that the possibilities of a rapprochement between blacks and whites on a working class basis are today worse than they were ten years ago. The C.P. has lost 1,579 or 79% of its Negro membership during the last year in New York State alone. Since that time, there has taken place the split of the Workers Alliance, and New York is slated to be always symptomatic of developments in the Party as a whole. It was not always like this. I am informed that some years ago in Harlem, the Negro who was aware of politics might not join the C.P., but he would say that of all the white parties, the C.P. was the only party which did fight for Negro equality and which tried to stick to its principles. Today that is gone. The chief reason for this is, of course, the new Popular Front turn of the C.P. The C.P. cannot gain the allies it wants if it fights the difficult fight for Negro rights. The C.P. is now an American party, and the petty bourgeois supporters of democracy who are coming into it have nothing in common with the Negro, who, finding himself an outsider, has simply left the Party. I have had personal experience of the bitterness of ex-members of the C.P. towards the Party, and unfortunately, to all white parties also.

But it is to be noted that the main grievance is political - the activity of the C.P. on the Ethiopian question. First of all, that Russia sold oil to Italy made a disastrous impression on the blacks. Yet many Negro party members remained. What seems to have been a decisive factor was the activity of the C.P. in regard to Spain and China and its lack of activity in regard to Ethiopia. "Every day it is only Spain, Spain, China, Spain, but nothing was done for Ethiopia except one or two meager processions around Harlem." I have the impression that the C.P. could have gotten away with the Soviet selling of oil if it had carried on a vigorous campaign, collecting money, etc. for the Ethiopian cause. The contrast with Spain has been too glaring, and when the C.P. entirely neglected the West Indian situation, the Negroes became finally conscious that they were once more the dupes of "another white party."

The Ethiopian question and the West Indian question are still live questions for the politically-minded Negroes. They will judge a Party on the international field by what it does or says on these issues.*

* The neglect of the Ethiopian question by the Fourth International (the British Section included) is a grave strategic error. The Ethiopians are in the field fighting and are going to be there for years. If there is any break in Italy during a war, these fighters will swoop the isolated Italian force out of the country. The African revolution today has a starting point in Africa. It is obvious what effect any such sweeping victory by the Ethiopian army will have on French black troops in Western Europe, and on Africans as a whole.

Articles, leaflets, and even small meetings in Harlem are not beyond the Party today with a little effort. One party comrade has managed to make himself with the Indian problem, to write articles in the N.I. and to make valuable contacts. The same could surely be done nearer home. *familiar

France at the present time is the key to the world situation. How to awaken interest in the American Negroes on the critical situation in France, obviously of such importance to themselves? Obviously by the struggle for independence in the French colonies, and particularly through the Negro organizations in Europe and Africa which are working towards this end. (The French Party and with it the Belgian and British parties have their responsibility here). In France today there are African revolutionary organizations in contact with a similar organization in Britain. The Fourth International must determinedly assist in building and strengthening its connections with this work, and the American Party has its part to play in this important means of educating and organizing the Negro movement in America.

The most difficult question is still to be faced. What will the Party aim at in its Negro work? There are certain things that every revolutionary party will do:

- a) Fight for the Negroes' place and rights in the Trade Unions.
- b) Seek to make as many Negroes as possible members.
- c) Carry on a merciless struggle against White chauvinism.

About (c) a word should be said. The C.P. has been accused of fostering a black chauvinism. There have been exaggerations and absurdities and downright crimes against Socialism, e.g. using white women to catch Negroes, but on the whole, the C.P. attitude of going to lengths in order to make the Negro feel that the C.P. looked upon him as a man and equal is not to be lightly dismissed. Its general aim was correct. The Negro brought up in America and Africa is extremely sensitive to chauvinism of any kind. Lenin knew this and in his thesis to the Second Congress on the Colonial Question, he warned that concessions would have to be made to correct this justifiable suspicion on the part of the colonial workers. No principled concession can ever be made. But sensitiveness to "black chauvinism" will gain nothing and will do a great deal of harm. It should be noted that this suspicious attitude is not directed against whites only. Africans, and also to some degree Americans, are often hostile to educated West Indian Negroes who from their British education and the comparative absence of sharp racial discrimination in the West Indies are accused, and justly, of having a "superior" and "white" attitude. Organizations in London predominantly West Indian find it difficult to get African members, and in America, to get American members. The party will base itself on the every-day needs of the Negroes. It must aim at being a mass organization or it would be useless and mischievous. The dangers of such an organization are obvious. But a recognition of these dangers does not solve two questions:

- 1) The great masses of Negroes are unorganized and no white party is going to organize them. They will not join the Fourth International. Is it worthwhile to assist in the formation of an organization which will rally Negroes, and, though reformist in character, must from the very nature of its membership develop into a militant organization. The Negro has

poured his money into Garvey's coffers, and now into Father Divine's, has worked hard and been robbed. Is there a way out for him to fight unless he joins the Fourth International?

2) Though I may be wrong here, I think that such an organization is going to be formed whatever we do.

This question of the Negro organization is one that deserves the closest study. As far as I can see, no white leader or white organization is going to build a mass organization among the Negroes, either in Africa or in America. As recently as 1935, however, the Negroes have shown their capacity for mass political action under one of their own leaders. One, Sufi, a Southern Negro, masquerading as a man from the East, organized a party, picketed shops, and helped to force employers to give one-third of their jobs to Negroes. He was the leading figure in the riots which gained Harlem schools, more colored teachers, recreation grounds, etc. Sufi was a racketeering demagogue and was entangled into an Anti-Semitism which, I am informed, was no part of his creed, such as it was. But he was ready to fight for such things as the Negro understood and he got a strong response. The question, however, is pertinently asked: Why is it that intelligent Negroes with political understanding never attempt to lead the Negroes but always leave them to men like Garvey and Sufi? This, it seems to me, is one of the most important questions on which the Party has to come to a decision. It is closely linked to the question of self-determination for American Negroes. Self-determination for the American Negroes is (1) economically reactionary (2) politically false because no Negroes (except C.P. stooges) want it. For Negroes it is merely an inverted segregation. Yet it is not to be lightly dismissed without providing for what it aims at: the creation of confidence among the Negroes that revolutionary Socialism does honestly and sincerely mean to stand by its promises. As so often with Marxists, the subsidiary psychological factors are not carefully provided for in the planning of political campaigns.

The Negro must be won for Socialism. There is no other way out for him in America or else where. But he must be won on the basis of his own experience and his own activity. There is no other way for him to learn, nor for that matter, for any other group of toilers! If he wanted self-determination, then however reactionary it might be in every other respect, it would be the business of the revolutionary party to raise that slogan. If after the revolution, he insisted on carrying out that slogan and forming his own Negro state, the revolutionary party would have to stand by its promises and (similarly to its treatment of large masses of the peasantry) patiently trust to economic development and education to achieve an integration. But the Negro, fortunately for Socialism, does not want self-determination.

Yet Negroes, individually and in the mass, will remain profoundly suspicious of whites. In private and in public, they ask the question: "How are we to know that after the revolution we shall not be treated in the same way?" Many who do not say this think it. The C.P. Negroes are looked upon as touts for Negro converts in exactly the same way as the Democratic and Republican Parties have touts for Negro votes. What is the remedy? I propose that there is an obvious way - the organization of a Negro movement. That the Negro masses do certainly want - they will respond to that and therefore they must have it. They will follow such a movement ably and honestly led. They have followed similar movements in

the past and are looking for a similar movement now.

The great argument for such a movement is that it has the possibility of setting the Negro masses in motion, the only way in which they will learn the realities of political activity and be brought to realize the necessity of mortal struggle against capitalism. Who opposes such a procedure must have some concrete suggestions for attaining this most important end: bringing Negro masses into the struggle.

