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Emergence of the Anti-Racist Majority

GUS HALL

Racism has always been very much part of and linked to the overall reactionary political and ideological currents in the United States. It is an important prop of the anti-working class, anti-trade union positions and trends in ruling-class circles. Therefore, it is not surprising that racism has been a big factor in the policies of the Reagan Administration.

The racist and the anti-working class atmosphere created by the Reaganites form a dialectical two-fold offensive, one evil feeding the other.

Racism, chauvinism, anti-Semitism and anti-communism are all integral features of the thought patterns of the extreme ultra-Right and fascist-tinged forces. Therefore, the tactic of unity in struggle—unity of Black and white, trade unions, the Afro-American community, unity of the democratic forces, has always been the most viable tactic in the fight against racism.

ULTRA-RIGHT SETBACKS

Racism remains a serious economic, social, political, ideological and cultural plague in the United States. But the setbacks of the Rightwing and ultra-Right forces set the stage for new victories against racism.

Now that the balance of forces is changing, now that declining Reaganism has only ten-months-and-out, now that the ultra-Right forces are increasingly scattered and isolated, and, because the progressive opposition forces are moving onto the offensive, the struggle against racism can take on a new head of steam.

The rebuff of Judge Robert Bork was an important blow against the racists. The defeats of some reactionary Rightwing candidates in the 1986 elections were victories against racism. The trial and conviction of the Howard Beach racist thugs was a victory against racism. And, although there has been an increase in racially motivated violence, police brutality and killings,

there are many examples of growing Black-white, working class unity.

THE NEW RACIST WAVE

The new wave of racist attacks, police brutality and the resulting tensions continues to swell especially in New York City. It is not yet clear whether this heightened racism is a new problem throughout the country and how much of it is an offshoot of the Howard Beach incident.

But the fact is, there has been an increase in hoodlum gang attacks, especially tied to a network of drug-related, white youth gangs. There is also an increase in racially motivated brutality by the city police. One feeds the other.

There have been a number of Howard Beach-like attacks in which racist thugs use "Howard Beach" as a slogan for inciting other criminal attacks. The recent incidents in the Brooklyn community of Bensonhurst are typical of the Howard Beach offshoots.

In the areas where the attacks are taking place they must be understood as emergencies that call for mass community meetings, demonstrations and petitions.

THE FIGHTBACK

The activities and events around the observance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 59th birthday have focused on many features of racism that have been beneath the surface, including the tremendous increase not only in police killings, but also police brutality and harassment. This climate was best described by a young Afro-American who said, "I was born a suspect."

The January 18th "March for Social Justice" in New York represented the anti-racist, multi-racial majority of the city. It included trade unions, political parties, key elected officials, churches, synagogues and community leaders and focussed its fire on Mayor Koch and City Hall. It was the first unified response to this new level of racial violence.

Also, in New York City, a petition cam-

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paign to outlaw racist and anti-Semitic violence is being directed to Governor Cuomo, Mayor Koch, the State Legislature and City Council. It demands that the City Council and State Legislature condemn and criminalize all acts of racist and anti-Semitic violence.

These are examples of the kind of multi-level activity that can send the message throughout the country that the people will not tolerate racism. It is an organized coalition response that will continue through the 1988, and into the 1989 elections, a coalition that can defeat Koch's re-election.

Within the working-class neighborhoods there are certain areas where racist attacks are more likely to take place. They occur largely in neighborhoods where there are large numbers of poor people, working class youth who hang-out in ethnic groups, areas where there are drugs and frustrated, jobless, high school drop-outs.

In these communities, initiatives must be taken to bring together coalitions that will work to take preventive actions. Such coalitions should take up economic and social issues—housing, education, jobs, recreation centers, day care, etc. Any negative estimate that the situation is hopeless and nothing can be done must be rejected.

Any ideas such as "the inevitability of racial polarization", or "the two societies" concept must also be firmly rejected. These ideas block the building of coalitions and lead to actions that increase tensions.

COALITION-BUILDING

It is necessary to condemn racist crimes. But this is not enough. We must initiate concerned-citizens committees, unity coalitions, Black, white, Puerto Rican, trade union, church, community and tenant organizations, youth clubs, sports teams—coalitions that will mobilize for a community-wide response to every act of raw racism.

These coalitions must be built, not only for preventive and emergency response-actions, but also for the long haul, for the process of education, including forums, seminars and public

meetings. We must help bring together the forces of the people who will work to prevent and circumvent racist attacks.

The success of spontaneous responses initiated following a racist attack proves that such coalitions and movements are both possible and effective.

There are now serious attempts, including by the news media, to whip up tensions to the point where further racist violence must break out. This is because the media focus is on the negative, the racist elements, instead of on the opposite forces and responses.

Progressive and anti-racist forces must direct their efforts toward ending the violence and lowering the tensions, toward creating a climate in which racist violence will not be tolerated and, therefore, cannot be sustained. The aim must be to bring together coalitions, Black and white, that will become the dominant force in these communities.

THE HOWARD BEACH VERDICT

In the Howard Beach trial, the jury, after 12 days of deliberations, settled on a compromise among: convicting the racist thugs for murder; or for a lesser crime; or acquitting them completely. The fact that there was no conviction for murder was a compromise. And compromises are always at the expense of the victims.

What sentences will eventually be handed down will be very important. There is a wide range of possibilities: from 5-15 years of jail to a suspended sentence. This case continues to have nationwide implications because the racist attack in Howard Beach symbolizes the increase in such attacks in New York and the country at large.

While racist thugs and vigilante gangs, as well as police, are getting away with murder, one must say, however, that the indictment, the trial, the convictions and the massive media attention to Howard Beach sent a message that such raw racist brutality will result in arrests, indictments and prison terms.

This is very important because the permissive, racist atmosphere created by seven years of the Reagan Administration has given the vig-

ilante gangs and the Ku Klux Klan elements a green light. They have been led to believe that acts of racial violence are condoned, which, in fact, is true.

Thus, the Howard Beach convictions help to change this official atmosphere. The important question is how to use this conviction to motivate and activate the anti-racist forces.

First, we must be able to see that, even in the Howard Beach and Bensonhurst situations, there were people in the neighborhood who made efforts to distance, to disassociate themselves from the racist acts and the racist thugs, who made statements on radio and TV such as, "We are not racists"; "We are a community of all kinds of people who have been living together for many years"; "It isn't fair to label our whole neighborhood as racists"; and, "We are ashamed of the attacks."

These spontaneous reactions demonstrate that there are people in these neighborhoods who can be organized in a united front against racist, vigilante violence. In addition, polls taken recently show that white public opinion is strongly against overt racism where words and deeds clearly show that racism is the motive.

In a recent poll on outlawing violence, 68 per cent said they would favor laws outlawing material that provokes violence against women. This is a strong basis for a law that would outlaw the inciting of violence against women and Afro-Americans. Already, 18 states have enacted legislation upping the penalties for racial violence.

Added to this is the fact that the Ku Klux Klan is now in its sharpest decline in 15 years. But the racist attacks cover up very important opposite developments such as those which have taken place in Nacogdoches, Texas, in Mobile, Alabama, in Iowa and in New England, as well as in New York.

In the last months there have been many very dramatic examples of Black-white, working-class unity. It is this class unity that can serve as a basis for broader people's anti-racist unity. However, organized resistance to racism

will not happen spontaneously. Without forceful initiatives and grass-roots community organizing, the anti-racist sentiments among the people will remain merely private sentiments and thoughts.

People must see that there are others who think as they do. And more, they must see that there are others who are willing to come together, stand up and speak out to put an end to criminal violence, racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry and intolerance in their neighborhoods.

Anti-racist movements usually begin as immediate responses to racist attacks. But they can develop into full-blown movements for equality in the community—in housing, in education, in community services, in recreation facilities, in job and recreational opportunities.

People's anti-racist forces must sit down together to plan immediate and longer-range campaigns, coalitions (on whatever scale) to deal with emergency situations. In all these there is the need for defensive and legal actions, emergency rallies and public meetings.

The struggle against racism and against the practice of racial discrimination remains a key element in the molding of working-class unity. While there has been progress in the struggle against racism, it remains a critical obstacle to class unity.

The developments of the past few months indicate that there is an action-reaction dynamic taking place in our country, on all levels. There is the rise of racism, chauvinism and anti-Semitism stemming from the Reagan-Meese offensive policies. And then there is the opposite direction, the emergence of the anti-racist majority, the new thought patterns and coalitions against racism.

To build solid, stable, consistent working-class unity the emerging anti-racist, multiracial majority must be mobilized and organized into a cohesive fighting force in order to eliminate the single, most damaging obstacle to unity of the working class and our people. □

Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit': Music and Social Consciousness

ANGELA DAVIS

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves, blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees
Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

This song, which Billie Holiday called her "personal protest" against the death-bringing ravages of racism, was destined to radically transform her status in American popular culture. If she had been previously acknowledged by the giants in her field as a brilliant innovator in jazz vocals, "Strange Fruit" would establish her as an unsurpassed aesthetic cultivator of social consciousness. Although she was only twenty-four years old when she recorded this song and integrated it into her performance repertoire, she had been striving for some time to reach beyond the circles of musicians and jazz cognoscenti who had faithfully and generously praised her work, in order to offer her art to the public at large. Yet, she staunchly refused to mar her art with tinges of commerciality which might have brought her the popular success for which she longed. She seemed to instinctively recognize that her musical genius was destined to serve a profound social purpose, for when she became aware of the impact of "Strange Fruit," she reconceptualized her role as a popular singer.

Prior to "Strange Fruit," the overwhelming majority of her music consisted of contemporary popular tunes, most of whose lyrics tended to be mediocre, if not downright trite. It was her unique phrasing, her striking transfor-

mations of original melodies and the timbre of her voice which elevated these songs to the status of art. She forged new content for these tunes by working wonders on the levels of form and technique. Now here was a song whose content had urgent and far-reaching implications—a song about hate, indignities and eruptions of violence which threatened every Afro-American in the country. Here was a song which could potentially awaken vast numbers of people—Black and white alike—from their apolitical slumber.

I worked like the devil on it because I was never sure I could put it across or that I could get across to a plush nightclub audience the things that it meant to me.¹

As long as her work appeared to be without manifest social content (and indeed, it only appeared to be so), she was lavishly praised by critics, whose belief in the "universality" of art presumptuously excluded themes relating to the collective struggles of Black people. Since "Strange Fruit" was unambiguously designed to prick the consciences of those who preferred to remain oblivious to the racist malevolence afflicting this land, it was inevitable that many critics would dismiss it as blatant propaganda, undeserving of the rubric of art. However, Billie Holiday needed no complicated aesthetic theories to grasp the artistic greatness of this work and to instinctively understand that "Strange Fruit" would render explicit the social function of her music in general.

Great art never achieves its greatness through an act of absolute transcendence of socio-historical reality. On the contrary, even as it transcends specific circumstances, it is deeply rooted in social realities. Its function precisely is to fashion new perspectives on the human condition—in its specificity and in its generality. "Strange Fruit" contained very specific references to the horrors of lynching at a time when Afro-Americans were still passionately calling for allies to assist in the campaign to eradicate this murderous manifestation of racism. At the

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same time, Billie Holiday's rendition expressed a universal condemnation of all assaults on the rights and lives of human beings.

DURING THE 1930s, apologists for what was so cavalierly referred to as "American Democracy" attempted to pretend that the institution of lynching was merely a blemish on the country's past. While it was true that the lives of Afro-Americans were no longer systematically consumed by mob-violence in numbers that mounted into the thousands, as had been the case during the decades following emancipation, this did not mean that the hundreds of contemporary lynch victims could be brushed aside as insignificant. During the four years following the Stock Market crash in 1929, 150 Black people were lynched.² In the fall of 1934, a mere five years before Lady Day's encounter with the poem, "Strange Fruit", a lynching occurred in Florida which should remain indelibly impressed on the memories of all who presume to understand the history of the United States. According to a newspaper account of the time,

An eye-witness to the lynching . . . said that [Claude] Neal had been forced to mutilate himself before he died. The eye-witnesses gave the following account of the event which took place in a swamp beside the Chattahoochee River:

" . . . first they cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked it.

Then they sliced his sides and stomach with knives and every now and then somebody would cut off a finger or a toe. Red hot irons were used on the n— [deletion by Ed.] to burn him from top to bottom. From rime to time during the torture, a rope would be tied around Neal's neck and he was pulled over a limb and held there until he almost choked to death, when he would be let down and the torture begun all over again. After several hours of this punishment, they decided to kill him.

Neal's body was tied to a rope on the rear of an automobile and dragged over the highway to the

Cannidy home. Here a mob estimated to number somewhere between 3,000 to 7,000 people from eleven southern states was excitedly awaiting his arrival . . .

'A woman came out of the Cannidy house and drove a butcher knife into his heart. Then the crowd came by and some kicked him and some drove their cars over him."

What remained of the body was brought by the mob to Marianna where it is now hanging from a tree on the northeast corner of the courthouse square.

Photographers say they will soon have pictures of the body for sale at fifty cents each. Fingers and toes from Neal's body are freely exhibited on street-corners here.³

Billie Holiday may never have witnessed such abominations firsthand, but she certainly grasped the connections between lynching, which constitutes one extreme of the spectrum of racism, and the daily routines of biases and prejudices which affect in some way every member of the Afro-American population. She apprehended in her own way a dynamic described by Franz Fanon when he wrote:

One can not say that a given country is racist but that lynchings or extermination camps are not to be found there. The truth is that all that and still other things exist on the horizon. These virtualities, these latent tendencies circulate, carried by the life-stream of psycho-affective, economic relations.⁴

If the spectre of lynchings irrevocably conjured up other forms of racism, the lyrics of "Strange Fruit" immediately led Billie Holiday to reflect upon the circumstances of her father's death. When Lewis Allen showed her the poem he had written with the idea in mind of setting it to music, she said, "I dug it right off. It seemed to spell out all the things that had killed Pop."⁵ Her father, jazz guitarist Clarence Holiday, had inhaled poison gas, during a battle in World War I, which caused him to have chronic lung problems. In March of 1937, while on tour in Texas with Don Redman's band, he developed a chest cold for which he received no treatment because of the segregation practices of the hospitals in that state. By the time the band reached

Dallas, where he was able to seek medical attention, he had already contracted pneumonia and he died of a hemorrhage in the Jim Crow ward of the Veterans Hospital.⁶ From Billie Holiday's perspective, to sing "Strange Fruit" was to release a passionate cry of protest against the racism which had killed her father.

