

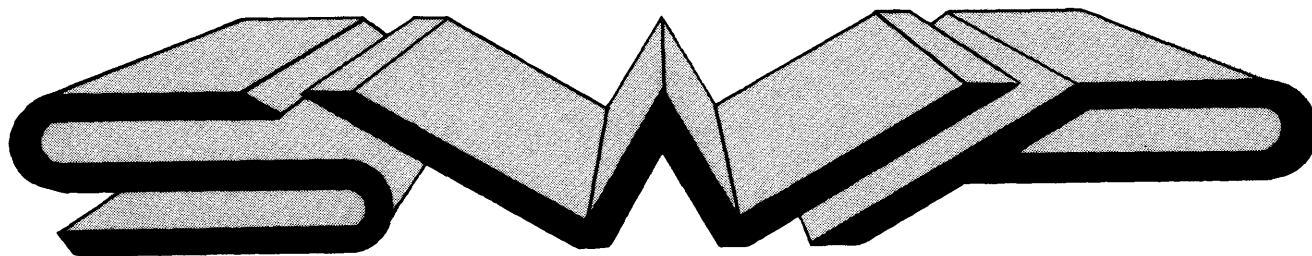
# Discussion Bulletin

Published by  
**SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY**  
873 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003

Vol. 26, No. 5  
September, 1967

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## THE EXPLOSIONS IN THE GHETTO SHAKES THINGS UP

By Nat W.

The evolution of the black revolution has confirmed our most important estimates of the great potential of this force in the making of the coming American revolution. The display of independent power is particularly imposing in the context of the relative quiet in the general class struggle. Newark and Detroit are striking cases in point. But, while the ghettos explode the message of the great power lodged there, they insistently suggest the existence of a unique limitation of the black freedom movement while it remains isolated from the struggle of the working class as a whole. That is, the black minority has a deficiency imposed on it as compared to other oppressed minorities in American history; it is virtually unable to exert a variable, controllable and/or sustained independent economic pressure directly at the point of production. This is not so much a result of the fact that black workers are a minority in the working class as it is a result of their location in the economy.

When other minorities came over in great waves from Europe they brought with them their skills, class struggle experience and very often a socialist ideology. They came at a time when the economy was expanding at a feverish rate. And because of the needs of America's economic rulers the doors of industry tended to be open. They were not prevented from concentrating and thus becoming weighty homogeneous blocs in industries and trades.

In this position, as for example that of the Italian immigrants in the mills of New England or the garment sweatshops of New York, who were able on their own or through effective collaboration with other immigrant workers, to dominate an industry or section of it. In this strategic position they could then go on to exercise this economic power in their role as workers, as a lever against super exploitation and oppression as national minorities. And conversely, they were in a position to unite their ghetto communities behind their "purely" class struggles.

The economic conflicts became the spearheads and rallying points for the struggle against national oppression. And despite the hostilities of indigenous workers the identity of class interests is overwhelming and fairly easily leads to alliances and finally assimilation into the class.

For example, minority groups that were excluded from the American Federation of Labor organized their own unions in many instances. They were at times more successful than the AFL which was then forced to accept them into their ranks. Sometimes important concessions were made to induce them to join the AFL. There are still locals, for example, that have in their charters the provision that meetings be conducted in German, Italian, Yiddish, etc.

The black migrant from the farms of the south has been denied this strategic advantage. In the first place his big migration from the farm to the city was delayed until a far more unfavorable time in the development of the economy. Delayed because he was not a surplus labor force to the masters of the southern plantations who resisted his departure through measures such as the feudalistic sharecropping system, the perpetuation of illiteracy and pure force. (Unlike his European counterpart whose departure was welcomed by his ruling class who were faced with a dangerous and explosive oversupply of "reserve army of unemployed".)

When this migration finally did take place the favorable conditions of rapid expansion of the economy no longer prevailed. The doors of industry opened slightly by the two world wars, were slammed shut at the wars end. The Negro migrant was restricted to the extremities of the economy -- the basements, kitchens and laundries and other non-strategic economic activities. The black population in the cities thus found themselves in a very poor position to repeat the pattern of struggle of their immigrant predecessors.

Even the breakthrough led by the CIO in the thirties and forties, while amending the picture didn't fundamentally change it. For although the black worker entered the mainstream of industry and made substantial gains, no independent economic levers were obtained by him in his black aspect of existence. He could now help pull the lever of economic power, true, but only with the consent of his white senior partner.

This unique development of the black minority and their structure in the class has left its unmistakable imprint on the psychology of the mass affecting almost every problem in the black revolution today.

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The most obvious question one asks himself when scenes of Newark and Detroit are flashed on the TV screens is: was there ever before in history similar "rebellions" that were not preceded, accompanied or followed by strike action? I don't think so -- not a similar series of rebellions at any rate. It is significant that thousands of modern proletarians in rebellion, in modern industrial cities, with working class traditions of struggle, have not introduced the idea of strike. The important thing for the moment however, is not so much this observation. It is more important not to make the mistake in thinking that the participants are unaware of this anomaly.