What precise aims will such an organization have? What it must not at any cost do is to seek to duplicate existing white organizations so as to result in anything like dual unionism, etc. One of its main tasks will be to demand and struggle for the right of the Negro to full participation in all industries and in all unions. Any Negro organization which fought militantly for such an aim would thereby justify its existence.

There are many urgent issues: the struggle for the Negro right to vote, against social and legal discrimination, against discrimination in schools (and universities), against oppressive rents. The struggle against such things and the task of bringing the white workers to see to a concrete realization of their responsibility in these questions can be best achieved by a combination of the few politically advanced whites backed by a powerful Negro movement. To expect a continuous struggle by the whites on these Negro issues is absurd to lay down as a condition, for that is what it amounts to - that the Negro cannot struggle against these things unless he forms organizations predominantly white, is sectarian and stupid.

The Negro himself will have the satisfaction of supporting his own movement. The constant domination of whites, whether by the bourgeoisie or in workers' movements, more and more irks the Negro. That is why he followed a Marcus Garvey in such hundreds of thousands and would not join the C.P. The Party's attitude towards such a movement should therefore be one of frank, sincere, and unwavering support. The white proletariat will have to demonstrate concretely its value to the Negro not once, but many times, before it wins the Negro's confidence.

The support of this movement by the Party should be frank, sincere, and unwavering. This is not as easy as it sounds. What the Party must avoid at all costs is looking upon such a movement as a recruiting ground for party members, something to be "captured" or manipulated for the aims of the party, or something which it supports spasmodically at the time it needs something in return. The party should frankly and openly endorse such a movement, urge Negroes to join it, assist the movement in every way and, while pointing out the political differences and showing that revolutionary socialism is the ultimate road, work side by side to influence this movement by criticism and activity combined. It is in this way and on the basis of a common struggle, with the party always helping but never seeking to manipulate the movement that the confidence of the Negro movement be gained by revolutionary socialism, without raising the impracticable slogan of self-determination.

What are the dangers of such a movement? The chief are: (a) the danger that it might be used by reactionary elements such as the Democratic Party or the Communist Party, (b) the danger of en-

couraging racial chauvinism. A fortunate combination of circumstances reduces these dangers to manageable proportions.

At the present moment, there is a sufficient number of capable Negroes ready and willing to lead such a movement who, while willing to cooperate with white parties, have no racial chauvinism.

While all Negroes will be admitted and racial discrimination against any Negro as a Negro, will be fought, it is recognized by all with whom I have discussed this question, that such a movement must be a mass movement based on the demands of Negro workers and peasants. Much will depend on the leadership here. I see no reason, however, to have any doubts on this score. Such a leadership exists at the present time and needs only to be mobilized. The Negro's right to his place in industry and the trade unions must be one of the main planks of the platform and one of the main fields of activity. The prospective leadership, as I see it, will be militantly opposed to the political line and organizational practise of the C.P.

Yet this is not sufficient as a political basis. Sooner or later the organization will have to face its attitude towards capitalism. Is it to be a reformist or revolutionary organization? It will not start as a full-fledged revolutionary socialist organization. As Lenin pointed out to the pioneers of Communism in Britain immediately after the war, it would be a mistake to flaunt the banner of revolution right at the beginning. The basis of the organization must be the struggle for the day to day demands of the Negro. But American economy is already and will increasingly pose the question to every political organization - Fascism or Communism. Here again the initial leadership will exercise a decisive influence. This is a question which will ultimately be decided by struggle within the organization. However, many factors are in favor of a victory ultimately for those who support revolutionary socialism, when the Negro masses are ready for it. First there is the question of revolutionary struggle for the Negroes in Africa against imperialism. On this, most politically-minded Negroes are agreed. Secondly, the International African Service Bureau, a British organization, issued a Manifesto during the Munich crisis (copy attached) which demanded a joint struggle of British workers and colonials in the Empire for the overthrow of imperialism. This Manifesto has been warmly welcomed among advanced Negroes in America, and the Bureau and its paper, International African Opinion, have already a powerful influence, and this not only on account of its policy, but because it is run by Negroes. Militant struggle for day to day demands must be the basis and constant activity of the movement, but in this period, action on this basis will drive the movement sharply up against the capitalist state and fascist or neo-fascist bands; and the transition to revolutionary socialism will not ultimately be difficult. As soon as this organization has achieved a firm basis, an international conference will most probably be called between the various militant Negro organizations and from my personal knowledge of them and their personnel, there is a probability that Socialism may be adopted. Such are the possibilities at the present time. And it is fortunate that they are so favorable. But it must be insisted upon that support of a Negro mass movement must not be conditional upon whether it is or soon will be Socialist or not. It is the awakening and bringing into political activity of the large masses of Negroes which is the main consideration, and to this the party must give its frank, sincere, and unwavering support. The rest depends on the develop-
*in Britain

ment of the whole international situation, the struggle of revolutionary parties, e.g. the growth of the S.W.P. and the individuals who will constitute the leadership.

On the specific danger of racial chauvinism, I shall say little; in my view, it is for the movement of the kind projected a minor question. No movement which proclaims the Negro's right to his place in the trade unions can be deeply penetrated with chauvinism. The Negroes who are likely to lead this movement see the dangers of chauvinism as clearly as the whites do. In America, where the Negroes are in a definite minority, serious fear of black chauvinism on the part of white revolutionaries seems to me not only unnecessary but dangerous. In the concrete instance, black chauvinism is a progressive force, it is the expression of a desire for equality of an oppressed and deeply humiliated people. The persistent refusal to have "self-determination" is evidence of the limitations of black chauvinism in America. Any excessive sensitiveness to black chauvinism by the white revolutionaries is the surest way to create hostilities and suspicion among the black people.

Such, in outline, it seems to me, should be the attitude of the party towards such an organization. It should actively assist the formation of such a movement. In any case, I have little doubt that such a movement is going to be formed sooner or later. But the party also has its own responsibility to the Negro question. The following are a few observations, based on a necessarily limited knowledge of the American situation, learned chiefly by discussion with Negro Socialists or near-Socialists.

(a) Earlier I stated that the Party must form a section devoted entirely to the Negro question. This is urgent work, whether a Negro organization is formed or not. Our great weapon at the present moment is Marxism by which we illuminate every grave social and political problem of the day. The Party's first task, therefore, is to do what no organization, white or Negro, can do completely unless it is based on the principles of Marxism, study the Negro question in relation to the national and international situation.

(b) The Negro Committee should embark on an unremitting study of the Negro question, immediately make arrangements for the publication of articles regularly in the Socialist Appeal and the New International. The S.A. should have a weekly column devoted to the Negro question. It will not be difficult to get regular information if contact is kept with Negroes. Not only accounts of lynchings, specific discriminations in industry, etc., but the presentation and analysis of various economic and social statistics issued, with special reference to the Negro, the colonial struggle in Africa, etc. This must now be a prominent and permanent section of the party's work, for Party members as well as Negro contacts.

Particularly urgent for the New International is an article or a series of articles written from the inside and exposing the dealings of the American C.P. with the Negro. The political line, the activities of Ford, Richard Moore and Co. would be shown up, and their political corruption and degeneration traced in relation to the decline of the Comintern. The Negroes must be shown why the C.P. policy to the Negro has been what it has been at different times and why. The bureaucratic "promotion" and "demotion"

of Negroes must be shown as a direct reflection of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution. A series of articles and a pamphlet relating the C.P. political and organizational policy towards Negroes with the zigzags of the C.I. would be of inestimable value. This should be done as a first task.

(c) The numerous Negro organizations in Harlem and elsewhere must be contacted. This should be done very carefully, for the C.P. policy of "penetration" or "capturing from within" and generally of being concerned chiefly with bringing the organization under its influence, and not with helping in the Negro struggle, has borne bitter fruit, and the attitude towards any white is likely to be "what have you come here to get?" That the party should encourage the formation of a Negro mass movement does not mean that it will in any way cease activity to gain membership among Negroes. What is to be avoided is the impression that it is interested in Negro activity solely for the purpose of getting members or influence, and not for the purpose of assisting Negro struggles. That would be a grave crime not only against Negroes but against the socialist movement. Yet the party will openly and frankly seek membership. It seems, however, that here certain dangers are to be avoided.