OF COURSE, BILLIE HOLIDAY'S GIFT of aesthetic communication did not simply consist in her ability to render in song the profound emotions underlying her own private woes. However skilfull she may have been in musically transmitting her own state of mind, this could never have served as the foundation for her greatness as an artist. While eloquently incorporating the emotions occasioned by her own personal tragedies in her songs, her particular condition functioned as a conduit permitting others to acquire insights about the emotional and social circumstances of their own lives. For Black people and their politically conscious white allies, "Strange Fruit" affirmed not only the existence of lynching and the web of racist institutions within which the abomination of lynching resided. It also signified the possibility and necessity of challenging and eventually eradicating this age-old oppression. For those who had not grasped the meaning of American racism, "Strange Fruit" functioned as a compelling statement of fact. As Bert Korall said of Billie Holiday in general, she

... so illuminated human situations as to give the listener a rare, if frightening, glimpse into the realities of experience. Where others fear to tread, she reached out and touched, where others mask their eyes, she defiantly kept hers open.⁷

Invariably, some people had been so hardened by racism as to be impervious to her message. In a Los Angeles club, a woman requested that Billie sing "Strange Fruit" by saying, "... why don't you sing that sexy song you're famous for? You know, the one about naked bod-

ies swinging in the trees?"⁸ Needless to say, in such situations, for the sake of preserving the song's dignity, she refused to sing it.

IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, "STRANGE FRUIT" ROSE out of socio-historical circumstances which provided the best backdrop, since the brief period of Radical Reconstruction, for the reception of such an impassioned plea for racial justice. If the 1920s had allowed for an expanding awareness of Afro-American art and culture in the wider population (even though this awareness was marred by racist notions of Black culture as "primitive" and "exotic"), the 1930s saw the emergence of important political and multi-racial alliances.

Organized challenges to lynching dated back to the turn-of-the-century efforts of Ida B. Wells. However, the ideological climate of the period, as well as through World War I and well into the 1920s, was so poisoned by racism that substantial numbers of white people could not be drawn into the anti-lynching campaigns. Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" echoed through circles of people who had been sensitized both by the trans-racial economic and social tragedies of the Great Depression and by the multi-racial mass movements seeking to redress the myriad grievances of Black and white alike.

Before the great movements of the 1930s and the consequent radicalization of large sectors of the population, "Strange Fruit" as a phenomenon would have been inconceivable. Indeed, an interracial night club like Cafe Society, where the song was born, would not have been viable at any other time. Barney Josephson, who opened this club at a time when even in Harlem Black and white people could not listen to jazz under the same roof, told Billie that "... this was to be one club where there was going to be no segregation, no racial prejudice."⁹ And, in fact, according to Holiday's biographer, John Chilton:

The liberal atmosphere of the club, with its clientele of "New Dealers," and the humanitarian principles of its owner made it a receptive setting for the presentation of the song's dramatic anti-lynching lyrics.¹⁰

If white people had developed a greater sensitivity to the plight of Afro-Americans, it was perhaps because enormous numbers of them had experienced in one form or another the devastation of the Great Depression. Workers' wages were cut almost in half and, by the last crisis year, seventeen million people were unemployed. Even more essential to the development of this sensitivity were the great mass movements which emerged during the 1930s—the campaign against unemployment and the extensive organizing of industrial unions associated with the CIO. The Communist Party, the Young Communist League and the Trade Union Unity League joined forces to establish the National Unemployed Councils, which were responsible for spectacular demonstrations throughout the country. On March 6, 1930, well over a million people participated in hunger marches in major urban centers—110,000 in New York, 100,000 in Detroit, for example. In December of 1931 and 1932, national hunger marches to Washington dramatized demands for unemployment insurance and other means of bringing relief to the unemployed.¹¹

Such mass opposition to the anti-worker policies of the Hoover Administration played a pivotal role in the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the subsequent inauguration of the New Deal. Far from pacifying those who suffered the effects of the Great Depression, the New Deal served as a further catalyst for the organization of multi-racial mass movements. Black people, in particular, were hardly satisfied with the sedatives offered them by the New Deal legislation. One of the most consequential of the mass organizations initiated during the Roosevelt years was the American Youth Congress (AYC), founded in 1934. Although the government was responsible for the inception of the AYC, the more than four and a half million young people who joined it before the outbreak of the war in 1939, could not be contained

by the policies of the government. Young Afro-Americans, especially in the South, played an indispensable part in developing the strategic direction of this organization. The Southern Negro Youth Congress, according to William Z. Foster, was "the most important movement ever conducted by Negro youth"¹² before the era of the Civil Rights Movement.

It pioneered many of the constructive developments . . . in the South—including the right-to-vote movement, the unionization of Southern industry, the fight for the right of education and the general struggle against lynching and all forms of Jim Crow.¹³

As a result of the work of the American Youth Congress, the issue of federal anti-lynching legislation was placed on the national political agenda for the first time in the twentieth century since the thwarted efforts of the NAACP to secure the passage of an anti-lynching bill in 1921. Consequently, when Billie Holiday sang "Strange Fruit" in 1939, her message fell upon many ears that had long since been rendered receptive by the AYC's demand that the Roosevelt Administration support the enactment of a law against lynching.

This is not to say that Billie Holiday herself was necessarily aware of the political developments of the thirties which served as the backdrop for her own cultural contributions. She was not the only artist swept into the stream of political radicalization who was incognizant of all the political ramifications of her own work. The "Thirties", according to Phillip Bonosky, constituted a "watershed in the American democratic tradition."

It is a period which will continue to serve both the present and the future as a reminder and as an example of how an aroused people, led and spurred by the working class, can change the entire complexion of the culture of a nation.¹⁴

Bonosky continues,

This period, for the first time in American history, saw the fundamental placing of the Negro and Jewish questions, which brought them out of the murky realm of private and personal ethics to their real roots

in a class society . . . [It] saw a dramatic change in every aspect of culture—its most characteristic feature being the discovery of the organic relationship between the intellectual and the people—the workers first of all . . .¹⁵

Although Billie Holiday was not directly associated with the artists' and cultural workers' movements related to the Works Progress Administration (WPA), she was clearly conscious of the need for radical change in the status of Black people in U.S. society. On countless occasions, she was herself the target of vitriolic expressions of racism. As a Black vocalist with Artie Shaw's all-white band, she encountered the crassness of Jim Crow on a daily basis when the band toured the Southern states. In Kentucky, for example, a small town sheriff who tried his best to prevent her from performing, finally came up to the bandstand and asked Shaw, "What's Blackie going to sing?"¹⁶ In St. Louis, the man who had hired the band to play in one of the city's largest ballrooms confronted Billie by saying, "What's that n— [deletion by Ed.] doing there? I don't have n—s [deletion by Ed.] to clean up around here."¹⁷ Needless to say, there were numerous incidents surrounding her hotel rooms and the eating establishments where she attempted to buy meals. "I got to the point where I hardly ever ate, slept or went to the bathroom without having a major NAACP-type production."¹⁸

Sometimes we'd make a six-hundred-mile jump and stop only once. Then it would be a place where I couldn't get served, let alone crash the toilet without causing a scene. At first I used to be ashamed. Then finally I just said to hell with it. When I had to go, I'd just ask the bus driver to stop and let me off at the side of the road. I'd rather go into the bushes than take a chance in the restaurants and towns.

Billie Holiday's social consciousness was deeply rooted in her own experiences—and she had indeed experienced more than her share of racism. While she was not one to engage in any extended political analyses, she never attempted to conceal where her loyalties were. "I'm a race woman,"²⁰ she proclaimed on nu-

merous occasions. According to Josh White, who developed a friendship with her after an initial collision surrounding his performance of "Strange Fruit," "she had more thought for humanity and was more race-conscious than people thought."²¹

BILLIE HOLIDAY'S UNIQUE ABILITY to imbue her music with authentic human feelings and thus to touch the hearts of all who had the privilege of hearing her was more evident in her singing of "Strange Fruit" than any other song. And this song posed a number of serious problems with respect to its rendering. With its forceful metaphors, an overly dramatic rendering might have transformed its powerful emotional content into histrionics. The intent behind this song—both Allen's and Holiday's—was to invoke the emotions of solidarity with its auditors. Unfortunately sometimes, art with this intent misses the aim and instead occasions feelings of pity. If those who were touched by "Strange Fruit" exited from the experience of feeling pity for Afro-American victims of racism, instead of solidarity and compassion, the underlying dynamics of racism would have been reduplicated instead of challenged. For white people thus moved by the song, the superiority of the white race would have been implicitly affirmed. But unless one is an incurable racist, it is difficult to listen to Billie Holiday's rendering of "Strange Fruit" without sensing the plea for human solidarity—equality even in the process of challenging racist horrors and indignities. One is able to identify with the "Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze" as human beings who deserve the right to live and love. "The lyric is stark and moving," as John Chilton put it,

and Billie wrings every ounce of emotion from the terrifying description of Black bodies hanging from the trees. Billie's supreme artistry ensures that there is no melodrama.²²

Glenn Coulter writes about:

[the] uncanny expression of horror which transcends its willful lyric when Billie sings it, and becomes a frozen lament, a paralysis of feeling truer to psychology than any conventional emotionalism could be.²³

If Billie Holiday ushered into popular music culture a new and original approach to singing, her decision to feature "Strange Fruit" as the centerpiece of her work established the basis for a tradition that was taken up later by musicians such as Nina Simone, whose "Mississippi Goddam" became an anthem of the Civil Rights era. "Strange Fruit" was a frontal challenge not only to lynching and racism, but to the policies of a government which implicitly condoned such actions, especially in its refusal thus far to secure the passage of laws against lynching. It was an undisguised rallying cry against the state. "The message of Lewis Allen's poem," in the words of jazz critic Leonard Feather,

had a meaning more vital than any of the soufflé-songs she had been handed by record producers. This was the first significant protest in words and music, the first unmuted cry against racism. It was radical and defiant at a time when Blacks and whites alike found it dangerous to make waves, to speak out against a deeply entrenched status quo.²⁴

Joachim Berendt called it:

the most emphatic and most impassioned musical testimony against racism to become known before Abbey Lincoln's interpretation of Max Roach's "Freedom Now Suite" of 1960.²⁵

"Strange Fruit" became a permanent piece in Billie Holiday's repertoire and, of more than 350 songs she sang, this one remains inextricably connected to the prevailing image of Lady Day. However, at the time, she was unable to convince Columbia, the recording company with which she was under contract, to permit her to record it. "They won't buy it in the South," was the company's response. "We'll be boycotted. . . It's too inflammatory."²⁶ Billie persisted, however, and eventually John Hammond released her for one recording date with Commodore, whose head, Milt Gabler agreed to record it.

Billie Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit" achieved something far greater than permanent preservation of her most important song, the aesthetic centerpiece of her career. Eventually millions would hear her sing this haunting anti-lynching appeal, and few not feel edified. People of many races, cultures and nations would be moved and simultaneously educated—thus fulfilling the artist's goal of lifting her listeners' consciousness. Yet, many others would be more deeply touched by Lady Day's musical protest than she could ever imagine. Would she have predicted that "Strange Fruit" would impel people to discover within themselves a previously unawakened calling to political activism? Or could she have understood how artists with incorruptible aesthetic principles would be inspired by this song to realize how passionately political their work could be without compromising an ounce of their aesthetic integrity? And could she have even sensed that catalytic role her song would play in rejuvenating a tradition of anti-lynching and anti-racist literature which had been initiated in the nineteenth century by such great abolitionists as Frances E.W. Harper. No, Lady Day could not have begun to fathom the vast influence and imperishable prestige of her courageous song of protest. Indeed, the literary continuum extending from "Strange Fruit" consists of works that would amount to volumes of poems, songs, novels and short stories about racist violence visited upon Black people. Occupying a prominent position on that continuum is a poem entitled "Lynchsong" whose author, Lorraine Hansberry, was linked by race and gender to the creator of the ancestral song. As an Afro-American woman who was far more knowledgeable of her people's culture than most of her contemporaries, Lorraine Hansberry was certainly conscious of the literary kinship between "Lynchsong" and "Strange Fruit."

Laurel:

Name sweet like the breath of peace

Blood and blood

Hatred there

White robes and

Black robes
And a burning
Burning cross

cross in Laurel
cross in Jackson
cross in Chicago

And a
Cross in front of the
City Hall
In:
New York City

Lord
Burning cross
Lord
Burning man
Lord
Murder cross

Laurel:
Name bitter like the rhyme of a lynchsong

I can hear Rosalee
See the eyes of Willie McGee
My mother told me about
Lynchings
My mother told me about
The dark nights
And dirt roads
And torch lights
And lynch robes

sorrow night
and a
sorrow night

The
faces of men
Laughing white
Faces of men
Dead in the night

sorrow night
and a
sorrow night.²⁷

Notes

1. Billie Holiday (with William Dufty), *Lady Day Sings the Blues*, Penguin Books, New York, 1984, p. 84.
2. William Z. Foster, *The Negro People in American History*, International Publishers, New York, 1954, p. 480.
3. Ralph Ginzberg, *One Hundred Years of Lynching*, Lancer Books, New York, 1969, p. 222.
4. Franz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," *Toward the African Revolution*, Grove Press, New York, 1964, p. 41.
5. Holiday, p. 84.
6. Ibid. pp. 68-69; John Chilton, *Billie's Blues*, Stein and Day, New York, 1978, p. 75.
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8. Holiday, p. 84.
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The "New Black Conservatives" Monopoly's Hired Guns

TONY MONTEIRO

A small yet highly publicized group of Right-wing Afro-American academics and ideologues has, in the last ten years, appeared on the political scene. Among the most well-known are Clarence Pendelton, Chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission; Thomas Sowell, fellow at the Hoover Institute for the Study of War, Peace and Revolution; Walter Williams, professor of economics, George Mason University; Glenn Loury, professor of political economy, Harvard University; Alan Keyes, fellow at the Heritage Foundation; and Joseph Perkins, editorial writer for the *Wall Street Journal*. The Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institute at Stanford University finance most of their research. The consequences of their theories and programs are to render impotent the struggle for Afro-American equality, to subvert the united working-class front and to split the unity between the Afro-American people and the trade union movement. They serve as political and ideological flunkies and spokesmen of the most racist, militarist and anti-Communist elements of the Reagan Administration.