Certainly the terminology of the strike has no difficulty finding its way into the ghetto (sit-ins, picket lines, rent "strikes", etc.) The idea of the employment of the course of action hinted at by these words must also intrude repeatedly into the mass ghetto brain. Thought, however, inevitably collides with the reality of the relationship of forces between

black workers and the at best indifferent white workers. The dominant whites can effectively veto any strike action by their black "brothers." The thought collides too with any notions of independent action along strike lines since the poor strategic position of black workers as an independent entity under present conditions is known in the ghetto. (The halt in production for several days in Detroit seems to be in contradiction to this. I'll come back to this further on.)

As a matter of fact there have been attempts to form black labor unions. (I think there is still a dead letter "Harlem Labor Union" in N.Y.C.) And last year in San Francisco the NAACP announced the intention of forming black unions in response to a spate of scandals concerning discrimination by unions. Unfortunately the black worker's structuring in the economy militates against any success in such an undertaking.

The dearth of meaningful concessions to the Negro in the aftermath of the ghetto explosions is testimony too to the white oppressors appreciation of the current limits to independent black power. This is not to say the ruling class is not deeply concerned even to the point of near panic at the impact of these events, not the least of which is on the troops in Vietnam, black and white. But still the dominant mood in the ruling class is essentially "no reward for rioting." Would there be such intransigence if the force of the ghetto were controllable, like a strike that could be turned on and off and presented as an "argument" across a bargaining table?

In Detroit production was halted for several days. But it was a completely undeliberate, unconscious and so far unharnessable by-product of the action in the streets. To say also that it was unorganized is too obvious. It should be equally obvious why there was no move toward organizing the stoppage and presenting demands on the strength of the stoppage. For despite the willingness of whites to share in the "expropriations" they are not yet ready to follow the lead of black workers in using a squeeze on production as a weapon to force concessions for blacks. The ghetto masses have shown remarkable care to maintain the outbursts as anti-white-power-structure -- not to let it appear as anti-white. They are concerned to keep the white mass as neutral as possible. In the present context, then, they see that an organized attempt to maintain a production stoppage would bring white workers into active opposition. Avenues that would bring these white workers into active collaboration appear blocked or non-existent to blacks.

There are a number of problems that are in part created by the feeling in the ghetto of isolation and insufficiency in independent economic muscle. The increase in ultra-leftism and adventurism in the ghetto is an indication of this feeling. When you come right down to it this grows out of

contradictory moods of pessimism, hopelessness, frustration as well as impatience and militancy. It bespeaks a disbelief that the power of the mass can be organized and directed. This is apparently paradoxical in the teeth of the raging power of the ghetto. If the impact on the black community were as substantial as it is on the white radical, real organization of solid units of independent black power, soundly based and oriented would seem to follow. But that is not what has been happening. On the contrary, the ghetto outbursts have tended to accelerate the proliferation of ultra-left grouplets specializing in verbal super-militancy.

SNCC's evolution is as significant for the expression of this tendency as it is for the welcome radicalization that is more often noted. The clue is the skirting of the question of independent political action. That course is avoided essentially because of a lack of confidence in independent black power. Which in turn derives in part from the black radical's cognition of the missing elements (economic leverage, controllability, organization) in the otherwise impressive ghetto protests. At the same time, as is to be expected, there are numerous indications of the tendencies by the same ultra-lefts towards opportunism.

Unable to find the way to a clear political course they become engulfed with frustration and turn toward the politics of desperation. Seeing no way around the current limits to independent black proletarian power they gravitate toward Maoist-like concepts of "guerrilla warfare." The characterization in this milieu of black oppression as being of a colonial type is applicable and useful in the figurative sense. But to draw from that "premise" the conclusion that guerrilla warfare is viable in the present context is erroneous and dangerous.

We should be careful too about terms like "rebellion," "uprising", "insurrection." They are appropriate as descriptive terms but not as political characterizations of the events. They imply too much about the stage the struggle is in, giving an assist to ultra-leftism. These terms also obscure the offensive role the cops play in these events. Malcolm X came closest in naming the thing when he called the first occurrences "police riots." It still fits although to a lesser extent after Watts, where the black response to rampaging, hate-filled cops became the unmistakably dominant aspect of the event. At the first outbreaks the police riots could well have been planned in advance to "teach the niggers a lesson" in the face of increasing incidences of crowds of ghetto dwellers gathering and intervening to stop police brutality on the spot. In the later ones the police riots are motivated, the evidence indicates, by a ruling class decision to unleash the racist cops lust for vengeance. Its purpose being to "convince" the ghetto that its blows against property do not pay. It is in this light that the greatly exaggerated reports of "sniping" can be seen to be an attempt to justify the tyrants terrorism. The one-sidedness of the casualty

statistics bear this out. Thousands of blacks shot and less than a handful of agents of state repression.