The N.A.A.C.P., the Urban League, and other Negro organizations, weekly forums, etc., carry on a certain amount of activity. Mere condemnation of these as bourgeois is worse than useless. At present, in most areas, the party's appeal to most Negroes would chiefly be to those who are attracted by its superior understanding and analysis of the Negro question and the world situation. But these Negroes, when won, must not be immediately abstracted from their milieu and be plunged into the struggle against Stalinism, etc. One of their main tasks at the present stage is to remain among the Negroes in their area and in the local organizations, carrying on an active fight for the Party's ideas in a manner carefully adapted to their hearers' point of view. Broadly speaking, among whites there is a differentiation: revolutionaries circle around revolutionary organizations, and the petty bourgeois democrats belong to the various petty bourgeois organizations. Among Negroes, especially in the provinces, it is not so. All types, instinctive revolutionaries and conservatives can be found at the local Negro forums, Y.M.C.A. etc., even though these meetings often begin with prayers. There is a vast field here for the winning of Negro members to the party if the party press and literature give them a weapon which they can use. But at the same time, the party must beware of looking upon Negro work as to be done necessarily by Negroes. The clearance of the long road to Socialist equality must begin at once. Certain white comrades can now begin to become experts on the Negro question. The method is easy to define, hard to carry out. It means a regular reading of the Negro press, Negro literature, regular attendance at Negro meetings, etc. The arguments for Socialism are to be directed against the latest pronouncements of Kelly, Miller, Mordecai, Johnson, George, Schuyler, the local Negro representatives of the Republican and Democratic Parties, not against Stalin, Daladier, and Chiang-Kai-Shek! And to attempt to do propaganda among Negroes on any other basis than attack, debate, exposition, etc., concerned with the writers, press, etc., read by the Negroes, is to speak a language alien to them. This is of particular importance in areas where the Party is small. (For the moment I exclude organization of the Negro unemployed, etc. which would more properly be the problem of the Trade Union Section). A close

attention by one or two white comrades to the discussions, literature, etc. of the various Negro groups in their community must bear fruit in the end owing to the superior power of the ideas we put forward. And while Negroes will do the main part of this work, even where the Party has Negro comrades, white comrades must take their part and will win great prestige for the party by showing themselves thoroughly familiar with Negro life and thought. We must work patiently in the rather restricted milieu to which even groups of educated Negroes are condemned by their position in American society.

The Committee should get into contact with the French, British, Belgian, and South African sections, get regular information about their work and contacts, a good supply of British and South African papers, especially those dealing with colonial questions, and circulate these and translations from the French among the Negro organizations and interested groups and persons. Every effort should be made to circulate the Spark widely among interested Negro contacts. The International African Service Bureau and its organ, International African Opinion, should be popularized by the party among Negroes and whites alike. Negroes will welcome and appreciate this. This organization of Fourth International colonial activity in a manner to present it constantly and regularly to Negroes in America, is not only one of the most important means of drawing Negro contacts ultimately into our party. It means also, and this is of immense importance, in our period, that Negro organizations everywhere which are internationally-minded or drawing towards internationalism, will ultimately realize that the only genuine international organization in the world at the present time is the Fourth International.

Stenographer's note: Rough draft uncorrected by participants.

Comrade Crux: Comrade Johnson proposes that we discuss the negro question in three parts, the first to be devoted to the programmatic question of self-determination for the negroes.

Comrade Johnson: (There was introduced some statistical material which was not included in the report.) The basic proposals for the negro question have already been distributed and here it is only necessary to deal with the question of self-determination. No one denies the negroes' right to self-determination. It is a question of whether we should advocate it. In Africa and in the West Indies we advocate self-determination because a large majority of the people want it. In Africa the great masses of the people look upon self-determination as a restoration of their independence. In the West Indies, where we have a population similar in origin to the negroes in America, there has been developing a national sentiment. The negroes are a majority. Already we hear ideas among the more advanced of a West Indian nation and it is highly probable that, even let us suppose that the negroes were offered full and free rights as citizens of the British Empire, they would probably oppose it and wish to be absolutely free and independent. Therefore, both in Africa and in the West Indies, the International African Service Bureau advocates self-determination. It is progressive. It is a step in the right direction. We weaken the enemy. It puts the workers in a position to make great progress toward Socialism.

In America the situation is different. The negro desperately wants to be an American citizen. He says, "I have been here from the beginning; I did all the work here in the early days. Jews, Polacks, Italians, Swedes and others come here and have all the privileges. You say that some of the Germans are spies. I will never spy. I have nobody for whom to spy. And yet you exclude me from the army and from the rights of citizenship."

In Poland and Catalonia there is a tradition of language, literature and history to add to the economic and political oppression and to help weld the population in its progressive demand for self-determination. In America it is not so. Let us look at certain historic events in the development of the negro in America.

Garvey raised the slogan, "Back to Africa" but the negroes who followed him did not believe for the most part that they were really going back to Africa. I knew that those in the West Indies who were following him and whom I met personally had not the slightest intention of going back to Africa, but they were glad to follow a militant leadership. And there is the case of the black woman who was pushed by a white woman in a streetcar and said to her, "You wait until Marcus gets into power and all you people will be treated in the way you deserve."

Obviously she was not thinking of Africa.

There was however this concentration on the negroes' problems simply because the white workers in 1919 were not developed. There was no political organization of any power calling upon the blacks and the whites to unite. The negroes were just back from the war--militant and having no offer of assistance naturally concentrated on their own particular affairs.

In addition, however, we should note that in Chicago, where a race riot took place, the riot was deliberately provoked by the employers. Some time before it actually broke out, the black and white meatpackers had struck and had paraded through the negro quarter in Chicago with the black population cheering the whites in the same way that they cheered the blacks. For the capitalists this was a very dangerous thing and they set themselves to creating race friction. At one stage, motor cars with white people in them, sped through the negro quarter shooting at all whom they saw. The capitalist press played up the differences and thus set the stage and initiated the riots that took place for dividing the population and driving the negro back upon himself.

During the period of the crisis there was a rebirth of these nationalist movements. There was a movement toward the 49th state and the movement concentrated around Liberia was developing. These movements assumed fairly large proportions up to at least 1934.

Then in 1936 came the organization of the C.I.O. John L. Lewis appointed a special negro department. The New Deal made gestures to the negroes. Blacks and whites fought together in various struggles. These nationalist movements have tended to disappear as the negro saw the opportunity to fight with the organized workers and to gain something.

The danger of our advocating and injecting a policy of self-determination is that it is the surest way to divide and confuse the workers in the south. The white workers have centuries of prejudice to overcome, but at the present time many of them are working with the negroes in the Southern Sharecroppers' Union and with the rise of the struggle there is every possibility that they will be able to overcome their age-long prejudices. But for us to propose that the negro have this black state for himself is asking too much from the white workers, especially when the negro himself is not making the same demand. The slogans of "abolition of debts," "confiscation of large properties," etc. are quite sufficient to lead them both to fight together and on the basis of economic struggle to make a united fight for the abolition of social discrimination. *it

I therefore propose concretely: (1) that we are for the right of self-determination. (2) If some demand should arise among the negroes for the right of self-determination we should support it. (3) We do not go out of our way to raise this slogan and place an unnecessary barrier between ourselves and socialism. (4) An investigation should be made into these

movements: the one lead by Garvey, the movement for the 49th state, the movement centering around Liberia. Find out what groups of the population supported them and on this basis come to some opinion as to how far there is any demand among the negroes for self-determination.