Designating themselves "new Black conservatives," they have fought to put the U.S. Civil Rights Commission into the hands of racist and anti-civil rights forces; supported the nomination of the arch-reactionary, Robert Bork, to the Supreme Court; are bitter opponents of affirmative action; and support the abolition of the minimum wage.

Like the ultra-Right in general, they target the Afro-American family for the most vicious attacks. For them, all of the problems that Afro-Americans face, that in actuality result from the crisis of capitalism, can be blamed on the Black family. In international affairs they are supporters of the Star Wars program, the Nicaraguan Contras, the bandits of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and

the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR). They are opponents of sanctions against apartheid South Africa.

George Gilder's *Wealth And Poverty*¹ and Charles Murray's *Losing Ground*² provide their theoretical framework. Gilder states their main thesis forthrightly when he says, "Real poverty is less a state of income than a state of mind."³

The economic and social devastation of many Afro-American urban communities is, according to Glenn Loury, caused by "the values and behaviors of some inner city residents."⁴ Murray poses the rhetorically racist question, "... how much of Black family breakdown is really a phenomenon of Black culture and how much is a matter of economic class?"⁵ Like Moynihan, he finds Black culture in general and the Black family are the cause.

Murray places the principal blame upon young Black males between 16 and 24.

In each instance the structural and cyclical crises of U.S. capitalism go unmentioned. These processes are purposely ignored in their rush to blame Afro-Americans for everything from high unemployment, to the national debt and racism itself.

THOMAS SOWELL:

Black culture causes inequality

Sowell argues that racism and exploitation are alien to capitalism. While he acknowledges that the causes of racial inequality are "multiple," none of these causes are rooted in the capitalist system and all are generated by the culture of the victims of inequality.⁶

Based upon this "understanding," Sowell concludes that the capitalist market tends to pay racial and ethnic groups at the average level of their aggregate productivity.⁷ The capitalist structure is, therefore, inherently anti-racist; inequality results from the inherent cultural inadequacies of Afro-Americans.

"The point," Sowell declares, "is not to praise, blame or rank whole races and cultures.

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The point is simply to recognize that *economic performance differences are quite real and quite large.*" (My emphasis—TM)⁸ Capitalism, therefore, rationally and equitably rewards these "economic performance differences."

Racial inequality reflects capitalism's rational ordering of inherent cultural differences between racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, racial inequality is a recognition that: "Some cultures have been more technologically or organizationally effective than others . . ."⁹

What is manifested in the unequal status of Afro-Americans, according to Sowell, is their "technological or organizational effectiveness," not racism inherent to the system. One is struck by the enormity of the blame-shifting. Sowell's point is to praise capitalism and condemn Black people, to apologize for U.S. capitalism's historic and inherent racism and to attack the struggle against it.

To further make this point, Sowell adopts as the measure of "technological or organizational effectiveness," IQ test performance. This standard is designed to obscure the significance of the contribution of Afro-American material and spiritual culture to the life of the U.S. working class and people. Furthermore, Sowell appears unmindful of the opinion of the majority of social scientists that IQ test performance neither measures intellectual potential nor the level of a people's culture. However, these tests have proven to be biased against sociologists Blacks, women and the working class. The I.Q. tests first appeared in the early years of this century and were used to discriminate against Jewish, Italian, Polish, Chinese and other immigrants. More recently, they have been used to justify the denial of social and economic equality to Afro-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans and women. What Sowell argues is that IQ test performance represents the intellectual inability of Afro-Americans to perform at the level of white ethnic groups.

Sowell portrays Black life and culture as pathological and socially disorganized. He claims to have "discovered" that, not only are Afro-Americans less intelligent, but they are

lazy as well. He says, ". . . the enduring stigma of hard manual, or menial labor has produced an anti-work ethic handicapping blacks . . ." ¹⁰

Such nonsense indicates that Sowell, not the Afro-American people, is pathological—specifically, he suffers from self-hatred. Sowell serves his masters well. He says what racists think, but dare not say. From the sewer of racist stereotypes, Sowell brings forward the following "observations": "No one seriously doubts that black Americans as a group play better basketball than white Americans or that Jews are disproportionately represented among the great violinists of the world."

Sowell is justifying the brutal exclusion of millions of Afro-Americans from access to scientific and technological education and to the arts generally. The outcome of Sowell's position would be to rationalize a new racist division of labor in the epoch of computers and robots in which Afro-Americans, our youth in particular, would be reduced to social and economic outcasts. Sowell's mindless fascination with capitalism leads him to accept the growing poverty among Black people and the repression designed for those who are seen as social pariahs.

These views, of course, are not new. Herbert Spencer, the founder of Social Darwinism in the 19th century and, more recently, certain socio-biologists, argue that capitalism socially orders inherent cultural and genetic capabilities and limitations of individuals and racial groups. Motivated by this perspective, Sowell holds that inequality is both inevitable and necessary.¹¹

Along with the Right-wing economists Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, Sowell holds that inequality is a condition of freedom. The questions Sowell must answer are—Freedom for whom? Inequality for whom? His answer is a forthright admission that capitalist freedom requires class exploitation, racial and gender oppression.

Milton Friedman argues that, ultimately, the measure of freedom is the extent to which monopoly capital is unfettered in its drive for maximum profit. As such, Sowell holds that, in perpetuating and utilizing inequalities based upon race and gender, monopoly capital epit-

omizes "rationality." (Rationality is academic language which denotes class interest.) Hence, capitalism, according to these theorists, does not create racial and gender inequality, it merely rationally orders them in a manner that supports the drive for maximizing profit.

Moreover, Sowell argues, bourgeois democracy can only afford Afro-Americans' legal equality, not substantive equality.¹² In return for what is no more than the illusion of equality, Afro-Americans, the working class and women must "refrain from interfering with the choice of individuals."¹³—which means, refrain from conducting struggles to better their lives and expand democracy.

WALTER WILLIAMS:
Racism is a rational choice

Walter Williams constructs a "sophisticated" deductive argument in defense of racial inequality. He develops language and definitions which are devoid of social significance and, therefore, have meaning only within the narrow confines of his logic. For instance, Williams substitutes for the socially meaningful concept "racial inequality," the words "prejudice" and "discrimination." Both are used in a manner that removes any social significance from them and leaves them with meaning only within Williams' system. "Prejudice" in Williams' system is merely to prejudice—as he says, to make a judgement based upon the existing level of knowledge. Discrimination is an informed preference, as in being "discriminating in one's tastes."

Language and definitions in Williams' system serve a very specific class purpose. He redefines racism in such a manner as to allow him to characterize monopoly capital's inherent racism as rational behavior whose *intent* is solely to expand freedom and prosperity. Thus, to limit the "right" of monopoly capital to *prejudice* or *discriminate* is to limit the freedom of choice and, therefore, undermine freedom and prosperity.

For Williams, regardless of the results, the intent of monopoly capital has nothing to do with racism. Thus begins what will become a shameless defense of racism under the guise of

protecting freedom of choice and capitalist rationality.

Like Sowell, he argues that racism is too costly for the capitalist to indulge in. Apparently Williams does not find it necessary to consult the vast scholarship that proves the opposite. This includes everything from the National Urban League's annual *State of Black America* reports to Victor Perlo's *Economics of Racism*,¹⁴

This scholarship proves that monopoly capital believes it would be *too costly not to perpetuate racism and the system of double exploitation of Afro-American workers upon which it is based*. Williams, however, argues that the capitalist market rationally sets a price on the economic performance of individuals in a manner that makes "effective business sense." His point is to make it appear that the *intent* of monopoly capital is to make capitalist production and market behavior rational and thereby non-racist. To establish this point, Williams says the following:

It is impossible for an *observer* to say for sure whether choices based on particular physical features reflect the indulgence of *preference* (taste) of the attempt to *minimize information costs* (prejudice) or the recognition of *real difference*. (My emphasis—TM)¹⁵

He then says, ". . . certain discrimination may come from rational behavior of individuals minimizing information costs or confronting real differences in the market."¹⁶

When Williams speaks of what is "*possible for an observer to say*," it can not be overlooked that his observation is from monopoly capital's side of the class divide. As such, his "observations" of racism are from the class position of monopoly capital, the most racist force in our society. He articulates the question in a way that totally removes capitalism from any blame and finds Afro-Americans and the working class to be the cause of racial inequality. In dealing with racism in the hiring and promotion practices of large corporations, Williams "observes" that, in actuality, "white recruits have the desired productivity."

Redlining by the banks, for Williams, is not racism, but merely reflects that banks have not

been allowed to charge high enough interest rates to make doing business profitable in the Black community. Nor are ripoff prices charged in the Black community by large food chains, racism. This practice reflects the need to charge more to offset doing business in "high crime areas."

Williams' contempt for his own people is only equalled by his disdain for the minimum wage and the trade union movement. According to Williams, the minimum wage fosters and promotes racism. Demonstrating the perverseness of his reasoning, Williams argues:

Suppose the employer has a *preference* for white employees over black employees . . . If there is such a law as the minimum wage law that requires the employers pay the same wages no matter who is hired, what are the incentives? His incentives are that of *preference indulgence*. (Emphasis in original)¹⁷

In his set of suppositions, Williams never once *supposes* that a "preference for white over black employees" could be racist. Nor does he *suppose* that racism constitutes a material incentive for monopoly capital in order to maximize profits. Or that the "preference indulgence" of monopoly is not for Afro-American or white workers, but for maximum profit.

Williams makes other assertions. He argues that the minimum wage "forces" employers to pay Afro-American workers above the value of their labor. This assertion is, of course, based on the oldest of racist stereotypes. That is, Afro-Americans are lazy, unproductive and more costly to hire than are whites. It has recently been argued that even during chattel slavery, Blacks were paid above their level of productivity.¹⁸ Moreover, according to Williams, whatever price monopoly capital is prepared to pay Afro-American workers should be accepted, because, in all likelihood, it reflects their level of productivity. The deeper point, however, is that workers in general should accept whatever crumbs monopoly capital is willing to give them. When so doing, William argues, workers and Afro-Americans are behaving rationally; but when they act in their own class interest they become suddenly irrational.

Williams' "observations" are so superficial that he is unable to understand that racism is first and foremost an economic category. As such, it is an inevitable and necessary part of capitalist relationships of production. The drive for maximum profit is the socio-economic foundation of racism. Therefore, to the extent that Williams defends the class interest of monopoly capital and the drive for maximum profits, to the same extent, must he defend racism. To obscure this reality, Williams descends to new levels of idiocy. He says, "Employers' substitution of higher skilled workers [to be read "white workers"] for low-skilled workers [to be read Black workers] is (one) effect of the minimum wage law."¹⁹

The question must be put to Williams: When the transnationals close down plants and even entire industries, moving those plants to South Africa, South Korea and Taiwan, are they substituting "higher skilled workers for low-skilled workers" or are they substituting nations with repressive regimes, which have no minimum wage and which outlaw and brutally repress unions, for those where workers have these rights?" The answer is obvious to all but Williams and the motley group of flunkies who follow him. Williams not only wants the minimum wage outlawed, he also wishes to overturn the Wagner Act, which legally protects the right of workers to collective bargaining. According to Williams, like the minimum wage, the Wagner Act and the trade unions generally, foster racism.²⁰ It is clear that he opposes sanctions against South Africa, because he would like to establish a similar racist, anti-labor regime in this country.

The reactionary depth of Williams' line is further illustrated when South Africa is used as an example. If, as he argues, the minimum wage, the Wagner Act and trade unions are responsible for racism, then how does Williams explain the legal system of apartheid fascism in South Africa where there is neither a minimum wage nor legal protection of collective bargaining? Furthermore, if the minimum wage causes high Black unemployment, how does Williams propose to explain the absence of a minimum

wage in South Africa, side-by-side with horrible levels of unemployment among South Africa's Black majority?

Williams is unable to explain the contradiction between reality and his assertions because to do so would demand that he admit that the minimum wage does not restrict "freedom," but rather restricts the depth of bestiality to which monopoly capital will (and does) go to maximize profits.

Williams' abuse of Afro-Americans and the trade-union movement is boundless. In order to substantiate his position that U.S. white workers are the cause of racism, he argues, "As in South Africa, unions in the United States are also supporters of the minimum wage laws."²¹ He ignores what most school children know. The white unions in South Africa are controlled by the apartheid regime. As such they oppose the extension of a minimum wage or and protection to Black workers. They do, however, support the confinement of Black workers to the lowest paying jobs with the worst conditions. Most importantly, not only have the U.S. trade unions fought to raise the minimum wage for youth, they have led the struggle for solidarity with the Black unions in South Africa and against apartheid's super-exploitation of Black workers. Unlike the U.S. working class, Williams dishonors Afro-Americans and the nation by his opposition to the minimum wage and his objective support for apartheid.

GLENN LOURY:

Black capitalism and traditional values

Loury asserts, ". . . all things considered, America is a good and great nation that affords vast opportunity to those prepared to apply themselves."²² Loury is not defending America, but monopoly capitalism as a system "that affords vast opportunity." The deeper suggestion however, is that Afro-Americans' unequal status results from their "not applying themselves."