The police riots triggered and remain an important part of the thing we find difficult to name. Perhaps it won't be so difficult later when either classic proletarian forms of action are introduced and/or a way is found to put a handle on the fiery sword of the ghetto explosion.

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The question of a correct term is more than semantics. The reported "sniping" in particular, in these events seems to give some substance to the theory that the ghetto "uprisings" can escalate into a new type of guerrilla warfare.

The essence of guerrilla warfare as a practical form of struggle is that it lends itself to the building of a larger and larger movement based on the accumulation of small victories at first and the realistic promise of larger ones later. The underlying dynamic is the same in all historically viable forms of struggle (boycotts, strikes, demonstrations, etc.). It doesn't appear that such a progression of "guerrilla" activity is possible in conjunction with the ghetto explosions in the context of relative social stability elsewhere in the cities. Obviously a black movement cannot incorporate, much less begin to organize, guerrilla war in its program without inviting swift victimization. The rate of police infiltration of the black groups is so high it makes the idea of going underground to organize for this purpose a joke.

The spontaneous nature of the outbursts defies control at present. It can't be turned on and off at will, threatened or bargained on the basis of this threat. And if you take away the masses milling in the streets, the "expropriations," the open defiance of the police and all that goes to make up this phenomenon -- and then carry on "guerrilla war" -- the buffer, the diversion, the protection it affords is lost.

A manifestation of the "guerrilla" idea is implied in the way in which black militants tend to project the right of self defense in recent years. When advocacy of this right becomes primary and is separated from other peaceful and legal activities it becomes other than simple self defense. When a Robert Williams or Mrs. Daisy Bates or Malcolm X arm themselves and/or announce their intention of defending themselves it is completely clear to all why. Under visible physical attack as a result of peaceful activities against oppression, self defense is completely logical, justifiable, understandable and no small point, indisputably legal. Arming against attack in general without first engaging in specific legal activities that meets with illegal or "legal" repression is not easily understood as self defense. The justification of armed self defense against general police brutality is apparent only to a few. Those who follow such a course leave

themselves open to police frameups with the least possibility of mobilizing general support.

Much of the exaggeration by black radicals is polemical and is justified in performing a useful and necessary function in overcoming the effects of hundreds of years of white oppression and brain washing. The call to get yourself a gun is itself a polemic against pacifistic turning of the cheek and dependence on "friends." It usually draws cheers and applause from ghetto audiences for that reason. Too much exaggeration however demoralizes rather than builds self confidence. Particularly when it becomes clear that the bold threats and proclamations are no more than words. Claiming credit directly or implicitly for the ghetto rebellions is empty and impresses no one. This is not the same as the valid references to the outbursts as the expression of the intrinsic power of the ghetto which build prideful self confidence. The pretensions of some black radicals in connection with these events only avoids and obscures the problem of finding ways to direct and harness the elemental power of the ghetto to force concessions -- to set in motion the dynamic process that builds the organizational instruments of liberation.

Without such instruments any future alliance with an upsurging working class will favor the restoration of dependence by blacks on whites, not to speak of the limits it places on what is possible now. Black independence will prove a powerful force driving the class as a whole faster and farther along the revolutionary road. But the Negro must be effectively organized to play this role.

\* \* \*

Black thinking on their class status is contradictory. Though Negroes today outside of those still in the rural sections of the south are in their overwhelming majority working class, they tend not to think of themselves consistently as a class or part of a class. Their dual existence as super exploited workers and as oppressed blacks plays a part in this. But this status has been occupied by other minorities as has been noted earlier, as immigrants in the U.S. and also occupied by workers of oppressed nations in other lands. These others were and are able to clearly see their class existence. The factor responsible for this obscuring of their existence as a proletariat contains two elements.

First, due to their peculiar development as a people on American soil, they were denied the experience in their past of ever having been either an integral sector of a proletariat or of having been or being a homogeneous proletarian sector of a black nation (nation in its more classic definition). And second, due to their present peculiar structure in the American working class.

Their special development contributes to the disappointment experienced by persons that look to black history for guidance in today's struggles. Disappointment comes when the healthy interest



in black history is combined with the rejection of everything "white" including "white" history. Behind the protestations of black radicals over the ignorance in the black community of black history, must lurk the feeling that this is so because this history is not adequate to explain the position of oppressed blacks in today's world -- that something is lacking.

The study of black history is important in restoring race pride and self respect. And can serve the function of history as teacher in the fight for freedom when black history is studied in its proper context as part of world ("white") history.

But in the rejection of "white" history lies the rub. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." A very important part of black existence today is their proletarian existence. The lessons that are the most germane to today's problems are to be found in "white" history. In their rejection of the "white" working class they become blind to their existence and history as part of that class and the lessons of that class' struggles.