Comrade Carlos: It seems to me that the problem can be divided into a number of different phases:

On the question of self-determination, I think it is clear that while we are for self-determination, even to the point of independence, it does not necessarily mean that we favor independence. What we are in favor of is that in a certain case, in a certain locality, they have the right to decide for themselves whether or not they should be independent or what particular governmental arrangements they should have with the majority of the country.

On the question of self-determination's being necessarily reactionary--I believe that is a little far-fetched. Self-determination for various nations and groups is not opposed to a future socialist world. I think the question was handled in a polemic between Lenin and Piatakov from the point of view of Russia--of self-determination for the various peoples of Russia while still building a united country. There is not necessarily a contradiction between the socialist society will not be built upon subjugated people, but from a free people. The reactionary character of self-determination is determined by whether or not it will advance the social revolution. That is the criterion.

As to the point which was made, that we should not advocate a thing if the masses do not want it, that is not correct. We do not advocate things just because the masses want them. The basic question of socialism would come under that category. In the United States only a small percentage of the people want socialism, but still we advocate it. They may want war, but we oppose it. The questions we have to solve are as follows: Will it help in the destruction of American Imperialism? If such a movement arises, will the people want it as the situation develops? *the two.

I take it that these nationalist movements of which you speak were carried on for years and the struggle was carried on by a handful of people in each case, but in the moment of social crisis the masses rallied to such movements. The same can possibly happen in connection with self-determination of the negroes.

It seems to me that the so-called "black belt" is a super-exploited section of American economy. It has all the characteristics of a subjugated section of an empire. It has all the extreme poverty and political inequality. It has the same financial structure--Wall Street exploits the petty bourgeois elements and in turn the poor workers. It represents simply a field for investment and a source of profits. It has the characteristics of part of a colonial empire. It is also essentially a regional matter, for the whites have also been forced to feel a reaction against finance capital.

It would also be interesting to study the possible future development of the negro question. We saw that when the negroes were brought to the south they stayed there for many decades. When the war came, many emigrated to the north and there formed a part of the proletariat. That tendency can no longer operate. Capitalism is no longer expanding as it was before. As a matter of fact, during the depression many of them went back to the farms. It is possible that instead of a tendency to emigrate, there will now be a tendency for the negro to stay in the south.

And there are other tendencies: The question of the cotton-picking machine which means that the workers will be thrown out of work by the thousands.

To get back to the question of self-determination. There is the possibility that in the midst of the social crisis the manifestation of radicalism takes a double phase: Along with the struggle for economic and social equality, there may be found the demand for the control of their own state. Even in Russia, when the Bolsheviks came to power, the Polish people were not satisfied that this would mean the end of oppression for them. They demanded the right to control their own destiny in their own way. Such a development is possible in the south.

The other questions are important, but I do not think they are basic--that, a nation must have its own language, culture and tradition. To a certain extent they have been developing a culture of their own. In any public library can be found books--fiction, anthologies, etc--expressing a new racial feeling.

Now, from the point of view of the United States, the withdrawal of the black belt means the weakening of American imperialism by the withdrawal of a big field of investment. That is a blow in favor of the American working class.

It seems to me that self-determination is not opposed to the struggle for social and political economic equality. In the north such a struggle is immediate and the need is acute. In the north the slogan for economic and political equality is an agitational slogan--an immediate question. From the practical angle, no one suggests that we raise the slogan of self-determination as an agitational one, but as a programmatic one which may become agitational in the future.

There is another factor, which might be called the psychological one. If the negroes think that this is an attempt to segregate them, then it would be best to withhold the slogan until they are convinced that this is not the case.

Comrade Crux: I do not quite understand whether Comrade Johnson proposes to eliminate the slogan of self-determination for the negroes from our program, or is it that we do not say that we are ready to everything possible for the self-determination of the negroes if they want it themselves. It is a question for the party as a whole, if we eliminate it or not. We are ready to help them if they want it. As a party we can remain absolutely neutral on this. We cannot say it will be

reactionary. It is not reactionary. We cannot tell them to set up a state because that will weaken imperialism and so will be good for us, the white workers. That would be against internationalism itself. We cannot say to them, "Stay here, even at the price of economic progress." We can say, "It is for you to decide. If you wish to take a part of the country, it is alright, but we do not wish to make the decision for you."

I believe that the differences between the West Indies, Catalonia, Poland and the situation of the negroes in the States are not so decisive. Rosa Luxemburg was against self-determination for Poland. She felt that it was reactionary and fantastic, as fantastic as demanding the right to fly. It shows that she did not possess the necessary historic imagination in this case. The landlords and representatives of the Polish ruling class were also opposed to self-determination, for their own reasons.

Comrade Johnson used three verbs: "support," "advocate," and "inject" the idea of self-determination. I do not propose for the party to advocate, I do not propose to inject, but only to proclaim our obligation to support the struggle for self-determination if the negroes themselves want it. It is not a question of our negro comrades. It is a question of 13 or 14 million negroes. The majority of them are very backward. They are not very clear as to what they wish now and we must give them a credit for the future, They will decide them.

What you said about the Garvey movement is interesting--but it proves that we must be cautious and broad and not base ourselves upon the status quo. The black woman who said to the white woman, "Wait until Marcus is in power. We will know how to treat you then," was simply expressing her desire for her own state. The American negroes gathered under the banner of the "Back to Africa" movement because it seemed a possible fulfillment of their wish for their own home. They did not want actually to go to Africa. It was the expression of a mystic desire for a home in which they would be free of the domination of the whites, in which they themselves could control their own fate. That also was a wish for self-determination. It was once expressed by some in a religious form and now it takes the form of a dream of an independent state. Here in the United States the whites are so powerful, so cruel and so rich that the poor negro sharecropper does not dare to say, even to himself, that he will take a part of this country for himself. Garvey spoke in glowing terms, that it was beautiful and that here all would be wonderful. Any psychoanalyst will say that the real content of this dream was to have their own home. It is not an argument in favor of injecting the idea. It is only an argument by which we can foresee the possibility of their giving their dream a more realistic form.

Under the condition that Japan invades the United States and the negroes are called upon to fight--they may come to feel themselves threatened first from one side and then from the other, and finally awakened may say, "We have nothing to do with either of you. We will have our own state."

But the black state could enter into a Federation. If the American negroes succeeded in creating their own state, I am sure that after a few years of the satisfaction and pride of independence, they would feel the need of entering into a Federation. Even if Catalonia, which is a very industrialized and highly developed province, had realized its independence, it would have been just a step to Federation.

The Jews in Germany and Austria wanted nothing more than to be the best German chauvinists. The most miserable of all was the Social Democrat, Austerlitz, the editor of the Arbeiter Zeitung. But now, with the turn of events, Hitler does not permit them to be German chauvinists. Now many of them have become Zionists and are Palestinian nationalists and anti-German. I saw a disgusting picture recently of a Jewish actor, arriving in America, bending down to kiss the soil of the United States. Then they will get a few blows from the Fascist fists in the United States and they will go to kiss the soil of Palestine.

There is another alternative to the successful revolutionary one. It is possible that Fascism will come to power with its racial delirium and oppression against the negroes. In that case it is possible that the reaction of the negro will be toward racial independence. Fascism in the United States will be directed against the Jews and the negroes, but against the negroes particularly, and in a most terrible manner. A "privileged" condition will be created for the American white workers on the backs of the negroes. The negroes have done everything possible to become an integral part of the United States, in a psychological as well as a political sense. We must foresee that their reaction will show its power during the revolution. They will enter with a great distrust of the whites. We must remain neutral in the matter and hold the door open for both possibilities and promise full support if they wish to create their own independent state.*our

So far as I am informed, it seems to me that the C.P.'s attitude of making an imperative slogan of it was false. It was a case of the whites saying to the negroes, "You must create a ghetto for yourselves." It is tactless and false and can only serve to repulse the negroes. Their only interpretation can be that the whites want to be separated from them.* Our negro comrades can say, "The Fourth International says that if it is our wish to be independent, it will help us in every way possible, but that the choice is ours. However, I, as a negro member of the Fourth, hold the view that we must remain in the same state as the whites," and so on. He can participate in the formation of the political and racial ideology of the negroes.