In order that Afro-Americans might afford themselves of the "vast opportunities" of capitalism, Loury proposes "self-reliance" and a return to "traditional morality." Self-reliance is nothing more or less than Black capitalism. It is

from behind this tattered and discredited banner that Loury launches attacks upon affirmative action and justifies the bestial cuts in social and economic programs by the Reagan Administration. Black capitalism "advocates turning away from government and stressing self-reliance." He defends this strategy because "the historic cancer of racism has abated." Indeed, while the process of racism's abatement advances among the working people, at the level of the Reagan Administration and monopoly capital it has dramatically intensified.

"Traditional morality," for Loury means submission to the dictates of racism. Loury has utter contempt for the working-class morality embodied in the increasing boldness in the struggle for equality. For Loury, it is not U.S. imperialism and its promotion of exploitation, racism and death around the world that epitomizes immorality, but the Afro-American people.

Loury advocates a return to the strategy of Booker T. Washington. In the early years of the twentieth century, Washington called upon Afro-Americans to submit to racism and accept their place at the bottom of the racist division of labor. His slogan, which expressed this capitulation to racism was "Put your buckets down where you are." If, as W.E.B. DuBois argued at that time, the strategy of submission was suicidal, it is more so today. In the epoch of computers and robots, of space stations and the historic advance of all sciences, it is a crime against Black people to suggest their separation into the barrack rooms of ghetto capitalism under the guise of "self reliance." The crime is compounded by calling this betrayal "return to traditional morality." For Afro-Americans to accept such a strategy would be tantamount to social suicide.

Loury and his colleagues, like the ultra-right racists generally, oppose Afro-Americans' political assertiveness. In the face of the eloquence of the political sophistication of Afro-Americans, Joseph Perkins makes the following statement,

. . . blacks have been very *unsophisticated politically*.

They have relied on their leaders to tell them what to think politically and how to behave at the ballot box. In short, black politics has been the politics of hegemony. (My emphasis—TM)²³

To satisfy Perkin's definition of "sophistication," Black folk would have had to have voted for Reagan rather than 95 per cent against him in 1980 and 1984. The election and reelection of Harold Washington in Chicago; the election of Blacks as mayors in four of the nation's five largest cities; the election of 23 independent-minded members of the Congressional Black Caucus; and Black folks championing the candidacy of Jesse Jackson for the U.S. presidency is, for Perkins, "politically unsophisticated." Perkins is unable to see that Afro-Americans have not "relied on their leaders to tell them what to think politically," but have produced that leadership which best reflects the class and all-peoples interests of the Afro-American community. What Afro-Americans have not done is follow the bankruptcy represented by Perkins and his colleagues. This, as well, is eloquent testimony to the political sophistication of Black folk.

Loury, Perkins, Elizabeth Wright and Larry Thompson can only view Afro-Americans in the most negative light. Rather than seeing the enormous accomplishments of Afro-Americans, they adopt a pro-racist characterization of the Black community as crime-ridden, pathological and degenerate. They see Black youth, especially males between 16 and 24, as a new lumpenproletariat whose only ambitions are to commit crime, take drugs and have irresponsible sex. Millions of Black youth, therefore, are not entitled to anything but police repression and long prison terms.

Thompson argues for tough police action against Black youth, the suspension of their civil rights and the wider use of the death penalty.²⁴ While he calls for the harshest police measures against Black youth, he has no proposals to deal with racist violence against Afro-Americans. Nothing is said about the KKK, the American Nazi Party, the Aryan Brotherhood and other racist organizations which openly call for violence against Blacks. No mention is made of

Howard Beach, of the police murders in New York and other parts of the nation, nor of the frightful Philadelphia events in May 1985, that left eleven people dead, five of them children, and an entire neighborhood burned to the ground. Who is to blame for this? Thompson and the "new Black conservatives" would probably blame this, too, on Afro-Americans.

WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON: Once again

In the *New York Times Book Review*,²⁵ Wilson says that he is a social democrat, holding views that parallel those of Michael Harrington. Be that what may, his book, *The Declining Significance of Race*,²⁶ provides aid and comfort to the enemies of full equality. Like the "Black conservatives," Wilson argues that capitalism, in its post-industrial stage, no longer has a need for racism. Like them, he fails to see that racism is primarily an economic category and there exists an inherent relationship between the oppression of Afro-Americans and the system that exploits all workers.

Wilson sees racism primarily as a past and outdated policy of government. He states, for instance that the "state . . . has in recent years promoted racial equality."²⁷ This in the face of the unprecedented racist drive of the Reagan Administration. Capitalism, he suggests, through its evolution, has outlived its need for racism. Wilson holds that racial barriers are no longer an obstacle to "the greatest opportunities for the better-trained, talented and educated" Afro-Americans.²⁸ This thinking constitutes Wilson's concept of the *reracialization of the capitalist structure* and the bourgeois state. On this matter he says,

Since World War II both political changes of the state and structural changes in the economy have contributed to a *gradual and continuous process of deracialization in the economic sector . . . a process in which racial distinctions gradually lose their importance in determining individual mobility in the United States.*²⁹

The myth of the declining significance of race is based upon the equally erroneous myth about the "flourishing opportunities" available to the so-called Black middle class. It never oc-

curs to Wilson that, in the professions generally, and especially in the natural sciences, Afro-Americans remain a miniscule proportion. In many areas, such as mathematics, computer science, physics and engineering, Afro-Americans are practically nonexistent.

The numbers of Afro-Americans in colleges and universities have taken an alarming decline in the seven years of Reagan, putting the totals below those of the late '60s. The myth of equality in the sciences and professions and the so-called separation of racism from capitalism is used by Wilson to argue that the real problems are "purely" class problems.

Wilson's peculiar "class analysis" leads him to oppose affirmative action as "race-specific" and unable to garner broad political support.³⁰ Wilson demands that:

public policy programs . . . attack inequality on a broad class front . . . that go beyond the limits of ethnic and racial discrimination by directly confronting the pervasive and destructive features of class subordination.³¹

Fortunately for Afro-Americans and the working class, the AFL-CIO, primarily the industrial unions which constitute its leading core, do not share Wilson's "class analysis." They have come out squarely in favor of affirmative action. Wilson's misunderstanding of class and, more importantly, the class struggle lead him to the erroneous conclusion that, under recessionary economic conditions, "the more that public programs are perceived by members of the wider society as benefitting only certain groups, the less support these programs will have."³²

Wilson fails to understand that, just as racism is inherent in the class structure, the sharpening of the class struggle leads workers to the recognition that racism is alien to their class and its objectives. Workers understand far more about affirmative action than does Professor Wilson. Increasingly, they see the struggle for affirmative action as not merely "race specific," but as working-class specific, as a measure to overcome the racial inequality imposed on the working class by the bosses.

In, *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*, and in recent articles, Wilson claims to speak for the "truly disadvantaged." Wilson offers too little too late. He calls for "rational government involvement in the economy." This involves long-term planning, wage and price stability, favorable employment conditions, manpower training and education.

Wilson, however, fails to propose measures that would enable the government to implement a national jobs program. Nowhere does he mention drastic cuts in the military budget, a reversal of the Reagan regressive tax policies, the nationalization of plants and industries targeted for closure, etc. Hence, talk of "rational government" and jobs programs is little more than academic grandstanding. Though he admits that Afro-Americans have been most severely affected by the combined impact of structural and cyclical crises, he is unable to recognize how this manifests the inherent racism of the capitalist system. Nor does he seem to understand how the impact of these crises is worsened by the racist edge of the Reagan Administration's economic and financial policies. He, therefore, is unable to understand that any solution to this situation, while addressing the impact of these crises upon working people in general, must take emergency and forceful measures to alleviate the special impact upon Afro-Americans.

Furthermore, Wilson is unable to see that "rational government" will only be realized as a consequence of the defeat of Reaganism and its supporters in 1988. This will be the result of unity—class unity and all-people's unity.

THE ROLE OF DEMOCRACY & GOVERNMENT

The views held by the "new Black conservatives" on democracy and the state are quite significant. Sowell, for instance, argues that inequality is built into the nature of human beings. Government must not upset this natural order. When government acts to guarantee and protect the rights of Afro-Americans and others who have historically faced discrimination, it runs the risk of creating greater inequalities and

the "increased concentration of political power inequalities."³¹ Government, as he says, must be constrained in its support for and protection of the civil rights of its citizens. Government and the courts should not go beyond the guarantee of legal equality to the racially oppressed men and women.

Moreover, Sowell suggests, that while guaranteeing formal equality, what he considers natural inequalities must be perpetuated. In other words, government and the courts should do nothing in the areas of affirmative action and comparable worth, because these inequalities are what Sowell considers "natural."

"Limited government" or what Sowell calls the "constrained state," is limited to protecting the class interest and freedom of the wealthiest corporations and individuals. His opposition to so-called big government, is essentially opposition to an expansion of government's role in defense of the people's rights.

Though claiming to base his thinking on the original intent of the framers of the constitution, his actual intent is to turn the government and the courts into the private property of the largest corporations. In this respect, Sowell does not differ from Ollie North, John Poin-dexter, William Casey and the other Iran-Con-tribute criminals. They claimed that, in breaking the law, they were living up to the original intent of the constitution. Like them, Sowell believes in narrowing and even eliminating the democratic aspects of our legal and governmental system.

Walter Williams contends that to the extent that government expands its role in defense of democracy, to that extent does it limit freedom.³⁴ This lopsided thinking is understandable only if one recognizes what Williams means by freedom. His "freedom" is the unfettered "right" of monopoly capital to exploit workers and oppress racial minorities and women. Democracy, on the other hand, is the action of people in defense of their rights. For Williams, the two are incompatible. Hence, in defense of freedom, Williams supports a large government role against democracy and the civil rights of the people.

Finally, these views represent a deeply anti-democratic sentiment. As such, they are totally opposed to the interest of the Afro-American people. It is a monumental hypocrisy that this motley group of opportunists and charlatans would dare suggest that theirs is a "Black agenda." In the last analysis, they are highly paid tools of the most anti-Black, anti-workingclass, anti-women and anti-people political and ideological forces in our nation. Their exposure and defeat is part and parcel of and crucial to the defeat of Reaganism, for peace, democracy and social progress. □

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The Path to Equality

KENDRA ALEXANDER

In 1867, Karl Marx, in his epoch-making work *Capital*, made the penetrating observation, "Labor can not emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." Guided by this great truth throughout its sixty-eight years, the Communist Party, USA has had as a cornerstone of its policy, the continuous theme that the freedom cause of Black people is absolutely essential to the emancipation objective of the U.S. working class and the democratic development of the nation as a whole.

This sixty-eight year tradition was built on the heritage established by pioneer Marxists in the United States. F.A. Sorge and Joseph Weydemeyer, for example, exemplified the abolitionist contribution of early Marxists. They agitated and organized against slavery among northern workers. They helped raise troops for and fought in the Union army during the Civil War and they strove to organize Black and white workers together in unions.

Early socialist parties in the U.S., however, failed to work out a program of demands to end the special oppression of Black people. Daniel DeLeon, leader of the Socialist Labor Party from 1890 to 1914, advanced one of the erroneous views behind that failure. Black people, he said, are "a special division in the ranks of labor. In no respect is [the Black worker] different from fellow wage-slaves of other races."¹

The Communist Party, USA, from its inception, rejected this view.

William Z. Foster wrote:

... from the beginning, the Communist Party had broken with the white chauvinist traditions of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party and recognized that that the Negro question was a special one, requiring special demands and special methods of struggle.²

This is a paper presented at the West Coast Marxist Scholars Conference, November 1987, by Kendra Alexander, chairwoman of the Northern California District, CPUSA.

This very brief historical view is presented to establish the fact that the nature of the oppression of Black people had engaged the interest and attention of the earliest Marxists in the United States. Today it is no less important.

What is the nature of the oppression of Black people? Is it racial, class or national? Or is it all three? The answers to these questions lie, in the first place, in the very history of the development of the U.S. nation.

From the 17th century, up to the Civil War, Black people, brought to this country as slaves, came mainly from tribal formations of the people of West Africa. Their distinctive racial characteristics were used to develop many pseudo-scientific theories of Black "racial inferiority" to justify racism and national oppression.

White supremacist racism arose to justify the slave trade, beginning the arguments for the alleged inferiority and sub-human character of Africans to justify their enslavement.

As slave uprisings increased and the whole institution of slavery came under increasing attack, the slave owners and their sympathizers developed this further into a body of racist thought and practice. History, biology, psychology, anthropology, religion and philosophy—all were bent to the service of racist propaganda.

It is important to remember that slavery was not just in the interest of the slave owners. The introduction of slavery into the newly developing U.S. nation was the instrument for the rapid primitive accumulation of capital. Slavery was by then an outmoded social and economic system which had given way to feudalism throughout Europe and where England and Germany had already spawned capitalist development.

There was, therefore, no reason for the use of slavery in the early 1800s in this part of the world, except for the rapid accumulation of capital. The "reason" was found in the racial distinctiveness of the African slaves. Thus the

racial stereotypes and propaganda were born. This body of racist ideology has survived and expanded well beyond the abolition of slavery.

Why? John Pittman, wrote,

Racist ideology derives from the organic incorporation of racism in the production relations, that is, in the economic structure and real foundation of U.S. state monopoly capitalism. An historically developed relation of capitalist production, originating in primitive accumulation, rooted in chattel slavery in the economic base, and subsequently reinforced and maintained by the super-structure complex of legal, political, social and cultural institutions, racism functions through the division of labor to fragment the working class and all working people. It incessantly generates a corresponding ideology which helps create competition and antagonism among various racial and national components of the working people. It thereby serves to perpetuate the exploiters' subjugation and exploitation of all working people and the super-exploitation of the racially and nationally oppressed.³

It is clear that racist ideology was used to justify slavery and the rapid accumulation of capital and it was quickly incorporated into the very foundation of the economic and social base of the developing capitalist system in the U.S. nation. Racism proved extremely profitable.