An indirect expression of this can be seen in Malcolm X's case. Even though he had so much going for him he had great difficulty in building his movement. Those that had the opportunity to observe his movement's life closely can testify to the fact that organizationally it was in a steady decline. The cadres getting smaller. Rejecting cultism he was freed to find truth. But without the cultology the "programmatic" glue it provides is lost. It had to be replaced. Those who were attracted to Malcolm X had a tough time keeping up with his rapid political development. When he went to Africa the paralysis that developed in his group reflected the shaky and fantastically uneven political foundations. When he was removed from the scene the full logic of the not yet developed political ground-work revealed itself.

He evolved so fast politically because it was necessary. Having made a decision to base his movement on truth rather than a demonology he had to get to solid theoretical ground fast. He needed to be able to tell his followers to read this and that literature, that this was the material out of which the outlines of his conclusions were formed. This was shown not only by his amazingly swift political evolution but by his frequent references to material he had read (including books by white authors) and urging his listener to read them too. This interpretation underlines the significance too of his recommendations of The Militant. Along these lines his report of discussions with revolutionary Algerians, Cubans and others where they pointed out to him that the experiences of their revolutions cut across his basic stand at the time -- that the basic character of the

conflict between the world's exploiters and exploited was racial.

Malcolm X's great strength lay in his brilliant and uncompromising championing of his downtrodden people. He could only maintain that strength if he had continued on the path that was leading him toward embracing the entire body of history to derive the lessons, generalizations and guidelines for revolutionary action. Marxism, its congealed essence, lies at the end of that road.

The second element responsible for the prevalent blindness toward class existence as such, derives from the Negro's structure in the class. From this his strong instincts of class consciousness are twisted by life into race consciousness.

Black workers can be viewed as being divided into two basic categories in which this twisting varies in degree. Those outside the unions, outside the more or less key sections of the economy. Or whose contact with unions tends to be with the worst type. (This would include most of those marginally employed or largely unemployed). And ex-students who because of their color are forced into the ranks of workers -- usually into this first category.)

In the second category are those who tend to be in the mainstream of the economy and are often in unions that retain some of the progressive features that were necessary to win the battles against the giants of industry.

Those in the first group -- in the lowest caste of workers -- tend to have the sharpest nationalist feelings. They connect their disadvantaged position essentially with their color. This obscures from their view their class existence. Sharp anti-capitalist feelings are translated into sharp anti-white convictions. Their experience with labor convinces them that all whites are in the same exploiter package. From every angle this tendency to amalgamate all whites is nurtured. The white labor bureaucrats, the white foreman, the white co-worker -- a cohabitor of his miserable economic position in laundry and restaurant who is too often placed in a "supervisory" position over him -- all combine to blur the class line in his mind. Add to this the inevitable restriction of upgrading to more skilled or simply better paying jobs, to whites, and the picture easily takes on the appearance of color not class oppression.

We don't recruit here despite our record of sensitivity to nationalist moods and support to individuals and groups who reflect this thinking. This is not alone due to general antagonisms to whites. But also to an inability to see whites as fellow proletarians -- that is, white workers seem to be a different, higher "class" (caste).

It's not much different with black students and intellectuals. In contrast we are quite successful in attracting white students to whom the image of the working class is almost as negative. But for the white student it is only necessary to accept an abstraction concerning the historic potential of a neutral class of workers. One that he can fairly easily identify with and physically become part of, in every sense, if he chooses. While for the black student it requires a leap in thought to accept the abstraction about what appears to him a hostile and unreachable working class. And to his chagrin he can look forward all too often to physically becoming part of, in every sense, the super-exploited and economically weak caste of black workers.

The other section of the black workers, those who are in the mainstream of the economy, many of whom have contact with unions that are not completely or openly racist and corrupt, tend to view their relationship to the working class differently. These are generally people on a higher income level closer to the standards of their white co-workers. It is an undeniable fact of their existence that their interests are tied up in some important ways with their co-workers. They are, in a sense, in a more contradictory position than the other sector of black workers. Their position as workers is clearer, making for sharper opposition to their existence as Negroes, which is no less clear. The gulf between them and their white co-workers is narrower as workers but comes into conflict with their clearly second-class social status outside the union hall. The idea of the potentially great historic role of the proletariat, and he as part of it, is somewhat easier to accept. But this is not to say that nationalist feeling is not strong here too.

Our record in support of the Negro struggle including and especially the aspect of black nationalism makes our objective attractiveness to the black unionist even greater because of this less acute alienation from the class of which they are a part. With this section of black workers, however, another obstacle to movement toward our politics stands in the way for the moment. These blacks are subject to the same conservatizing factors as are operating on white workers. And while oppression as Negroes may counter the effects of these objective factors upon them, their "affluence" relative to the black community operates again in the conservatizing direction. By comparison with white workers they have less to lose but by comparison with their disadvantaged black brothers, they have a lot to lose.