Comrade Johnson: I am very glad that we have had this discussion, because I agree with you entirely. It seems to be the idea in America that we should advocate it as the C.P. has done. You seem to think that there is a greater possibility of the negroes' wanting self-determination than I think is probable. But we have a hundred per cent agreement on the idea which you have put forward that we should be neutral in the development.

* Our negro comrades of course, have the right to participate more intimately in such developments.

Comrade Crux: It is the word "reactionary" that bothered me.

Comrade Johnson: Let me quote from the document: "If he wanted self-determination, then however reactionary it might be in every other respect, it would be the business of the revolutionary party to raise that slogan." I consider the idea of separating as a step backward so far as a socialist society is concerned. If the white workers extend a hand to the negro, he will not want self-determination.

Comrade Crux: It is too abstract, because the realization of this slogan can be reached only as the 13 or 14 million negroes feel that the domination by the whites is terminated. To fight for the possibility of realizing an independent state is a sign of great moral and political awakening. It would be a tremendous revolutionary step. This ascendance would immediately have the best economic consequences.

Comrade Carlos: I think that an analogy could be made in connection with the collectives and the distribution of large estates. One might consider the breaking up of large estates as reactionary, but it is not necessarily so, but this question is up to the peasants whether they want to operate the estates collectively or individually. We advise the peasants, but we do not force them--it is up to them. Some would say that the breaking up of the large estates* would be economically reactionary, but that is not so.

Comrade Crux: This was also the position of Rosa Luxemburg. She maintained that self-determination would be as reactionary as the breaking up of the large estates.

Comrade Carlos: The question of self-determination is also tied up with the question of land and must be looked upon not only in its political, but also in its economic mani-

*into small plots.

A NEGRO ORGANIZATION

Discussion held April 5, 1939

Stenographer's note: Rough draft uncorrected by participants.

Comrade Johnson's manuscript read by the comrades prior to the meeting.

Comrade Crux: It is very important whether it is advisable and whether it is possible to create such an organization on our own initiative. Our movement is familiar with such forms as the party, the trade union, the educational organization, the cooperative; but this is a new type of organization which does not coincide with the traditional forms. We must consider the question from all sides as to whether it is advisable or not and what the form of our participation in this organization should be. If another party had organized such a mass movement, we would surely participate as a fraction, providing that it included workers, poor petty bourgeois, poor farmers, and so on. We would enter for the purpose of educating the best elements and winning them for our party. But this is another thing. What is proposed here is that we take the initiative. Even without knowing the concrete situation in the Negro circles in the United States, I believe that we can admit that no one but our party is capable of forming such a movement on a realistic basis. Of course, the movements guided by the improvisatorial Negro leaders, as we saw them in the past, more or less expressed the unwillingness or the incapacity, the perfidy of all the existing parties.

None of the parties can now assume such a task, because they are either pro-Roosevelt imperialists or anti-Roosevelt imperialists. Such an organization of the oppressed Negroes signifies to them the weakening of "democracy" and big business. This is also true of the Stalinists. Thus, the only party capable of beginning such an action is our own party.

But the question remains as to whether we can take upon ourselves the initiative of forming such an organization of Negroes as Negroes - not with the purpose of winning some elements to our party, but with the purpose of doing systematic educational work in order to elevate them politically. What should be the form - what the correct line of our policy? That is our question.

Comrade Carlos: As I have already said to Comrade Johnson, the C.P. organized the American Negro Labor Congress and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. Neither one had a great success. Both were very poorly organized. I personally think that such an organization should be organized, but I think it should be done carefully and only after a study of all the factors involved and also of the causes of the breakdowns of the two organizations mentioned. We must be sure of a mass base. To create a shadow of ourselves would serve only to discredit the idea and would benefit no one.

Comrade Crux: Who were the leaders of these organizations?

Comrade Carlos: Fort-Whitman, Owen, Hayward, Ford, Patterson; Bob Minor was the leader of the C.P.'s Negro work.

Comrade Crux: Where are the leaders now?

Comrade Curtiss: Most of them are in the C.P. so far as I know. Some have dropped out of the movement.

Comrade Owen: Comrade Johnson seems to have the idea that there is a good chance of building such an organization in the immediate future. I would like to have him elaborate.

Comrade Johnson: I think that it should be a success because on my arrival in New York, I met great numbers of Negroes and spoke to many Negro organizations. I brought forward the point of view of the Fourth International particularly on the war question and in every case there was great applause and a very enthusiastic reception of the ideas. Great numbers of these Negroes hated the Communist Party, agreed entirely with the program put forward by the International African Service Bureau and were extremely interested in the journal International African Opinion. Up to the last convention, 79% of the Negro membership of the C.P. in New York State, 1579 people, had left the C.P. I met many of the representative ones and they were now willing to form a Negro organization but did not wish to join the Fourth International. I had come to the conclusion that there was this possibility of a Negro organization before I left New York, but waited until I had gone through various towns in the States and got into contact with the Negro population there. And I found that the impressions that I had gathered in New York corresponded to those that I found on the tour.

In Boston, for instance, I went to a Barbados organization and there found about 20 or 30 people who had some sort of free society, but after having spoken to them for five or ten minutes they became very much interested in the political questions that I raised; and the chairman told me that if I wanted to come back to Boston, he could arrange a Negro meeting for me at which we would have about 700 people. I do not think that it is too much to say that that was characteristic of the general attitude of the Negroes in the various places at which I held meetings.

Comrade Crux: I have not formed an opinion about the question, because I do not have enough information. What Comrade Johnson tells us now is very important. It shows that we can have some elements for cooperation in this field, but at the same time, this information limits the immediate perspective of the organization. Who are these elements? The majority are Negro intellectuals, former Stalinist functionaries and sympathizers. We know that now large strata of the intellectuals are turning back to the Stalinists in every country. We have observed such people who were very sympathetic to us: Eastman, Solow, Hook, and others. They were very sympathetic to us insofar as they considered us an object for their protection. They abandoned the Stalinists and looked for a new field of action, especially during the Moscow trials, and so for the period, they were our friends.

Now, since we have begun a vigorous campaign, they are hostile to us. Many of them are returning to all sorts of vague things - humanism, etc. In France, Plisnier, the famous author, went back to God as well as to democracy. But when the white intellectuals went back to Roosevelt and democracy, the disappointed Negro intellectuals looked for a new field on the basis of the Negro question. Of course we must utilize them, but they are not a basis for a large mass movement. They can be used only when there is a clear program and good slogans.

The real question is whether or not it is possible to organize a mass movement. You know for such disappointed elements we created FIARI. It is not only for artists; anyone may enter. It is something of a moral or political "resort" for the disappointed intellectuals. Of course it can also be used at times to protect us in certain ways - for money, to influence petty bourgeois public opinion, and so on. That is one thing; but you consider these Negro intellectuals for the directing of a mass movement.

Your project would create something like a pre-political school. What determines the necessity? Two fundamental facts: that the large masses of the Negroes are backward and oppressed and this oppression is so strong that they must feel it every moment; that they feel it as Negroes. We must find the possibility of giving this feeling a political organizational expression. You may say that in Germany or in England we do not organize such semi-political, semi-trade union, or semi-cultural organizations; we reply that we must adapt ourselves to the genuine Negro masses in the United States.

I will give you another example. We are terribly against the French turn. We abandoned our independence in order to penetrate into a contrist organization. You see that this Negro woman writes that they will not adhere to a Trotskyist organization. It is the result of the disappointments that they have had from the Stalinist organizations and also the propaganda of the Stalinists against us. They say, "We are already persecuted, just because we are Negroes. Now if we adhere to the Trotskyists, we will be even more oppressed."