Capitalism in the U.S. pulled itself up by the "bootstraps" of enslaved Black labor. It was built upon the genocide of Native Americans, the holding of indentured servants, theft of Mexico's land, colonization of Puerto Rico and the ruthless exploitation of immigrants, particularly from Asia. All for the sake of profits.

This special web of racism, plunder and exploitation, rooted in the slave system and continuously utilized to this day, has afforded U.S. capitalism a rapid rise to the number one position among capitalist countries.

Therefore, it is important for Marxists in 1987, to understand that racism is part of the nature of oppression of Black people. But that does not mean that racism is inherent or born into white people; in fact, it is inherent in the development of capitalism in the U.S. Conse-

quently, the fight against racism must be directed at its root cause: capitalism itself. Gus Hall, general secretary of the CPUSA, places it this way,

The struggle against racism must be directed at demands on the corporations for shorter hours, for affirmative action programs. They must be interwoven with demands for government-sponsored programs for retraining at union wages, for extension and increases of employment benefits.⁴

Do Black people face oppression and exploitation as workers? I opened this paper with Marx's famous quote, "labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the Black it is branded." Even under conditions of slavery, Marx viewed Black people as an integral component of the working class.

After the Civil War and the planned systematic destruction of reconstruction from 1865-1877, Black people remained primarily tied to the land under the brutal sharecropper system. There was some migration from southern rural areas to the cities in the North during the period of World War I from 1916-1923; however, the overwhelming majority of Black people remained in the South on the land. In fact, in whole areas of the South, Black people constituted a majority of the population. These areas of Black majority were the former old cotton country which became known as the "Black Belt" region.

Marxists during this period concluded that the Black majority in the "Black Belt" constituted a nation made up primarily of an exploited peasantry. This designation was based on the definition of nationhood advanced by Joseph Stalin: "A nation is an historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture."⁵ Such a designation carried with it the right of self-determination, including the right to secede from the oppressor nation.

However, even though this was the stated view of the CPUSA at this time, there were correct cautions raised. James S. Allen, in a pamphlet entitled, *Negro Liberation*, published in

1938, said, "A nation does not drop out of a clear sky ready-made; it has its beginnings, develops through various stages, and also may decline."⁶ (my emphasis—K.A.)

Gus Hall in a speech delivered on the occasion "Negro History Week" in February 1951, warned against any position which would place all 14 million Black people as a part of the "Negro Nation." Any attempt to do so would dilute the struggle for the full economic, social and political rights of Black people in the nation as a whole. He said further, "This concept does not see the Negro as an integral part of the working class."

In the mid to late 1950s the Communist Party undertook a major study of then current conditions of Black people in the United States. The results of that study and the Party's discussion which ensued were published in a pamphlet entitled, *New Features on the Negro Question in the U.S.*⁷

What the study found was that, during and after World War II, there was a huge migration of Black people off the land into the cities of both the South and the North. For example, between 1940 and 1950 the Black population in Michigan and California doubled.

This migratory trend continued, so that by 1958, of the 7.5 million Black people in the civilian labor force, 5.5 million were employed in non-agricultural industry. And only 758,000 were employed in agriculture.

These figures clearly indicated that by 1958 the class composition of Black people had dramatically shifted from primarily peasant to overwhelmingly working-class. Another consequence of the study and the discussion was the conclusion that not only had the class composition of Black people shifted, but they were concentrated, far beyond their numbers, in the basic industries particularly auto and steel.

This discussion resulted in the adoption, in 1959, of a new theoretical delineation of the nature of the oppression of Black people. The Communist Party defined Black people as overwhelmingly working class, constituting a national minority within the U.S. The Party ad-

vanced the demand for full, complete equality in every sphere of life, economic, political social and cultural. And concluded further that the struggle against the ideology and practice of racism was the responsibility of every Communist.

Today the Afro-American community is in essence a working-class community. Over 90 per cent of Black people are workers. Black people comprise around 11 per cent of the total population, but they are 15 per cent of union membership and 25-30 per cent of the union membership in the basic industries of auto and steel.

A marked and major consequence of the special oppression directed against Black people is the fact that in their 90 per cent majority they are working-class. This high proportion points to the basic class source of Black oppression and indicates the monopolists' super profit-making object of oppression.

Racism is used to pay Black workers less, to deny them access to training, to bar them from upgrading and promotion, to consign them to the least desirable and lowest paid jobs and to create a vast pool of unemployed. All this increases the amount of profits taken by capitalists and adds destructive competitive pressures between workers.

The twin aspects of racial oppression and class exploitation of Black people can not be separated one from the other. They are two sides of the same coin. In fact, it is these two elements of the oppression of Black people which has forged the national aspect of the oppression and the resistance to it.

The oppression of Black people in the United States is a national question of a special kind, of a special type.

Black people are a component part of the U.S., suffering the oppression of a national minority. Black people are integral to the U.S. nation, but are deprived of their rightful full and equal status in the family of the U.S. nation.

The national aspect of the oppression manifests itself in the fact that racism subjects all social and class strata of Black people to racist humiliation and violation of their dignity as

human beings.

This exploitation has a three-fold effect on Black women. To the affects of class and national oppression must be added the impact of ideology and practice of male supremacy. Thus, millions of Black women are forced to work under below-standard conditions and for wage rates that extract an added measure of surplus value from their labor.

In spite of the fact that Black people speak in the language common to the rest of the nation and have made major contributions to the economy and culture of the nation, the severe patterns of anti-Black discrimination and white racial exclusiveness have compelled them to be a people apart. They are set apart by identifiable features of their African origin and by barricades of physical segregation especially in housing, schools and job classifications.

Regardless of this continued attempt to segregate and isolate Black people, they have consistently fought for their full status as equal citizens of the U.S. nation. And in the course of this struggle, they have continuously asserted their identify as a distinctive people.

The singular experience of, and the epic struggle against slavery's horror and its aftermath were unique factors which fused a national consciousness that continues to be tempered in the ongoing struggle for freedom. It is such singular historical and contemporary experiences which contribute to and account for the special national features of the culture of Black people.

The particular national aspect of the Afro-American people has its distinctive cultural expression in a rich and growing body of literature and artistic creation. It is also seen in the prideful reclaiming of their history and in the popularization of the taste and style of American and African origin. This fight for self-determined aesthetic standards and art forms based on Black people's own historical and contemporary experience and creativity is an important part of the general struggle for dignity and freedom. At the same time, it enriches the culture of the whole nation.

The national aspect of the struggle lies in

the common history, common oppression and common destiny of Black people. Black people are welded together by the fact and by the knowledge of the fact that their situation demands they move together as a group.

There are numerous examples of this national consensus of Black people. The virtual unanimous support of Black people for the Civil Rights movement of the '60s and the hero status conferred on Martin Luther King Jr. The national consensus to change their name from Negro to Black is an affirmation of the pride in their history, culture, traditions and color. The solid support among Black people for the freedom of Angela Davis, even though she was a Communist and many did not share her ideological views, was a national Black consensus that she was being persecuted because she was a Black woman who stood firm for her beliefs; and, today, the 80-90 per cent majority who work and vote for the candidacy of Jesse Jackson because he's Black, but equally important, because he addresses concerns and issues which affect Black and working people. William Z. Foster, said,

We must understand and deal with the Negro question in its three-fold complexity. As a class question, a racial question and overall as a national question. We can not discard any of these three factors without falling into theoretical and practical confusion.⁸

Lenin said, "In our time the proletariat alone upholds the real freedom of nations and the unity of all nations."

The triple nature of the oppression of Black people, while a heavy burden to bear, places them at the strategic center of the struggle for unity of the working class and oppressed peoples.

Here is a people discriminated against based on race, exploited based on class and nationally oppressed based on history, culture and struggle. Black people have seen oppression and exploitation from all angles. They have conducted relentless struggles on all fronts.

Through their constant drive for freedom they have more clearly defined their enemy and
(Continued on page 35)

The Afro-American Community: Unity and Diversity

TIMOTHY V. JOHNSON

The Afro-American community is not monolithic. It is composed of many classes and social strata. However, due to the particularities of oppression of Afro-Americans, there is an all-class unity within the Afro-American community that forms in the course of the struggle for equality. Nevertheless, each class continues to play its own unique role, influencing how it sees the path to equality. It is therefore, extremely useful to look at the class composition of the Afro-American community and the different roles the various classes are playing in the struggle.

The purpose of any class analysis is to gauge the level of development and influence of specific classes in society. Having a correct, empirically grounded perspective of classes, and understanding their objective development and interrelationships, is a critical precursor to formulating a strategy to advance the interests of the working class.

Grasping the nature and motion of classes in any society is a complex task. This complexity is heightened here in the U.S.—the most advanced capitalist country in the world. This heightened complexity is rendered even more difficult when studying the Afro-American community—where social phenomenon often appear in a distorted form due to the effects of national oppression.

Before looking at the class structure of the Afro-American community, it is helpful to briefly restate some basic concepts, beginning with the category of “class.”

The classic definition (Lenin’s) of social classes states that they are

... large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labor, and, consequently, by the di-

mensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.¹

Of these four class-forming criteria, Lenin singled out one as primary. He stated:

The fundamental criteria by which classes are distinguished is the place they occupy in social production, and, consequently, the relation in which they stand to the means of production.²

The first criterion—the place occupied in a historically determined system of production—aims at viewing groups of people according to where they stand in relation to the production and appropriation of surplus value, as producers of surplus value or extractors of surplus value from others. This criterion is aimed at the very logic of the capitalist system, the production of surplus value. In a society based upon exploitation, as is capitalism, this must be the fundamental criterion.

Where one stands in relation to the second criterion—relationship to the means of production—is largely determined by the first. That is, if one exists through the extraction of surplus value from workers, one probably owns the means of production. Conversely, if one produces surplus value, one is likely to be divorced from ownership of the means of production.

The third criterion—the role in the social organization of labor—concerns issues such as decision-making and management.

Finally, the fourth criterion—the share of the social wealth—is primarily concerned with income.

Within each distinct class, groups of people can be grouped in various strata, based on a specific set of additional criteria. Income level, manual or mental labor and productive or unproductive labor are just a few of the ways that strata within classes can be viewed. The various stratification criteria often have a qualitative impact on the assessments of the class sectors themselves. This is particularly true, for example, of the bourgeoisie, which can be grouped

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into large and small, monopoly and nonmonopoly, capitalists etc.

In any capitalist society the major classes are the bourgeoisie and the working class, although intermediate classes, such as the petit-bourgeoisie, play a large role. The Afro-American community is no exception. Both of the basic classes are present there.

THE AFRO-AMERICAN BOURGEOISIE

The Afro-American bourgeoisie is very small. Due to racism and national oppression, its development and growth have been severely limited. As a result, it has been almost totally excluded from the ranks of monopoly capital.

Defined as those owning means of production and exploiting the labor of others, the bourgeoisie makes up approximately .4 per cent of the Afro-American community. This includes approximately 38,631 businesses with total receipts of \$8.5 billion. These businesses employ over 165,000 workers—predominately Afro-Americans.³

The vast majority of these businesses are very small. The top 100 of the 38,000, representing .2 per cent, account for 11 per cent of all those employed by Black-owned businesses and 39 per cent of the total income of those businesses.

These 100 largest Afro-American companies can be taken to represent the big bourgeoisie in the Afro-American community. The most noticeable aspect of this sector is that it has been entirely shut out from monopoly capital. Thus, it is mainly absent from large manufacturing. Sixty-six of these businesses are aimed primarily, if not entirely, at the Afro-American community and have a limited market potential. Included among these are 53 automobile dealerships, which, due to the large ticket price of cars, add to the aggregate gross receipts of Black businesses but contribute little in terms of employment. In addition there are the more traditional areas of Black-owned business such as hair-care product manufacturing and publishing (Johnson Publishing Co. being the largest of them).

The Afro-American bourgeoisie finds itself

in a contradictory position. On one hand, its class interests are with the bourgeoisie as a whole, and against workers. On the other hand, it finds its ability to participate equally in the economy hindered by racism and national oppression. Consequently, it finds itself allied with Afro-American workers on many issues, particularly issues related to the struggle for equality.

For example, Rev. Jesse Jackson's campaign for the U.S. presidency has succeeded in capturing the support of the majority of the Afro-American people. He is widely viewed as echoing the political sentiments of Afro-American people in his program for jobs, economic justice and equality. At the same time he has been very outspoken in his criticism of transnational corporations.

Given the political direction of Jackson's campaign it might be expected that he would receive little support from the Afro-American business community. However, Jackson has been able to garner relatively large contributions from Black businessmen. Clearly, they see Jackson's run as an attempt to open doors that they could walk through, particularly in terms of potential government contracts to Afro-American businesses. In other words, it is in their class interests, as a sector of the bourgeoisie that has been shut out of the market because of racism, to support Jackson, including his campaign against the dominant transnational corporations.

A similar phenomenon was expressed during the 1983 mayoral campaign of Harold Washington in Chicago. Washington received wide financial support from the Afro-American community, including Black businessmen. To the Afro-American bourgeoisie, Washington represented not only the expansion of democracy, but with that expansion, an increased opportunity for business shut out by racism.

The expansion of democracy that represented workers' rights, equal employment opportunities, the struggle for peace, etc., coincided with an expansion of rights for the Black bourgeoisie—namely equal access to city contracts. Thus, there was a confluence of interests

between the Afro-American bourgeoisie, Afro-American workers and the entire working class.

Yet at the same time these businesses fight to expand democracy for all Black people, faced with heavy competition from larger corporations, they often bitterly oppose unionization of their companies. In so doing, they contribute to the very problem they oppose in society as a whole, the limitation of the buying power of the Afro-American consumer—a key problem for many Black businesses.