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Look for a moment at the idea of the independent black party. Is such a development realistic as we have presented it? We have more or less presented it as a parallel to the labor party in concept. That is emphasizing the construction of an independent organization and projecting only the

most essential programmatic points. There is no question but that the simple creation of the independent black political organization represents a giant programmatic step forward. But there is something else to consider. The unions represent a more or less ready made foundation for a labor party. There does not appear to be any parallel existing organizational foundation in the ghetto.

While the possibilities are undoubtedly infinitely greater in the ghetto than in Lowndes county the job appears to be much harder in the ghetto. The organizational problem in the ghetto far overbalancing the "difficult and isolated circumstances" of a Lowndes county.

The ghetto explosions; the unusual structure of the black minority in the working class limiting or making difficult the expression of ghetto power; the divided black workers somewhat pushed in different directions by their different relation to the working class; the non-existence of a suitable organizational structure in the ghetto on which to rest the independent black party; the improbability of a strong, healthy black movement developing on the basis of an ideological foundation that is an "independent" one; that is, basing itself on exclusively black experience; and finally our own remarkable difficulty in recruiting in the ghetto calls for some rethinking.

It all boils down to the question of leadership and program. This factor is key with any movement seeking to make fundamental changes, but experience indicates that for blacks the leadership problem is crucial even in the earliest stages. In the case of workers, to illustrate what I mean, their strategic location in basic industry favors the development of "instincts" that lead them towards the right course of action in spontaneous situations. Moreover they are naturally organized by the factory. When they strike they not only easily organize themselves but, driven by the necessity to defend their jobs, they are ready-made full-time troops. They can go a long way along essentially correct lines, winning confidence, building concessions, without the highest caliber leadership. Providing time for the selecting of an adequate leadership for the more difficult tasks in the later stages of the struggle.

The black movement is not blessed by natural conditions with these advantages. For them to get off the ground and begin to make real gains -- wrest significant concessions from the ruling class -- requires the highest qualities of leadership.

It may be that until there is an upsurge of the workers there is no way around these difficulties. It may also be that until there is a general labor radicalization the doors to the black as well as the white workers will be largely closed to us.

Nevertheless we are obligated to try and find a way. The fact of the ghetto explosions demands it. A paragraph from the transitional program is appropriate at this point:

"During a transitional epoch, the workers' movement does not have a systematic and well balanced, but a feverish and explosive character. Slogans as well as organizational forms should be subordinated to the indices of the movement. On guard against routine handling of a situation as against a plague, the leadership should respond sensitively to the initiative of the masses."

It is in this anti-routinist spirit and in the light of the feverish and explosive character of today's ghettos that I raise the following points for consideration.

I think we should consider an attempt to initiate the construction of a black working class organization based on the program of the Fourth International that would in effect be a black counterpart to the SWP. I am well aware of what may be insurmountable difficulties. Let me refer to Lenin's views on self-determination first, to lay the basis for my arguments.

Lenin, in his polemics with Luxemburg, was merciless in his attacks on her position in opposition to the slogan of self-determination which she considered reactionary -- counterposing to it, proletarian internationalism. Lenin's criticism was tempered by his appreciation of the fact she was herself part of an oppressed national minority and a vigorous opponent of reactionary Polish bourgeois nationalism. The sin was not as great as it would be had she been a Russian. He made the point, in fact, that it was the duty of a revolutionary socialist in an oppressed nation to stress and work for the unity of the international working class -- to strive for the solidarity of the Polish workers with the Russian proletariat. She couldn't see that the advocacy of the right of self-determination by the Russian Party was a progressive and necessary foundation for the eventual firm alliance between the proletarians of oppressor and oppressed nation. And that though the advocacy of the right to separate was completely sincere it was motivated by the just as sincere aspirations of her Russian comrades for the solid alliance on the basis of equality of the two peoples.

In contrast, our black comrades are in the uncomfortable position of having to advocate self-determination for blacks while practicing membership in a "white" party. They are on the defensive with blacks who see our comrades' white affiliation as giving the lie to "pretensions" of support to black independence.

As black Trotskyists, organizationally independent of the party they would be in a position of practicing independence while advocating an alliance of equals. Their

association with the "white" party that advocates and demonstrates its complete support of the principle of self determination and with whom it has political agreement would put them on better ground to stand in approaching the ghetto. Dual membership in the "white" SWP, on the other hand, would be desirable, welcomed and encouraged. We are not a white organization, our doors must remain open to all workers.

The black Trotskyists could approach both sections of the black workers with equal ease. A black Trotskyist organization would not be in opposition to the independent black party, they would be its foremost black advocates. And would be prepared to work as a faction within it to fight for a revolutionary program.

It could best present the whole body of literature representing the congealed experience of the whole history of oppressed classes and nations as the theoretical foundations of an independent black movement for liberation.