Why did we penetrate into the Socialist Party and into the PSOP? If we were not the left wing, subject to the most severe blows, our powers of attraction would be ten or a hundred times greater. The people would come to us, but now we must penetrate into other organizations, keeping our heads on our shoulders and telling them that we are not so bad as they say.

There is a certain analogy with the Negroes. They were enslaved by the whites. They were liberated by the whites (so-called liberation). They were led and misled by the whites and they did not have their own political independence. They were in need of a pre-political activity as Negroes. Theoretically it seems to me absolutely clear that a special organization should be created for a special situation. The danger is only that it will become a game for the intellectuals. This organization can justify itself only by winning workers, sharecroppers, and so on. If it does not succeed - we will have to confess that it was a failure. If it does succeed, we will be very happy because we will have a mass organization of Negroes. In that case I fully agree with Comrade Johnson, except of course with some reservations on the

question of self-determination, as was stated in our other discussion.

The task is not one of simply passing through the organization for a few weeks. It is a question of awakening the Negro masses. It does not exclude recruitment. I believe that success is quite possible. I am not sure. But it is clear for us all that our comrades in such an organization should be organized into a group. We should take the initiative. I believe it is necessary. This supposes the adoption of our transitional program to the Negro problems in the State - a very carefully elaborated program with genuine civil rights, political rights, cultural interests, economic interests, and so on. It should be done.

I believe that there are two strata: the intellectuals and the masses. I believe that it is among the intellectuals that you find this opposition to self-determination. Why? Because they keep themselves separated from the masses always with the desire to take on the Anglo-Saxon culture and of becoming an integral part of the Anglo-Saxon life. The majority are opportunists and reformists. Many of them continue to imagine that by the improvement of the mentality and so on, the discrimination will disappear. That is why they are against any kind of sharp slogan.

Comrade Johnson: They will maintain an intellectual interest because the Marxist analysis of Negro history and the problems of the day will give them an insight into the development of the Negroes which nothing else can. Also they are very much isolated from the white bourgeoisie and the social discrimination makes them therefore less easily corrupted, as for example the Negro intellectuals in the West Indies. Furthermore, they are a very small section of the Negro population and on the whole are very much less dangerous than the corresponding section of the petty bourgeoisie in any other group or community. Also what has happened to the Jews in Germany has made the Negro intellectuals think twice. They will raise enough money to start the thing off. After that we do not have to bother in particular. Some, however, would maintain an intellectual interest and give money.

continue to

THE NEGRO QUESTION

In The New Negro by Alain Locke (p. 367) there is a reference to the fact that Garvey preached an exclusively black doctrine of race - only Negroes who were black were truly Negroes. This statement is of the first importance.

In America today, there are caste divisions among the blacks themselves, and these are based on color. They are most clearly seen in the church. The mulattoes are petty bourgeois members of the Roman Catholic and Episcopalian (orthodox Protestant) churches. The blacks, the poorest, the most oppressed, are members of the Baptist and African Methodist Churches, the great stronghold of the black parsons and to this day the most powerful national organization created and controlled entirely by Negroes.

It was on this stratum that Garvey built his movement; his appeal to the "pure" black shows that, also, they had just emigrated and were still coming in hundreds of thousands from the South, a proletarian and sub-proletarian mass getting better wages for the first time and rising to the possibilities that even the limited freedom of the North allowed them.

I have personal experience of these people, particularly in an "Ethiopian" movement in New York and in one of the "black" churches which I attended. The "Ethiopians" are fanatically chauvinistic and on the night I spoke to them two white comrades evoked great hostility. But of their revolutionary ardor there was no doubt. A similar passion was also obvious in the church service, and there, the weeping, the shaking of hands, the response to the preacher's references to oppression, were no doubt a sublimation of revolutionary emotion. The greatest response was made to the passage on oppression and suffering.* Garvey raised these people to political activity. His movement fell, and today their leader is Father Divine, merely a super-preacher and demagogue combined.

*This clergyman offered me his pulpit for a Sunday evening - an audience of 800 people - the poorest of the poor. I could not do so before I left New York, but I asked him to wait until I returned. I shall make a cautious but clear appeal for revolutionary action and particularly raise the question of a black state.

But the great response to (a) Freedom in Africa (b) Freedom in Ethiopia (c) Freedom in Heaven, seems to point to the fact that self-determination, i.e. a black state in the South would awaken a response among these masses, as bitterly as it is opposed by all the intellectuals and more literate among the Negroes. This is the tentative conclusion I have come to after carefully considering the course of our discussion and thinking back over the contacts I made with this stratum during my short stay in America. This of course will have to be tested by experience, but another question arises.

If it does prove to be so, the slogan of a "black state" will come badly from the S.W.P. It will infallibly awaken great suspicion among the Negroes. "They want to get rid of us." Coming, however, from Negro intellectuals in a Negro movement, if there is the latent response, it will be accepted without difficulty. The S.W.P. can then support it wholeheartedly.

The success of the Garvey movement; of the Divine movement, and the millions of dollars poor Negroes pour annually into the churches out of their almost empty purses, all these are evidence of their fanatical devotion and capacity for self-sacrifice. And the revolutionary energy, the readiness to give all which distinguished the Garvey movement in particular, in return for nothing tangible but the promise of a new society, shows that here, in contradistinction to the great movements of organized workers for higher wages, closed shop, etc., we have perhaps the most important manifestation in American capitalist society of one most powerful current in the coming socialist revolution. The party must find a way to these millions and I am more than ever convinced that the way is through a Negro organization, going over the literate and vocal intellectuals and finding the masses whom Garvey found.

J.R. Johnson

Written on or around April 12, 1939

Discussion held April 11, 1939

Stenographer's note: Rough draft uncorrected by participants.

Comrade Johnson: The suggestions for the party work are in the documents and there is no need to go over them. I propose that they should be considered by the PC immediately together with Comrade Crux's idea for a special number of the New International on the negro question. Urgently needed is a pamphlet written by someone familiar with the dealings of the C. P. on the negro question and relating these to the C. I. and its degeneration. This would be an indispensable theoretical preliminary to the organization of the negro movement and the party's own work among the negroes. What is not needed is a general pamphlet dealing in a general way with the difficulties of the negro and stating that in general black and white must unite. It would only be another of a long list.

The Negro Organization:

Theoretical:

- (1) The study of negro history and historic propaganda should be:
 - (a) Emancipation of the negroes in San Domingo linked with the French Revolution.
 - (b) Emancipation of the slaves in the British Empire linked with the British Reform Bill of 1832.
 - (c) Emancipation of the negroes in the United States linked with the Civil War in America.

This leads easily up to the conclusion that the emancipation of the negro in the United States and abroad is linked with the emancipation of the white working class.

- (d) The economic roots of racial discrimination.
- (e) Fascism.
- (f) The necessity for self-determination for negro peoples in Africa and a similar policy in China, India, etc.

NB: The party should produce a theoretical study of the permanent revolution and the negro peoples. This should be very different in style from the pamphlet previously suggested. It should not be a controversy with the CP, but a positive economic and political analysis showing that socialism is the only way out and definitely treating the theory on a high level. This however should come from the party.

- (2) A scrupulous analysis and exposure of the economic situation of the poorest negroes and the way this retards not only the negroes themselves, but the whole community. This, the bringing to the negroes themselves a formulated account of their own conditions by means of simple diagrams, illustrations, charts, etc. is of the utmost importance.

Theory -- organizational means:

- (1) Weekly paper and pamphlets of the negro organization.
- (2) To establish the International African Opinion as a monthly theoretical journal, financed to some degree from America, make it twice its present size and after a few months enter boldly upon a discussion of international socialism, emphasizing the right of self-determination, taking care to show that socialism will be the decision of the negro states themselves on the basis of their own experience. Invite an international participation of all organizations in the labor movement, negro intellectuals, etc. It is to be hoped that Comrade Crux will be able to participate in this. This discussion on Socialism should have no part in the weekly agitational paper.