Thus Afro-American business plays a contradictory role. A similar pattern can be found in the mass movements for equality. While the Black bourgeoisie is supportive of the democratic struggles, it puts its particular class "spin" to it. Thus, the struggle for jobs often becomes enmeshed in the struggle to support and develop Black businesses. The cry of "Buy Black," which probably reaches its most accepting audience among the smaller bourgeoisie, who are more numerous and less secure, is most often posed as a solution to the problem of high unemployment among Afro-American workers. In raising the demand this way, the bourgeoisie can often contribute to sidetracking the struggle for jobs that legitimately targets the transnational corporations.

The notion that the development of Black businesses can solve the economic problems of the Afro-American community is clearly fallacious. At their present level of development, Black businesses account for 165,000 jobs. At the official rate, much lower than the actual rate, there are 1.8 million unemployed Afro-American workers. This means that the top 100 Black businesses would have to expand their present size over 100 times in order to employ all of the officially unemployed Afro-American workers—not to mention that many of the jobs created would be in low-wage categories.

On the other hand, the monopoly-controlled auto industry, where Afro-American workers are disproportionately employed, has laid off over 200,000 workers in the past eight years. Rescinding these layoffs of high-paying skilled and unskilled workers, layoffs which have devastated many Afro-American commu-

nities, would clearly do more to solve the unemployment problem than building black businesses.

THE PETIT-BOURGEOISIE

The Afro-American petit-bourgeoisie, defined as those who own means of production but don't exploit the labor of others, accounts for approximately three per cent of the Afro-American people. They operate over 300,000 businesses with total receipts of over three billion dollars per year. These businesses are concentrated in the retail and service sectors.

However, these statistics are somewhat deceiving. A closer look shows that over 50 per cent of these businesses have net receipts of less than \$5,000 per year. Half of these small businesses are owned by workers and used for supplementary income. Thus, the real percentage of the Afro-Americans in this sector is closer to 1.5 per cent.

The general classic formulation of the petit-bourgeoisie inhabiting a position in-between the bourgeoisie and the working class is true in the case of the Afro-American community as well. Given the small size of their businesses and the high rates of failure, this sector is constantly in danger of being thrown back into the working class. However, their unique position leaves them susceptible, as is the bourgeoisie, to the cry of "Buy Black."

Like the bourgeoisie, they are restricted in their expansion by racism and national oppression. The nature of their enterprises—retail shops, mom and pop stores, and service stations, locates them in the Afro-American community. Here they are sharply restricted by monopoly domination of the broader concerns and the lower income level of their market due also to racist corporate policies.

The vast majority of the Afro-American community, over 96 per cent, consists of workers. This basic fact influences all aspects of Afro-U.S. life. Culture, politics, religion, etc., are all conditioned by this.

Within the working class, Afro-Americans are disproportionately located in several categories. There are heavy concentrations of Black

workers in the industrial labor sector, the service sector and a few areas of the economy outside these two categories. Conversely, Blacks are underrepresented in managerial, professional and highly skilled industrial occupations.

THE WORKING CLASS

Over 2.3 million Afro-American workers are in the industrial labor sector. This is slightly less than 25 per cent of all Blacks presently in the labor force. They are concentrated in such areas as textile (256,000 workers); pressing machine operators (41,000 workers); industrial truck operators (83,000 workers); freight handlers (270,000 workers); general laborers (172,000 workers); and transport workers (621,000).

More than 2.5 million Afro-American workers are in service industries. This is more than 25 per cent of all Blacks in the labor force. Here also, there are several areas of concentration. These include private household workers (290,000); security guards (145,000); health workers (431,000); and building maintenance workers (703,000).

In addition to the industrial and service areas, Afro-Americans are also heavily concentrated among public school teachers and teachers' aides (346,000); postal and mail workers (226,000); and clerical workers (366,000). In all of these sectors, Afro-Americans are disproportionately located.

The job concentrations of Afro-Americans has significance for several reasons. Afro-Americans tend to be concentrated in areas where the workforce is unionized. This is true in both the industrial and service sectors. This fact explains why Afro-Americans are unionized at a higher rate than the workforce in general. In 1985, 24.3 per cent of Afro-Americans in the labor force were unionized, as opposed to the overall rate of 18 per cent. This is a reflection of the fact that industrial laborers, a sector where Afro-Americans are concentrated, were unionized at a rate of 31.8 per cent. In addition, many of the other job categories where Afro-Americans are concentrated have experienced recent growths in organizing, particularly among government

workers, teachers and health care workers.

On the other hand, many of these same areas of concentration are experiencing a decline.

Many industries where Afro-Americans are concentrated have experienced the horrors of plant shutdowns in recent years. Those industries are primarily located in the urban areas of the North, Midwest and East. These industries include, steel, auto and rubber.

In addition, many of the occupations where Afro-Americans are concentrated are declining. Among the Labor Department's list of "Fastest Declining" occupations are private household workers, textile workers, industrial truck operators, pressing machine operators and postal service clerks—all areas where Afro-American workers are heavily concentrated.

In 1974, the official unemployment rate for Afro-Americans was 10.5 per cent, twice as high as the rate for whites of 5 per cent. In 1984, the official rate was 15.9 per cent for Afro-Americans, versus the 6.5 per cent for whites. Also in 1984 the unemployment rate for Afro-American teens stood at 40 per cent. Many of these youth may never have the opportunity to earn a decent wage with regular employment. Unless checked by the implementation of a full employment policy, the unemployment situation in the Afro-American community is destined to worsen.

ROLE OF BLACK TRADE UNIONISTS

Afro-American trade unionists are playing an increasingly critical role in the politics of the Afro-American community, the trade union movement and the nation. Rather than operating as a completely independent force within the Black community, they tend to function within the context of an all-class movement for equality. Although they represent a significant minority among Afro-American workers as a whole, their influence is disproportionately high.

Historically, leadership in the Afro-American community has been centered, almost dominated, by the church. For years the church was the only institution in the Black community

where Afro-American leadership could develop and maintain a base of support. Thus, from Nat Turner to Martin Luther King Jr., the church figured prominently in the struggle for Afro-American equality.

Recently, however, there have arisen two new sectors where Afro-American leadership has emerged—Black elected officials and Black trade unionists.

The increase in the number of Black elected officials is largely attributed to the increase in Afro-American voter participation. Spurred by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which struck down many of the barriers to registration, Afro-Americans have become an increasingly critical factor in electoral struggles. Since 1980 the number of Afro-Americans in the Congress has increased from 18 to 23.

These politicians have played an extremely important role on the struggle for equality. The Congressional Black Caucus has emerged as the key congressional bulwark against the policies of the Reagan Administration. Each year it has issued an alternative federal budget, calling for reduced military spending and increased spending on social programs. The CBC has played an important role in molding a progressive coalition in Congress, allowing for the inclusion of white and Latino congressmen in their activities.

Afro-Americans have become mayors of a number of important cities in the U.S., including Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Birmingham, New Orleans and Atlanta. In addition, Afro-Americans have assumed leadership positions in numerous city councils and state governments.

That Black elected officials would constitute the most progressive wing of the Democratic Party is not surprising. Their views are a reflection of the communities they represent, which are overwhelmingly working class. In addition, their communities suffer from racism and national oppression. This provides the objective conditions for the Left-leaning policies of many Black elected officials.

Probably the most outstanding example of the local impact of Black elected officials is Har-

old Washington, the late mayor of Chicago. This example also illustrates the growing role of Afro-American trade unionists.

Washington, in his bid for the mayor's seat, put together a coalition that included the Afro-American community, Latinos, trade unionists and progressive whites. This coalition was capable of electing Washington twice and changing the composition of the city council.

The core of Washington's coalition was the Afro-American community. However, within that core, a decisive role was played by Afro-American trade unionists.

Afro-American trade unionists had a dual role in Washington's 1983 campaign. First, they provided an organizational base for the candidate within the Black community. Second, they provided a base for Washington within the entire labor movement.

Beginning with Washington's declaration to run in 1982, Afro-American trade unionists provided much needed support for the campaign. Expressing themselves most decisively through the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) and unions with a large Afro-American membership, they helped bring a sense of organization, structure and class consciousness to the campaign. The roles of Charles Hayes and Addie Wyatt of the United Food and Commercial Workers were particularly significant.

At the same time, Afro-American trade unionists helped to solidify support for Washington throughout the entire labor movement. In the April 1983 primary, the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) had endorsed then Mayor Jane Byrne for reelection. However, after Washington won the primary, the CFL endorsed him.

The shift of the CFL was the result of rank-and-file pressure from the movement of Black workers, especially the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists . . . it was mainly Black workers from basic industrial unions . . . that changed the CFL position.⁴

The role of Afro-American trade unionists, as illustrated in the Washington campaign, indicates the growing significance of the class struggle and the working class for the struggle for equality.

Afro-American trade unionists stand with one foot in each of the two sectors—the Afro-American community and the organized labor movement—that must be united to advance the interests of either and the entire working class.

Consequently, Afro-American trade unionists play a unique role. Within the Afro-American community they are among the most consistent forces for Black-white unity. Their experience in the trade union movement teaches the importance and possibility of unity. As part of the organized section of the working class, they have a clearer concept of the path to equality and are not as easily sidetracked into detours such as "Buy Black. Thus, in national all-class forms like the Black Leadership Roundtable, the CBTU is the most consistent democratic and progressive force.

Likewise, Afro-American trade unionists often act as a catalyst within the trade union movement as a whole. In situations such as the Harold Washington campaign, they play the leading role in galvanizing the trade union movement behind policies that are in the interests of the entire working class.

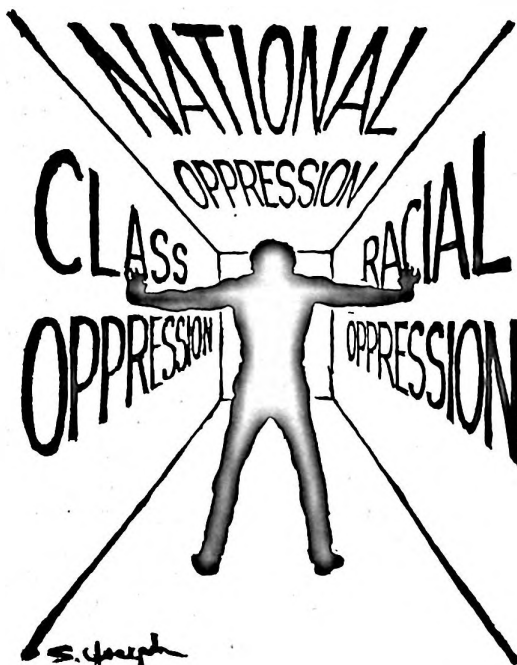
This dual role of Afro-American trade unionists is even more crucial with the confluence of the struggle for equality and the class struggle. As the general crisis of capitalism deepens, the ruling class launches attacks against the

rights of all workers and against the nationally oppressed. These attacks have reached a high point with advent of the Reagan Administration, the most anti-labor and racist administration in recent memory.

However, to defend itself against these attacks, the working class movement and the movement for equality are forced to develop deeper and more profound forms of unity. This unity has been manifested in actions like the 1983 Solidarity Day March on Washington, the April 25 March for Peace and Justice, the Jobs with Justice rallies and thousands of similar actions at the local level.

At the center of these militant demonstrations of unity has been the Afro-American-labor alliance, with Black trade unionists at the center. The development of this alliance must remain the central task for all activists in

the movements for labor and Afro-American rights.



Notes

1. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, Progress Publishers, 1966, p. 421.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 262-263.
3. All statistics are compiled from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1987. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1986.
4. Ted Pearson, "Chicago: Class Struggle in the Electoral Arena." *Political Affairs*, November 1983, p. 34.

Labor's Role in the Fight for Unity

BILL DENNISON

The multi-layered economic crisis and the corporate restructuring of the last decade that have devastated basic industry and the living standards of millions of U.S. workers, has had its sharpest impact on Afro-American workers and the Afro-American people as a whole.

Corporate sponsored racism and national oppression have also made the conditions of life for Latino, Asian-American and Native American peoples especially difficult.

The need for a broad-based, all peoples effort to combat the impact of the crisis, not only on Black and other national minority workers, but on the entire working class, is urgent. Fundamental for the success of such a movement is the unity of the working class and the unity of the working class and its allies.

Building this unity requires special measures to combat the particularly desperate conditions facing the Afro-American, Latino, Asian-American and Native American communities. Affirmative action programs are key in any struggle for equality. Because they represent real and measureable steps forward, they have long been the focus of attack from the enemies of equality.

"Greed is good," is not only the motto of the central character of the movie "Wall Street." It is the national creed of the Reagan Administration.

During the last seven years the U.S. has experienced the most massive shift of wealth from working people to the wealthy in this nation's history. The richest 1 per cent of the people of the country today own more than the 90 per cent of the rest of us. The wealthiest 2 per cent own 54 per cent of all financial assets. The bottom 55 per cent have a zero or negative net worth. Real wages today are lower than they were a quarter of a century ago!

Of the 32.4 million poor in our country, 69 per cent or 22.35 million are white, 9.07 million

are Black and the remaining 1 million are Latino, Asian American and Native American.

In absolute terms the largest numbers of the poor, the hungry, the unemployed and underemployed are white. Still, the sharpest and most catastrophic impact has been on Afro-Americans. One reason is that Afro-Americans are overwhelmingly workers. Another reason is discrimination. It adds a double whammy forcing millions of Black workers into the most desperate conditions.

Although Afro-Americans are 12 per cent of the population, they are 22 per cent of the unemployed; 25 per cent of the uncoun- ted, discouraged workers; and 28 per cent of the poor.

Prior to the structural crisis (the restructuring of industry over the last two decades, causing many plants to shutdown) and the cyclical crisis of 1981-82, Black workers had begun to progress in jobs and promotions in a number of industries. The past years, however, have changed all that. Progress has now more than ground to a halt. It has reversed directions.

The disparity between the fantastically wealthy and the rest of us, Black and white has skyrocketed; the chasm of injustice between those who profit from racism and those who suffer from it has become monumental.