No special black transitional program need be formulated, if there is such a thing. Only the normal adaptations or expansion of the universal elements of the transitional program to the special needs and tempo of the black revolution. For example, something like the transitional demand for Soviets combined with the democratic slogan for a constituent assembly seems to be applicable in the ghetto today. A black SWP can project more easily the idea of a "Ghetto Assembly" that would be open to representatives of every black organization, church, tenants committees, or groups of black workers on a job or in a union.

Such a body, it could be argued, could be the instrumentality of self-defense and self-policing of the ghetto. It could "bargain" with the white power structure -- particularly at times of great stress. It could take up the question of independent political action. Maybe ghetto referendums, etc.

Our party is at present incapable of projecting such ideas without arousing great resentment.

The faster tempo of the black revolution, the higher prices, greater unemployment, gives the demand for a sliding scale of hours and wages greater relevance in the ghetto. In addition to the regular function of this demand it can be used in connection with job discrimination. It has the added virtue of proposing to solve the problem of exclusion with a proletarian, anti-capitalist solution. It could give a whole new slant to job-site protests. Black radicalism could then appear to workers in its true light, openly class conscious. Black radicalism can at the minimum neutralize some hostile white workers and at maximum, enable the more militant black proletariat to, in the fullest sense, lead the class.

In this way the raw power of the ghetto could be augmented intervention in the unions -- the more intricate pushing, pulling and shifting of the weight of the working class into the balance on the black side of the scales. The potential is there for organized black militants inside the labor movement to become the nucleus around which the future left wing will form.

No doubt these proposals would be almost unchallengeable if we had a sizeable black cadre and that was their inclination. Unfortunately the thinness of our black cadre seems to rule out such a bold step. But in thinking about how such a step could even be realistically considered some interesting angles can be seen.

The growth of nationalist and internationalist feeling enables our world movement as such to play a significant role here. A black committee could announce its intention of exploring the possibility of setting up an Afro-American section of the world movement. No legal restriction need stand in the way. An actual violation of the law need not actually take place. There is considerable propaganda value in a challenge by black workers of any legal bar to their collaboration with their class brothers in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The form a black Trotskyist organization would take however is secondary. A clearer picture would emerge after some testing of the possibilities.

There are a series of steps that could be taken before our black comrades commit themselves even to an announcement of intention to organize independently. Discussion in the national committee, with black comrades, in the party as a whole, with black friends outside the party, a discussion article in the magazine, etc., give time to test the response.

A black Trotskyist organization would free black comrades to raise in the clearest way the banner of proletarian internationalism without in the slightest cutting across the task of creating the organs of black independence. The black worker could then truly play the role of vanguard of the class.

San Francisco, Calif.  
August 29, 1967

PROPOSAL FOR AN AMENDMENT TO P.C. DRAFT POLITICAL RESOLUTION

By Asher Harer and Paul Colvin

The rising tide of opposition to the war finds a natural expression in the demand to put the question to a vote. All current methods of dissent -- marches, rallies, numerous articles in various publications -- have generated considerable momentum among an ever-widening opposition. But the war, far from ending, has not even slackened; the policy makers have more rigidly and obstinately escalated the war, all the while claiming to have the full support of the overwhelming majority of the population of the U.S. The question of voting on war need not remain an abstraction. We did not consider the question of letting the people vote on war a timely slogan at the time of World War II or even during the Korean War. But today this question must be viewed differently: the opposition to the war in Vietnam is much deeper and is growing hour by hour. (In San Francisco, April, 1967, the regular petitioners were bringing in 30 names in three hours -- by August these same people were bringing in 60 -- exactly doubling the rate.)

To push for a vote on the war at this time tends to bring those opposed to the war into direct conflict with both the Administration and the Legislature on two levels: that of allowing basic international policy to be determined by popular vote, heretofore a jealously guarded prerogative of every ruling class, and the substance of the question itself -- withdrawing from the war short of victory or even with a negotiated "honorable solution," to use Johnson's terminology. Voting on questions in dispute, however, finds a ready response in a society brought up to believe in democratic traditions however lacking they may be in actuality. The entrance of those sectors of the population not yet drawn into antiwar activity into the political arena in opposition to a fundamental issue of ruling class policy may very well begin on this question. The clash of basic interests between the capitalist class for war and profits and the masses for peace and a constructive domestic program will become more and more evident. It should be clear, however, that "Let the people vote on war" is not a slogan of general applicability, but rather to be considered as a slogan to be applied where tactically indicated.

Attempts to resist the demand for a popular vote by nit-picking legal technicalities as well as such overt means as trying to label it a communist plot will tend to generate more opposition to administration policy, at the same time lessening the effectiveness of red-baiting. The overriding appeal of a democratic method of resolving the problem will be extremely difficult for the Administration to put down. Even a small minority of pro-war advocates will go along with the idea that the people, by a vote of the majority, should determine the supreme question of war or peace, life or death. The struggle to have the question



determined by a democratic vote will in itself offer us the opportunity to explain the real nature of parliamentary democracy in a class society -- as well as propagandizing against the war.