Organizational:

- (1) Summon a small group of negroes and whites if possible: Fourth Internationalists, Lovestonites, unattached revolutionaries -- this group must be clear on (a) the war question and (b) socialism. We cannot begin by placing an abstract question like Socialism before negro workers. It seems to me that we cannot afford to have confusion on this question in the leadership; for it is on this question that hangs the whole direction of our day-to-day politics. Are we going to attempt to patch up capitalism or to break it? On the war question there can be no compromise. The Bureau has a position and that must be the basis of the new organization.

Program:

- (1) A careful adaptation of the program of the transitional demands with emphasis on the demands for equality. This is as much as can be said at present.

Practical steps:

- (1) Choose, after careful investigation, some trade union where there is discrimination affecting a large number of negroes and where there is a possibility of success. Mobilize a national campaign with every conceivable means of united front: A. F. of L., C.I.O., S.P., S.W.P.,

negro churches, bourgeois organizations and all, in an attempt to break down this discrimination. This should be the first campaign to show clearly that the organization is fighting as a negro organization, but has nothing to do with Garveyism.

- (2) To seek to build a nationwide organization on negro housing and high rents, attempting to draw the women in for militant action.
- (3) Discrimination in restaurants should be fought by a campaign. A number of negroes in any area go into a restaurant all together, ordering for instance some coffee, and refuse to come out until they are served. It would be possible to sit there for a whole day in a very orderly manner and throw upon the police the necessity of removing these negroes. A campaign to be built around such action.
- (4) The question of the organization of domestic servants is very important and though very difficult a thorough investigation should be made.
- (5) Negro unemployment--though here great care will have to be taken to avoid duplicating organizations; and this is probably the role of the party.
- (6) The negro organization must take the sharecroppers' organization in the south as its own. It must make it one of the bases of the solution of the negro question in the south, popularize its work, its aims, its possibilities in the east and west, try to influence it in a more militant direction, invite speakers from it, urge it to take action against lynching and make the whole negro community and the whites aware of its importance in the regional and national struggle.

Political orientation:

- (1) To initiate a militant struggle against Fascism and to see to it that negroes are always in the forefront of any demonstration or activity against Fascism.
- (2) To inculcate the impossibility of any assistance being gained from the Republican and Democratic parties. Negroes must put up their own candidates on a working class program and form a united front only with those candidates whose program approximates to theirs.

Internal organization:

The local units will devote themselves to these questions in accordance with the urgency of the local situation and the national campaigns planned by the center. These can only be

decided upon by investigation.

- (a) Begin with a large scale campaign for funds to establish a paper and at least two headquarters--one in New York and one in a town like St. Louis, within striking distance of the South.
- (b) A weekly agitational paper costing two cents.
- (c) The aim should be to have as soon as possible at least five professional revolutionists--two in New York, two in St. Louis (?) and one constantly travelling from the center. A national tour in the fall after the paper has been established and a draft program and aims established. A national conference in the early summer.
- (d) Seek to get a negro militant from South Africa to make a tour here as soon as possible. There is little doubt that this can easily be arranged.

The party members in the organization will form a fraction and all important documents submitted by the fraction to the negro organization must be ratified either by the PC or its appointed representatives.

Comrade Carlos: About opening the discussion of Socialism in the Bulletin, but excluding it, at least for a time, from the weekly paper: It seems to me that that is dangerous. That is falling into the idea that Socialism is for intellectuals and the elite, but that the people on the bottom should be interested only in the common, day-to-day things. The method should be different in both places, but I think that there should at least be a drive in the direction in the weekly paper; not only from the point of view of the daily matters, but also in what we call abstract discussion. It is a contradiction--the mass paper would have to take a clear position on the war question, but not on Socialism. It is impossible to do the first without the second. It is a form of "economism." The workers should interest themselves in the everyday affairs, but not in the "theories" of socialism.

*of socialism

Comrade Johnson: I see the difficulties and the contradiction, but there is something else that I cannot quite see--if we want to build a mass movement we cannot plunge into a discussion of Socialism, because I think that it would cause more confusion than it would gain support. The negro is not interested in Socialism. He can be brought to socialism on the basis of his concrete experiences. Otherwise we would have to form a negro socialist organization. I think we must put forth a minimal, concrete program. I agree that we should not put socialism too far in the future, but I am trying to avoid lengthy discussions on Marxism, the Second International, the Third International, etc.

Comrade Larkin: Would this organization throw its doors open to all classes of negroes?

Comrade Johnson: Yes, on the basis of its program. The bourgeois negro can come in to help, but only on the basis of the organization's program.

Comrade Larkin: I cannot see how the negro bourgeoisie can help the negro proletariat fight for its economic advancement.

Comrade Johnson: In our own movement some of us are petty bourgeois. If a bourgeois negro is excluded from a university because of his color, this organization will probably mobilize the masses to fight for the rights of the bourgeois negro student. Help for the organization will be mobilized on the basis of its program and we will not be able to exclude any negro from it if he is willing to fight for that program.

Comrade Crux: I believe that the first question is the attitude of the S. W. P. toward the negroes. It is very disquieting to find that until now the Party has done almost nothing in this field. It has not published a book, a pamphlet, leaflets, nor even any articles in the New International. Two comrades who compiled a book on the question, a serious work, remained isolated. The book is not published, nor are even quotations from it published. It is not a good sign. It is a bad sign. The characteristic thing about the American workers' parties, trade union organizations and so on was their aristocratic character. It is the basis of opportunism. The skilled workers who feel set in the capitalist society help the bourgeois class to hold the negroes and the unskilled workers down to a very low scale. Our party is not safe from degeneration if it remains a place for intellectuals, semi-intellectuals, skilled workers and Jewish workers who build a very close milieu which is almost isolated from the genuine masses. Under these conditions our party cannot develop--it will degenerate. We must have this great danger before our eyes. Many times I have proposed that every member of the party, especially the intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, who, during a period of say six months, cannot each win a worker member for the party, should be demoted to the position of sympathizer. We can say the same in the negro question. The old organizations, beginning with the A. F. of L. are the organizations of the workers' aristocracy. Our party is a part of the same milieu, not of the basic exploited masses of whom the negroes are the most exploited. The fact that our party until now has not turned to the negro question is a very disquieting symptom. If the workers' aristocracy is the basis of opportunism, one of the sources of adaptation to capitalist society, then the most oppressed, most discriminated class, of which the negroes are the most oppressed and discriminated, are the most dynamic milieu of the working class. We must say to the conscious elements of the negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class. What serves as the brake on the higher strata? It is the privileges, the comforts that hinder them from becoming revolutionists. It does not exist for the negroes. What can transform a certain strata--make it more capable of courage and sacrifice? It is

concentrated in the negroes. If it happens that we in the S. W. P. are not able to find the road to this strata, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie.

In the States we now have various contests. Competition to see who will sell the most papers and so on. That is very good. But we must also establish a more serious competition-- the recruiting of workers and especially of negro workers. To a certain degree that is independent of the creation of the special negro organization.

I believe that the party should utilize the sojourn of Comrade Johnson in the States (the tour was necessary to acquaint him with conditions) but now for the next six months, for a behind-the-scenes organizational and political work in order to avoid attracting too much attention from the authorities. A six months' program can be elaborated for the negro question, so that if Johnson should be obliged to return to Great Britain, for personal reasons or through the pressure of the police, after a half year's work we have a base for the negro movement and we have a serious nucleus of negroes and whites working together on this plan. It is a question of the vitality of the party. It is an important question. It is a question of whether the party is to be transformed into a sect or if it is capable of finding its way to the most oppressed part of the working class.