Monopoly's offensive against working people has included an attack on the legal rights of the trade union movement as well as an effort to gut equal rights. The special concentration point is the lowest-paid section of the working class. This situation cripples the efforts of the entire class to protect itself. The plan is to destroy the base of the wage structure and cause its top floors to collapse.

They have singled out for court challenge every possible affirmative action plan. Where possible, they have blocked enforcement of pro-equality laws and regulations with countless legal stratagems.

The class struggle today is more than ever intertwined with the fight for equality and vice

Bill Dennison is labor editor of the *People's Daily World*.

versa. Improvement of the conditions of Black workers is a condition for improving life for the entire working class. It is also true that there can be no successful struggle against the giant and powerful transnational corporations without unity. A fundamental requirement for any working-class advance is unity of the class—in the first place Black-white unity.

Improvement in the conditions of white workers, as well as Blacks, depends upon how securely this unity is welded, how skillfully it is used to mobilize joint actions around common concerns, and how carefully political candidates are chosen and elected to reflect this unity. But unity cannot be built without a recognition of, and a fight to rectify, the special discrimination facing Black workers. In short, unity is impossible without a fight by both Black and white for affirmative action.

The situation of white workers is then, the same as Blacks in this regard—both depend upon the broadest possible unity of the class to achieve meaningful progress.

The genius of Dr. Martin Luther King in his battle against segregation and for equality was his recognition that racism had its source in a system of exploitation and that Black-white unity was required to win economic justice for either. Racism, most of all he argued, was a source of profit. Based on this, he insisted, white workers could be won to oppose racism.

In "Where Do We Go from Here," written only months before his murder, Dr. King said:

The attempt to give moral sanction to a profitable system gave birth to the doctrine of white supremacy. Generally we think of white supremacist views as having their origins with the unlettered, underprivileged, poorer class whites. But the social obstetricians who presided at the birth of racist views in our country were from the aristocracy, rich merchants, influential clergymen, men of medical science, historians and political scientists from some of the leading universities of the nation.

A system driven by greed and profit was the source of racism in the early years of this nation and remains the reason for its perpetuation today.

NEW LEVELS OF UNITY

The fierce economic battles that the nation's trade union movement and peoples' organizations have been, and are now, engaged in has led to a new level of unity among Black and white workers. Some of the bitterest battles against the TNCs have been marked by rising levels of unity—Black and white workers on picket lines fighting side by side. There have been massive solidarity actions that have brought Black and white workers together in unselfish efforts to support each other.

This past November, 3,000—mainly white—trade union members in Texas traveled across their state to participate in a "Jobs with Justice" solidarity rally in behalf of Black women cafeteria workers in the small east-Texas town of Nacogdoches. It was a powerful statement of unity against the racist and male supremacist discrimination that these women have been battling for decades.

The national "Jobs with Justice" (JwJ) campaign itself is an example of a new degree of unity. Initiated by the largest AFL-CIO unions, it has built a coalition of labor, civil rights, women and seniors' organizations that have taken the fight for unity out of the realm of talk and into the realm of action. From the first mass rally of 12,000 in Miami, addressed by union leaders and by Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to the Nacogdoches rally, the JwJ actions have expressed Black-white unity in mass action.

Last year, following the murder of a young Black construction worker in the Howard Beach section of New York City, the N.Y. Central Labor Council unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the murder. It said, "Labor must speak loud and clear that we abhor racism," adding that "labor shall work actively to unite white and Black workers against the real enemy, anti-labor big business and the Reagan Administration."

This year, in New York City, police violence against Blacks and Puerto Ricans has continued. In response, the city's labor movement

organized a mass protest at city hall on the Martin Luther King holiday, January 18, demanding "legislation that will outlaw racist and bias-motivated violence and will establish a permanent special prosecutor to investigate and prosecute acts of racial violence."

One of the important developments in the current Democratic primary election campaign is the response of white workers to the candidacy of Rev. Jesse Jackson. He has been tumultuously welcomed, often from crowds of nearly all white workers.

Perhaps the largest integrated mass meeting of Blacks and whites ever in the deep South took place last year outside Mobile, Alabama. Locked-out paperworkers there, about equally divided between Black and white, cheered the support given them by Jackson.

Another expression of the growing levels of unity is the recent series of union organizing victories in the South, including one at a major General Electric factory in Tennessee.

W. A. Joiner, director of the International Chemical Workers Union's Southeast region, which includes 5 states of the deep South, said recently of the thousands of white members of his union, "I haven't heard any complaints" about affirmative actions programs. He added, not only are they "accepted by whites, they understand why they are needed."

NEW APPEALS TO RACISM

Despite these developments, those who profit from racism are not idle. The corporations have gone to extra racist lengths to sabotage the movement toward unity.

At the struck International Paper plant in Jay, Maine a scab-herding union buster from Birmingham, Alabama, BE&K Construction Co., was brought in. This firm deliberately brought a few Black strike breakers to this predominantly white community. Shortly after this, the Ku Klux Klan announced new organizing efforts in the area. As if to make clear the source of the Klan activity, the company unfurled a giant confederate flag from the plant gate as striking workers and their supporters

neared the plant during a protest march.

In east-Texas, a little over a month after the Jobs With Justice rally took place there, and only 40 miles from Nacogdoches, a Black man was arrested and beaten to death by white policemen. As many saw it, this action was closely connected to the developing Black-white unity that has emerged in that area.

During the bitter strikes and lockouts of meatpacking workers in Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota last year, the biggest meatpacking companies deliberately sought out people of color as strikebreakers—workers who, at any other time, would not have been hired. The company brought in Vietnamese and Laotian workers from Texas. They recruited strikebreakers on reservations, taking advantage of the outrageous number of unemployed among Native American peoples.

In New York City, where Wall Street calls the shots in the mayor's office and where multi-racial unity is the only path to real political change, a rash of police killings and violent racial attacks on Blacks and Latinos have occurred. From the shotgun slaying of a grandmother in 1987 to the recent death-dealing assault on a Black mother and homecare worker, the police have exhibited unrestrained brutality. In all these cases, Mayor Koch has gone out of his way to heighten the racial tensions caused by the events.

To confuse, undermine and divide the consensus for equality that exists, the largest corporations and their politicians are not only busy with racist provocations, they are concocting new disguises for old racist ideas.

The Reaganites and the transnational corporations tell workers that the "economic pie" is shrinking and that times ahead are going to get tougher. Their message to white workers is that any steps to improve the conditions of Afro-American workers must come at their expense.

The fact is that the nation's "economic pie" has not been shrinking. Only the share of the pie received by the working class as a whole has gotten smaller. While all workers wages have declined, the pay of Black workers has declined even more sharply. As a result, the rate of pov-

erty for Blacks has now returned to where it was 10 years ago.

ATTACKS ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

While the Reaganites and the ultra-Right have challenged affirmative action plans in court they have also attempted to build a national constituency against the concept. Because thinking among masses of whites has progressed significantly in the past decade, they can not openly campaign for a return to the past. Instead, they piously claim that they too, oppose discrimination. However, the only "discrimination" they oppose is what they refer to as "reverse discrimination."

The irony of their claiming to be the saviors of white workers "victimized" by "reverse discrimination," is not lost on millions of workers who recognize this administration as the most anti-worker in recent history.

The corporations' pose as the defenders of white workers' interests, but what they are really defending is their own superprofits drawn from the superexploitation of Black workers and the added profits taken from the lower wages imposed on whites as a result of divisions in the class.

They want to hide from demands that the racist wage-gap be closed, not by cutting white workers wages but by raising the pay of Black workers and by accepting unionization of millions Southern workers.

They reject demands for affirmative action and equal opportunity in hiring and promotions, claiming that it is "unfair" to white workers. In reality they know that affirmative action could easily be implemented without cutting any jobs from whites, if they accepted limitations on overtime, speedup and the export of millions of jobs to low wage countries.

There are other, more subtle arguments in defense of racism being offered up these days. But they are just as false. Unfortunately, some of these are being offered inside the trade union movement. And, although they start from different points, they end up at the same place as the Reaganites and the ultra-Right.

One of these is the concept that the class struggle and the class issues facing Blacks have superceded the problems posed by race. Therefore, it is argued, affirmative action is no longer relevant.

However, the most recent statistics on wages, unemployment, poverty, etc., show that the gaps between Blacks and whites are not closing—but in some cases widening. While this form of racism is not imposed by a legal system of seperation, it is still racism.

This form of racism remains an integral part of U.S. monopoly capitalism which has come to rely on the superprofits it extracts from Black Americans.

Developing their defense of racism further, the advocates of this concept argue that, while the "effects of past racism" remain a problem, raising special measures to correct the disparity only divides workers. White workers, they say, can not be won to support special measures to combat discrimination—i.e. affirmative action.

But is racism a thing of the past? With the gap in working and living conditions widening, such a claim becomes hard indeed to defend. To frame the discussion as if racism has disappeared is deliberately fraudulent.

With new aspects of racism being introduced daily, the labor movement dares not ignore the danger, lest it find itself helpless to prevent the resulting disunity. Nothing contributes as much to disunity as one part of the class ignoring the needs of another part.

And thirdly, there is widespread evidence that white workers have not only accepted affirmative action as necessary but are willing to fight for it.

A decline in racist attitudes, however, does not by itself mean an active fight against racism and for unity. Such a fight needs to be organized. To lead it is an important task of the trade union movement, because without it the labor movement can not make bigger advances.

EQUALITY BENEFITS WHITE WORKERS

The only ones who gain any longterm advantage from racism are those who exploit others.

Above all else, the corporations and the

Reaganites work to conceal the self-interest of white workers in opposing racism. Moral opposition to racism, combined with an understanding of self-interest is a powerful combination. When they come together they lead to a higher plateau of struggle. Explaining the self-interest of white workers is one of the most important jobs of the Left in the labor movement.

Affirmative action plans are a good example. In some parts of the construction industry, over the years it has been almost impossible to obtain skilled jobs unless one was the son of a skilled trades worker. Apprenticeships were severely limited to close family members.

One worker, in a case involving Local 28 of the Sheet Metal Workers Union in New York City, testified about the union's apprenticeships. He told the court, "it was a father and son thing, you had to be a relative to become a member."

Prior to 1965, no Black worker had ever been enrolled in the Local 28 apprenticeship program. Nor had anyone who was not a relative of a Local 28 member ever been enrolled. With the imposition of an affirmative action program, apprenticeships were opened to all applicants, Blacks as well as whites—both of whom had been excluded.

The building contractors and some class-collaborationist union leaders were happy with the old situation. For the contractors it meant an almost total halt in organizing the construction industry. For some union leaders the concept meant a smaller membership—and, as they saw it, fewer problems and less competition for the shrinking number of jobs in the industry.

However, the anti-union building contractors were happy to find work for the thousands of construction workers who were locked out of jobs and the union. Nonunion companies were set up, often by the same union contractors (double-breasting), and a whole sector of the industry went nonunion.

In the course of the fight for affirmative action, the entire process of who gets a job or a promotion, and who gets accepted into colleges and training programs has been changed, made more democratic for all workers, Black and

white. This not only allows for concrete measures to correct discrimination, it also helps to expose corporate racism and, as well, corruption and favoritism.

In addition, the fight for affirmative action opens new possibilities for more radical demands that are needed to solve the problems faced by all workers. These demands include a shorter work week, an end to mandatory overtime and public takeover of plants threatened with closing. Unity on these demands combined with a program of affirmative action forms the basis for a broad and firm united fight.

Communists have a responsibility to stimulate and help to lead the fight for equality because it is a fight against injustice and a fight for unity of the class. And, it is upon this unity, that all advances rest.

White communists have a special role. In many situations where racism raises its head, one firm and clear voice can inspire others to follow.

1988 AND BEYOND

Unity ! The Only Way, the report to the 24th national convention of the Communist Party, USA by Gus Hall put it this way:

Defeating the Republicans and the ultra-right in the presidential election is an enormous political, organizational, tactical and financial task. It cannot be achieved by the trade unions alone, by the Afro-American people alone, or by the independent forces alone. Winning requires unity in action of all the forces opposed to the Reaganite conspiracy for any reason and to any extent.

In the coming period, the struggle to overcome the eight years of Reaganism and what will be a continuing, corporate offensive against workers, will require greater unity.

One of the most important challenges in this regard, and an important part of the fight against racism and for equality, is the job of organizing the unorganized. Few things contribute so much to eradicating racial myths as working together. And few things bring workers

closer together than organizing their workplaces.

In addition, where working class communities are organized, the concerns of each group of workers can become the concerns of all. Where there is organization, a fightback against racist provocations is possible. Organization means that there can be a united fight for a program that improves the conditions of all. Where there is no organization, the racists have an open field.

Based on the recent victories of the Electrical Workers in Tennessee, the Food and Commercial Workers in Mississippi and Maryland, the Aluminum Brick and Glass workers in Tennessee, the Service Employees Union in Texas, etc., it is safe to say Southern workers are ready. Clearly, there is no part of the country where organization can not succeed.

Millions of white workers, struggling to make ends meet, can be won to the union mov-

ment and to fighting side by side with Black workers. They can also be won to support the special actions needed to end inequality.

The AFL-CIO has launched a \$14 million "Union Yes" campaign to get the word out about the purpose of and the need for the trade union movement. TV, radio and print ads that sharply define the difficult conditions workers face and call for a united campaign to win decent wages, job protections and justice in the work place can elicit a wide response.

Now is the time! Such an organizing campaign can go hand in hand with labor's all out effort in the 1988 election. Just as unity between the labor movement, and nationally oppressed peoples is essential to defeat the Reaganites, it is also the key to organizing the unorganized.

With a bigger more united trade union movement, the fight for equality takes a big step forward. With a stronger movement for equality, labor can be bigger and more united. □

(Continued from page 23)

their friends. Black people are objectively a force for unity. They are the living link between the emancipation objective of the working class and the freedom and equality goals of oppressed people.