Wherever possible, such as in San Francisco and New York, actual drives to put the war question on local municipal ballots form centers of activity around which opposition is concretized and given a tangible goal. The same opportunities offered by other types of activity are presented here also, even though the referendum committee in San Francisco is not based primarily on students. Party activists and program are brought into contact with a growing circle of anti-war people -- some from other political groups, many entering politics for the first time. Not only the means (a popular vote) but the substance (immediate withdrawal) can be discussed on a continuing basis with a significant portion of the population of any given city. It has been estimated that in the campaign in San Francisco in the four months from the demonstration on April 15th to August 20th, at least 20 percent of the electorate has been directly contacted on the streets by petitioners. Favorable news reports, comments by columnists and TV interviews have brought the campaign to the attention of a majority of the population of the City and Bay Area.

In the event that the efforts of a "Citizens for a Vote on Vietnam" committee are successful in getting the issue placed on an official ballot, the next phase begins immediately. All means of propaganda can then be directed to publicizing and arguing for a "Yes" vote at election time. This is especially important where we have candidates running for office and on the ballot. Their antiwar program can be directed toward giving a concrete expression to the prevailing antiwar sentiment. Even where such candidates are not elected (as seems most likely at this time) a major point in their program can gain a substantial minority vote and in some cases perhaps a majority. Even where such a question fails to gain majority support, it would undoubtedly show a large minority in favor, which in itself gives the lie to the Administration's assertion that only a tiny, insignificant, but noisy minority oppose the war, and that the overwhelming majority support the President. This, in itself, can be a concrete addition to our general antiwar propaganda. And to once permit a vote on the war question, even as a policy statement by a city, sets a precedent that makes refusal more difficult in the future.

Finally, in the event that the optimum variant -- a majority vote -- occurs, it would be a major blow against the war, nationally and internationally, would have a stimulating effect on the antiwar movement in general, and would

serve as an example to be followed in every area where there is an organized antiwar movement. It would raise the antiwar movement to a new level by showing that the official representatives of the people are in conflict with the people's real antiwar desires. This would be of inestimable value for our Party and candidates during the election campaign of 1968. On campuses and in approaching youth in general the demand should be put forth that 18 to 21-year-olds be allowed to vote on this question.

For these reasons, the undersigned move the following amendment:

AMENDMENT

That the Political Committee Draft Resolution be amended to include the point that getting an Anti-Vietnam War policy statement on official ballots be a major part of our work in the coming period.

/Signed/ Asher Harer

Paul Colvin

San Francisco

September 3, 1967

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION ON A BLACK POLITICAL PARTY

By Gloria Allen

It is, I feel, no accident that the party has reprinted in time for the pre-convention discussion several old documents under the new title, "Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination." The possibility for building an independent black political party raises many questions which these documents do much to answer. There is, however, another aspect of the current ghetto struggle which I feel has not been dealt with adequately in our recent discussions, and these documents are equally useful in understanding our position should Afro-Americans raise a demand for separation.

The possibility of a demand for a separate state is implicit in any discussion of black nationalism, but has been mentioned only briefly in the past few years. Because we cannot raise separatist demands, our tendency has been to evaluate the possibility for action only in those areas where we can intervene. However, I think we should also assess those aspects of the struggle which, while not being in our domain, are revolutionary, are being expressed by black militants (as at the recent Black Power convention held in Newark), and which we support.

When we speak of the formation of an independent black political party with an orientation towards electoral politics in the coming period, I feel that we are discussing a turn which we would like to see, and which we evaluate as being the best possible next move, but for which there is very little basis in the current situation. It is a mistake, I think, to say that an independent black political party of the type discussed in the Political Committee's resolution is the only way the slogan and concept of black power can be politically realized.

The alternative of the black masses engaging in guerrilla-type warfare and of the recent insurrections which we have witnessed in the ghettos becoming more organized and politically sophisticated is a very real one which we should discuss if we are to understand what direction black Americans are likely to take. The slogan for autonomy in the ghetto is being raised more and more frequently, but we must not underestimate the ability of Afro-Americans to realize, without this particular seizure of black power taking place, how inadequate the slogan and concept is. In the final analysis, of what earthly good is black power over a slum?

Side by side with this, black people are educating each other with regard to just how much they have contributed and continue to contribute to the wealth and growth of this nation. These two elements -- an understanding that power over the ghetto is meaningless without control over some source of

economic independence, and that this nation owes the black masses a great debt -- combined with the constant, increasing oppression and persecution meted out by all levels of white America, create the possibility, if not the probability, that the slogan for a separate state could take hold and become a conscious and programmatic demand.