Proposals taken up point by point:

1. Pamphlet on the negro question and the negroes in the CP, relating it to the degeneration of the Kremlin...

Comrade Crux: Good. And also would it not be well perhaps to mimeograph this book, or parts of it and send it, together with other material on the question, to the various sections of the party for discussion?

2. A negro number of the New International.

Comrade Crux: I believe that it is absolutely necessary.

Comrade Owen: It seems to me that there is a danger of getting out the negro number before we have a sufficient negro organization to assure its distribution.

Comrade Johnson: It is not intended primarily for the negroes. It is intended for the party itself and for the other readers of the New International.

3. The use of the history of the negroes themselves in educating them.

General agreement.

4. A study of the permanent revolution and the negro question.

General agreement.

5. The question of Socialism--whether to bring it in through the paper or through the bulletin.

Comrade Crux: I do not believe that we can begin with the exclusion of Socialism from the organization. You propose a very large, somewhat heterogeneous organization, which will also accept religious people. That would signify that if a negro worker, or farmer, or merchant, makes a speech in the organization to the effect that the only salvation for the negroes is in the church, we will be too tolerant to expel him and at the same time so wise that we will not let him speak in favor of religion, but we will not speak in favor of Socialism. If we understand the character of this milieu, we will adapt the presentation of our ideas to it. We will be cautious--but to tie our hands in advance, to say that we will not introduce the question of Socialism because it is an abstract matter--that is not possible. It is one thing to present a general socialist program; and another thing to be very attentive to the concrete questions of the negro life and to oppose socialism to capitalism in these questions. It is one thing to accept a heterogeneous group and to work in it and another to be absorbed by it.

Comrade Johnson: I quite agree with what you say. What I am afraid of is the putting forth of an abstract socialism. You will recall that I said that the leading group must clearly understand what it is doing and where it is going. But the socialist education of the mass should arise from the day-to-day questions. I am only anxious to prevent the things' developing into an endless discussion. The discussion should be free and thorough in the theoretical organ.

In regard to the question of socialism in the agitational organ, it is my view that the organization should definitely establish itself as doing the day-to-day work of the negroes in such a way that the masses of negroes can take part in it before involving itself in discussions about socialism. While it is clear that an individual can raise whatever points he wishes and point out his solution of the negro problems, yet the question is whether those who are guiding the organization as a whole should begin by speaking in the name of socialism. I think not. It is important to remember that those who take the initiative should have some common agreement as to the fundamentals of politics today, otherwise there will be great trouble as the

organization develops. But although these, as individuals, are entitled to put forward their particular point of view in the general discussion, yet the issue is whether they should speak as a body as socialist from the very beginning, and my personal view is no.

Comrade Crux: In the theoretical organ you can have theoretical discussion and in the mass organ you can have a mass political discussion. You say that they are contaminated by the capitalist propaganda. Say to them, "You don't believe in socialism. But you will see that in the fighting the member of the Fourth International will not only be with you, but possibly the most militant." I would even go so far as to have every one of our speakers end his speech by saying, "My name is the Fourth International!" They will come to see that we are the fighters, while the person who preaches religion in the hall, in the critical moment will go to the church instead of to the battlefield.

6. The organizing groups and individuals of the new organization must be in complete agreement on the war question.

Comrade Crux: Yes, it is the most important and the most difficult question. The program may be very modest, but at the same time it must leave to everyone his freedom of expression in his speeches and so on--the program must not be the limitation of our activity, but only our common obligation. Everyone must have the right to go further, but everyone is obliged to defend the minimum. We will see how this minimum will be crystallized as we go along in the opening steps.

7. A campaign in some industry in behalf of the negroes.

Comrade Crux: That is important. It will bring a conflict with some white workers who will not want it. It is a shift from the most aristocratic workers' elements to the lowest elements. We attracted to ourselves some of the higher strata of the intellectuals when they felt that we needed protection: Dewey, LaFollette, etc. Now that we are undertaking serious work, they are leaving us. I believe that we will lose two or three more strata and go more deeply into the masses. This will be the touchstone.

8. Housing and rent campaign.

Comrade Crux: It is absolutely necessary.

Comrade Carlos: It also works in very well with our transitional demands.

9. The demonstration in the restaurant.

Comrade Crux: Yes, and give it an even more militant character. There could be a picket line outside to attract attention. Have the whites carrying banners to attract attention and explain something of what is going on.

10. Domestic servants.

Comrade Crux: Yes, I believe it is very important; but I believe that there is the first a priori consideration that many of these negroes are servants for rich people and are demoralized and have been transformed into moral lackeys. But there are others, a larger strata, and the question is to win those who are not so privileged.

Comrade Owen: That is a point that I wished to present. Some years ago I was living in Los Angeles near a negro section--one set aside from the others. The negroes there were more prosperous. I inquired as to their work and was told by the negroes themselves that they were better off because they were the servants--many of them in the houses of the movie colony. I was surprised to find the servants in the higher strata. This colony of negroes was not small--it consisted of several thousand people.

Comrade Johnson: That is true. But if you are serious, it is not difficult to get to the negro masses. They live together and they feel together. This strata of privileged negroes is smaller than any other privileged strata. The whites treat them with such contempt that in spite of themselves they are closer to the other negroes than you would think. In the West Indies, for example, there are great divisions among the negroes--certain classes of negroes do not fraternize with other classes. But that is not true here. Here they are kept in the ghetto.

11. Mobilize the negroes against fascism.

General agreement.

12. The relationship of the negroes to the Republican and Democratic parties.

Comrade Crux: How many negroes are there in Congress? One. There are 440 members in the House of Representatives and 96 in the Senate. Then if the negroes have almost 10% of the population, they are entitled to about 50 members, but they have only one. It is a clear picture of political inequality. We can often oppose a negro candidate to a white candidate.

This negro organization can always say, "We want a negro who knows our problems." It can have important consequences.

Comrade Owen: It seems to me that Comrade Johnson has ignored a very important part of our program--the labor party.

Comrade Johnson: The negro section wants to put up a negro candidate. We tell them they must not stand just as negroes, but they must have a program suitable to the masses of poor negroes. They are not stupid and they can understand that and it is to be encouraged. The white workers put up a labor candidate in another section. Then we say to the negroes in the white section, "Support that candidate, because his demands are good workers' demands." And we say to the white workers in the negro area, "You should support the negro candidate, because although he is a negro you will notice that his demands are good for the whole working class." But this means that the negroes have the satisfaction of having their own candidates in areas where they predominate and at the same time we build labor solidarity. It fits into the labor party program.

Comrade Carlos: Isn't that coming close to the Popular Front, to vote for a negro just because he is a negro?

Comrade Johnson: This organization has a program. When the Democrats put up a negro candidate, we say, "Not at all. It must be a candidate with a program we can support."

Comrade Crux: It is a question of another organization for which we are not responsible, just as they are not responsible for us. If this organization puts up a certain candidate, and we find as a party that we must put up our own candidate in opposition, we have the full right to do so. If we are weak and cannot get the organization to choose a revolutionist, and they choose a negro Democrat, we might even withdraw our candidate with a concrete* that we abstain from fighting, not the Democrat, but the negro. We consider that the negro's candidacy as opposed to the white's candidacy, even if both are of the same party, is an important factor in the struggle of the negroes for their equality; and in this case we can critically support them. I believe that it can be done in certain instances.

*declaration

13. A negro from South or West Africa to tour the States.

Comrade Crux: What will he teach?

Comrade Johnson: I have in mind several young negroes any one of whom can give a clear anti-imperialist, anti-war picture. I think it would be very important in building up an understanding of internationalism.

14. Submit documents and plans to the P.C.

General agreement.

Comrade Johnson: I agree with your attitude on the party work in connection with the negroes. They are a tremendous force and they will dominate the whole of the southern states. If the party gets a hold here, the revolution is won in America. Nothing can stop it.