One of the most unfortunate, but nevertheless undeniable, aspects of white American society is that it is racist from top to bottom, and this most certainly includes the white working class. While I believe that events will demonstrate to the white working class that it has nothing to gain by hanging on to its prejudices, I see no materialistic reason for this change taking place before a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation confronts it.

If we truly believe that the black people of America are going to provide the revolutionary vanguard, then we must once and for all get it into our heads that the vanguard will be formed in a racist society and that the experiences of that vanguard will be of a racist white working class. All of its programmatic demands will be formulated within this context. We are very quick to understand the skepticism of young students and workers towards the occurrence of a viable working class movement, since they have never seen the working class in motion. How much easier it should be to understand the black man's even deeper skepticism towards receiving meaningful help from a white working class.

In connection with this, I think we must be realistic in assessing how Afro-Americans view our white, radical organization. We do not at the moment represent any tangible power which is able to get "the man" off their backs. We cannot in our own name exert power, we cannot rouse the working class to exert power, and we cannot wheel and deal with the ruling class to influence power. In the black man's eyes we are totally powerless and of no immediate value in his search for allies. Even our educational value he eyes suspiciously, and takes his concepts of socialism from his colored brothers in other countries. From our point of view about all we can do in the ghetto at this point is to "patiently explain" and keep our integrity intact. From the Afro-American's point of view about all we are good for is occasionally to get his ideas voiced in the white community, and the value of this is dubious in his mind as he wearies of trying to communicate with "whitey". More and more he comes to feel that actions speak louder than words.

So it is that Afro-Americans search for allies outside of this country and find internationalism. They do not confine their search to Africa, but extend it to Cuba, Vietnam, China, etc. They find that there are oppressed peoples around the world who are united with them, not only in having an

oppressor but in who that oppressor is. One of the benefits from living in the country with the highest standard of living in the world is that the subsistence level is now raised to include television. And as the black masses are exposed to the nature of imperialism and tend to identify with colonial peoples and with colonial revolutions, they have an increasing sense of being a part of the colonial world trapped within the imperialist homeland.

They feel a growing kinship with the values and aspirations of other cultures and societies, and as the tendency develops for them to identify with the revolutionary struggles in these colonial countries, a tendency also develops to identify with the methods used in the struggle. Inspired by the guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam, using tactics of harassment and disruption so that whitey could have the cities by day while the insurgents have them by night, Afro-Americans might thus exert pressure in attempting to achieve their own territorial nation.

In a recent lecture in Boston, one of our Afro-American comrades advanced the idea that black people had never been integrated into the economic structure of this society. A number of conclusions flow from this which bear on the possibility of their creating an independent black political party at this stage of the struggle. Our comrade drew the conclusion that this meant that they had never been proletarianized and so their ability to structure their organizations, a necessary pre-requisite for organizing a political party, is at a very low level.

Granted that there are educated Afro-Americans to spare to fill the top levels of any such party, it is the base structure which suffers. The gap between the two levels in the black community is incredible. The discipline necessary for regularly handing out leaflets, attending meetings, paying dues, etc., which comes from steady employment and participating in a union, is in short supply in the ghetto. Society has never been particularly interested in whether black people in the ghetto were socialized in this manner, and indeed it has become impossible for conditions to exist whereby this type of socialization might be achieved by other methods -- for instance, through a stable family life. They have as yet very limited experience in organizing themselves to work in a disciplined manner for a common goal.

The specific type of discipline needed to survive the day to day grind and frustration of building a political party, when tangible results are so slow in showing themselves, has not been something they have found it necessary to learn for survival up to the present.

I don't think it is necessary for me to elaborate upon the point that they have never had a political life of their own within the bourgeois political parties, and so do not have that experience to draw upon either.

Another factor which I feel would inhibit the formation of such a party is the growing cynicism as to what could be achieved by it. Afro-Americans have witnessed the political demise of Adam Clayton Powell, who was after all a bourgeois politician. I think they have few illusions about the fate of an independent politician. Also they see and share the cynicism with which even white people regard the "free" elections in South Vietnam, and the ability of governments to nullify elections which don't turn out the "right" way. All of these I think would tend to make black people direct their energies in directions other than in forming an independent political party.

Should an independent black political party be formed, however, I thoroughly agree with the Political Committee that it would have the most profound effect on all sectors of American society. This document is intended to put forth some of the conditions which I consider would inhibit such a formation and to present one possible alternative. There may even be other alternatives. I think it is a mistake to say only one way exists, as stated on page 5 of the P.C. document, in the same way that I consider it a mistake on page 2 to say that "an independent mass party of the workers will eventually be formed here as elsewhere."

There is always the possibility that the workers of this country will bypass the need for a labor party and proceed straight to a revolutionary situation. There are certainly indications that this is more than possible for black people. Having become disenchanted with "the American dream," with no prospect for assimilation within this society, and looking outside of this country for allies, black people are becoming far more sophisticated than their white worker counterparts about the varieties and advantages of other cultures and political systems.

Boston

September 5, 1967