In conditions of the United States in 1987, Marxists can make no greater error than to try to sever the class aspects of oppression from the racial and national aspects of oppression of Black people. To do so would be a disservice to all three and would serve to weaken the total fight against our class enemy, monopoly capitalism in general and the most reactionary sector, the military industrial complex in particular.

This enemy cannot be defeated by Black

people alone, labor alone, other nationally oppressed people alone, or the peace movement alone. Means must be found to unite these forces to confront this enemy. □

Notes

1. William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the U.S.*, International Publishers, New York, p. 87.⁶
2. *The Negro People in American History*, International Publishers, New York, 1954, p. 462.
3. *Political Affairs*, February, 1979.
4. 24th National Convention of the CPUSA, August, 1987.
5. *Marxism and the National Question*, International Publishers, New York, 1942, p. 12.
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The Communist 'Plus' At Work in Connecticut

JOELLE FISHMAN

Hartford's Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood is the center of many fightback movements for better housing, jobs, equal rights and peace. The Mariana Bracetti Sheldon-Charter Oak Club of the Communist Party plays a major role in organizing the community, and in offering a center of action and friendship to families where they live.

This is the oldest neighborhood in the city. Most families living here are Puerto Rican and Afro-American. There is more poverty in this working-class community than in any other part of the fourth poorest city in the nation.

The Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood is composed of five low-income public housing projects. Mostly young families live there, mothers and fathers often the victims of layoffs from factories that have shut down or moved to non-union areas in the U.S. and abroad. To make ends meet, most parents are forced to work several minimum-wage jobs, when they can find work, at a terrible cost to personal and family health. Or, when they are unable to find work, to struggle through on unemployment compensation and then welfare.

At the edge of the neighborhood is the Colt Firearms plant where workers have been on strike for two years to save their jobs and their union. Only a few more blocks away, in the heart of downtown, glisten the towering corporate headquarters of the world's largest insurance companies, and such monopoly corporations as United Technologies.

Hartford is a tale of two cities, within Connecticut a tale of two states. The families in the Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood are among the victims most sharply affected.

Connecticut is touted as a state of economic prosperity. Here the statistics show the

highest personal income in the country. Much of the wealth is concentrated in the Fairfield County section adjacent to New York City where corporate executives and Wall Street lawyers make their homes. Excluding this area, Connecticut would drop all the way to 30th in personal income.

The state is dominated by military monopolies like United Technologies. A third of the workers in Connecticut are employed in military production or related jobs. This dependency creates an unstable economy for Connecticut, fluctuating according to the amount of military contracts, devouring taxes that could be spent on desperately needed housing, education, health-care facilities and programs which create jobs.

Last year 25,000, mostly women and children, used homeless shelters in Connecticut. Many were turned away for lack of facilities. At least 100,000 families in the state have inadequate housing. Officially, 63,300 are counted as unemployed, but the reality is twice as high, including those unemployed so long they are no longer being counted in the statistics.

In Hartford, one in five is unemployed. The city lost 39 per cent of its manufacturing jobs between 1970 and 1980. In their place have come sweat shops with conditions no better than at the turn of the century: 12 hour days, hazardous working conditions, minimum wages and no union representation. As developed in the Resolution on Afro-American Equality of the 24th National Convention of the Communist Party USA,

These developments affect Black people in a special way . . . germinating a new racist division of labor to fit the demands of capital in the face of structural crisis and scientific and technological revolution . . . Inequality has widened to the highest margins in over 30 years.

Joelle Fishman is chairwoman of the Communist Party of Connecticut

Nine years ago, the Communist Party organization in the state established a small club of three people who began a *Daily World* route in the Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood. The club was established as part of the policy of concentrating in multi-racial working class neighborhoods, in an effort to bring new members into the Communist Party by reaching industrial workers in their homes, and by building grassroots movements and the fight for equality in key communities which would move others forward with them.

None of the three comrades in the original club lived in Sheldon-Charter Oak. Today, the club has 22 members from the neighborhood. Nearly all were first acquainted with the Communist Party by getting the *Daily World* and later *People's Daily World* delivered to their homes each week by the same person. Over time, conversations develop, and a friendship is established.

It was four years before the first neighborhood residents joined the club. A lot of patience and consistency was required to sustain the paper route on a weekly basis, and to keep the discussions in the club meetings centered around developments in the neighborhood, conducted in such a way that anyone from the neighborhood could walk into the room and feel at home.

From the start, the club responded to emergencies which confronted the families on the paper route. Today, if there is an emergency in the neighborhood, club members advise the families involved, "come to the 'Comité' and we will see what we can do."

The club has initiated actions and won victories which have had an impact far beyond the Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood. For example, the club worked with tenants and helped save a neighborhood apartment building from destruction when a rich developer, interested in gentrifying the property for high-priced condos, tried to move in.

The developer, Charles Standish is a descendant of Dutch colonizer Miles Standish.

The first club newsletter, "The Oak" depicted Miles Standish destroying the Native American settlement, as a parallel to today. After the newsletter was distributed, it began appearing in windows around the development. In an effort to divide and conquer, Standish promised jobs to those in the tenants' organization who would separate themselves from the "outside Communist agitators" opposing his plans. Intensive redbaiting ensued, including threats to people on their jobs.

With great courage, the club stood firm on principle, and helped organize a new neighborhood economic fightback organization. As a result of this major struggle in which the apartment building was saved, the Hartford City Council passed an ordinance requiring developers to replace, within the same neighborhood, any low-income housing they destroy.

While Communists play a critical role in the leadership of the neighborhood economic fightback organization, people are at ease to join it and participate in activities without feeling they are also joining the Communist Party. This organization has taken initiatives that speak to the community's needs and, therefore, commands the respect and support of the neighborhood.

Club members bring problems and ideas to the neighborhood economic fightback organization, and this often results in action. For example, it initiated a fightback movement to stop evictions of entire families from public housing when any member of the household was found to have drugs. Children led a march on city hall with signs "Don't evict innocent children." It became the lead story on television news.

And the club has been at the center of organizing neighborhood support for the workers on strike against Colt Firearms. First, during the 10-month period in which the workers were working without a union contract, a second issue of "The Oak" was published, appealing to the community to support the struggle of their neighbors and co-workers. It carried a cartoon showing a colt sitting on top of the people of the community. The newsletter found its way into the shop and began to appear in large quantities in the washrooms, on windowsills, and every-

where, giving extra strength to the union in its fight at the bargaining table.

After the strike began, the neighborhood economic fightback organization initiated a community demand that the city take the police off the picket line where they were protecting strikebreakers and serving the interests of the multi-national corporation, and, that the police be reassigned to be a helpful, constructive force in the neighborhood, serving the citizens of Hartford.

This was one of the initiatives that brought together the groups who eventually formed an independent political party, People for a Change, which wrested two seats from Republicans in November's municipal elections.

During the People for a Change campaign, the neighborhood economic fightback organization hosted a house party for the candidates and participated in a voter registration drive as well as a get-out-the vote effort concentrated on the readers of the *People's Daily World*. The club participated in similar efforts in past years. In 1984, after petitioning successfully to put Gus Hall and Angela Davis on the ballot, the Communist Party had poll watchers at the voting place in the Sheldon-Charter Oak neighborhood. Over 90 per cent of those on the paper route voted in the election, helping to deliver a large Mondale vote against Reagan in the district.

The club has stepped forward in each crisis faced by the neighborhood, accentuated by Reaganite anti-people policies and the crises of capitalism. The club has attempted to expose the source of the problem, and to develop concrete popular tactics around which to organize fightback. The focus of the club on common economic issues has helped build the unity of Afro-American and Puerto Rican families in the neighborhood.

The club experience underscores the proposition put forward by Gus Hall at the 24th National Convention:

Because people are calling for answers and action, we can be more effective leaders precisely because of our

uniqueness . . . We will win new members because workers and people will be convinced we are unique, and that the Communist plus will be a plus for them too.

In response, the club has come under attack directly and indirectly from developers and their clients. It has met each crisis forthrightly in a principled manner. Instead of weakening or falling apart, the club has been strengthened and has won wide respect in the process.

The Jehovahs Witnesses are very organized in the neighborhood. They regularly select individual apartments in the development where they go and read the Bible. One of the members of the Party club often spent several hours each week with a member of Jehovahs Witness, having tea and reading the Bible. The Jehovahs Witnesses, however, take the view that if a person is active in politics he or she can not read the Bible with them, pushing them away from political activity.

Consequently the question of religion came up in the Party club, as it often does when new people consider joining the Communist Party. The myth that all Communists do not believe in God is a common barrier to joining. But the club members point out that there are many churchgoers among us, and we organize our meetings to take that fact into account.

The most difficult job for our club was breaking through—winning our first members to the club from the housing development. This happened in several stages.

The first person on the paper route to join the club had been involved in the civil rights movements in the 1960's. He joined as soon as he was asked, but shortly moved to another state. About the same time, the next two new members, both of whom received the paper on our route returned to Puerto Rico.

The club reviewed its work, and made a concerted effort to invite readers on the paper route to join us in building for the Solidarity Day demonstration in Washington in 1981. Some bus seats were made available by the labor movement and this helped a great deal.

One person, who had been inspired by the Hall-Davis campaign, and another, whose co-

worker on the assembly line gave him the paper, both at work and on the route, went to Washington. During the trip, they had the chance to discuss neighborhood issues with club members. Upon return, a meeting with a national leader of the Communist Party was organized, and both people joined the club.

Shortly after one of the families was threatened by the state, which wanted to take their son away from them. The club responded and helped to organize support for them. As a result, the mother, who had been afraid of the word "Communist" joined her husband as a member of our club.

In response to the Extraordinary National Conference of the Communist Party in Milwaukee in 1982, our club decided to help build a neighborhood fightback organization uniting different tenant groups. It was at this time that the present chair of the club joined.

I saw it was a Communist paper that was being brought to my door each week. When the man asked if I knew it was a Communist paper I said yes. When he asked if I would come to a meeting, I agreed to go right away. I asked him if I could bring some friends.

This new member was challenged immediately by the redbaiting that had been instigated by Standish in an attempt to forestall opposition to his plan to tear down the apartment building. With the help of the rest of the Party organization, broad support was organized for the tenants, despite the attack, and a valuable lesson in unity was learned by the community, the Party club and its members.

Today club leaders give a great deal of attention to how the meetings are conducted. The members of the club, and their friends who attend meetings, all face many day to day problems. The meetings are flexible. They take into account the fact that there may be children present. At times a neighbor with a problem may come by. Often someone may attend who, not being a member, would like to know more about the Communist Party.

Often when a new person is present, a spe-

cial educational is presented explaining the program of the Communist Party for equality in all areas of life, the need for a socialist system, and how we can get there. There is also discussion of the neighborhood concentration, the day-to-day struggles that are going on there, and the *People's Daily World* route. Copies of the Communist Party Constitution and membership application blanks are handed out.

Most club members have difficult personal financial problems, and care is taken to guarantee that fund raising and dues do not put new pressures on our members.

There have been a few instances when someone came and joined and never returned, and there have been some instances where people came, joined and quickly became among the most active comrades in the club. Special attention has had to be given to developing an appreciation for organization and leadership, especially when club meetings are not too formal.

The club meets every week, and the members are very close. If anyone in the club has a problem, it is everyone's concern. When one member with four children found herself on the verge of ending up in a shelter, the club was able to help find the proper agencies to get a "Section B" subsidized apartment, where there is a waiting list of over 800.

The club takes very seriously the conclusions of the 24th National Convention that priority must be given to building the Party. Consequently it is projecting ways of bringing in new members from more housing developments. It is discussing the added ingredients necessary to recruit even faster and more consistently in the course of the mass struggles. It is discussing what candidates can run for elected office to represent the needs of workers and unemployed.

The state organization of the Party has helped the club to grow and develop. The club work is nurtured by a member of the state committee, and the work is discussed frequently at meetings of the state executive committee. In return, the work of the club has had a profound impact on the development of the state organization.

The work of the Sheldon-Charter Oak Club shows how it is possible to bring industrial workers, Afro-American and Puerto Rican workers into the life of the Communist Party. It shows the invaluable role the People's Daily World in establishing regular relations with working people in a community. The work of the club also shows the degree to which a Communist Party club can become a leading, initiating force, uniting the community in action for its best immediate and long-term interests.

On the basis of the experience of the Sheldon-Charter Oak Club, and on that of other shop and neighborhood clubs in Connecticut, certain requirements for building the club as a Communist political organization with a constituency have been developed and used as guidelines for all clubs in the state. These include:

- Having a defined area of responsibility, either a neighborhood (election district) or shop (workplace).

- Knowing the people and the issues and developing a set of political goals and program demands toward changing the political balance of forces in the shop or neighborhood.

- Developing a functioning club executive committee responsible to plan club agendas, centered on the problems in the shop or neighborhood, that lead to action with class-struggle content, planned recruitment, and ongoing educational work.

- Developing regular circulation of the *People's Daily World* and Communist Party litera-

ture, including flyers or materials issued by the club in the shop or neighborhood.

- Developing full and consistent participation in an economic fightback organization in the shop or neighborhood.

At the Connecticut State Convention held last June in preparation for the 24th National Convention, the leadership of the Sheldon-Charter Oak Club led a workshop of the entire convention on building neighborhood clubs. The groundbreaking work that this club had done, was already in the process of being repeated by other clubs in different neighborhoods and cities in the state. The main lesson of the workshop was that, with patience, consistency and careful tactics, the work will result in building a multi-racial working-class club.

The club is making an important contribution to the development of working class, Afro-American and Puerto Rican Party leadership, and has benefitted from schools and classes on the state and regional levels. The club leadership is now concerning itself with how to increase the percentage of club members who are actively engaged in club meetings and activities on a weekly basis.

As a result of the work of the Sheldon-Charter Oak Club, the state Party organization is now establishing a new club in an adjacent neighborhood which is part of the North End of the city, the heart of the Afro-American community. This effort is being undertaken in the spirit of industrial concentration and building a much larger Communist Party, as projected at the 24th National Convention. □

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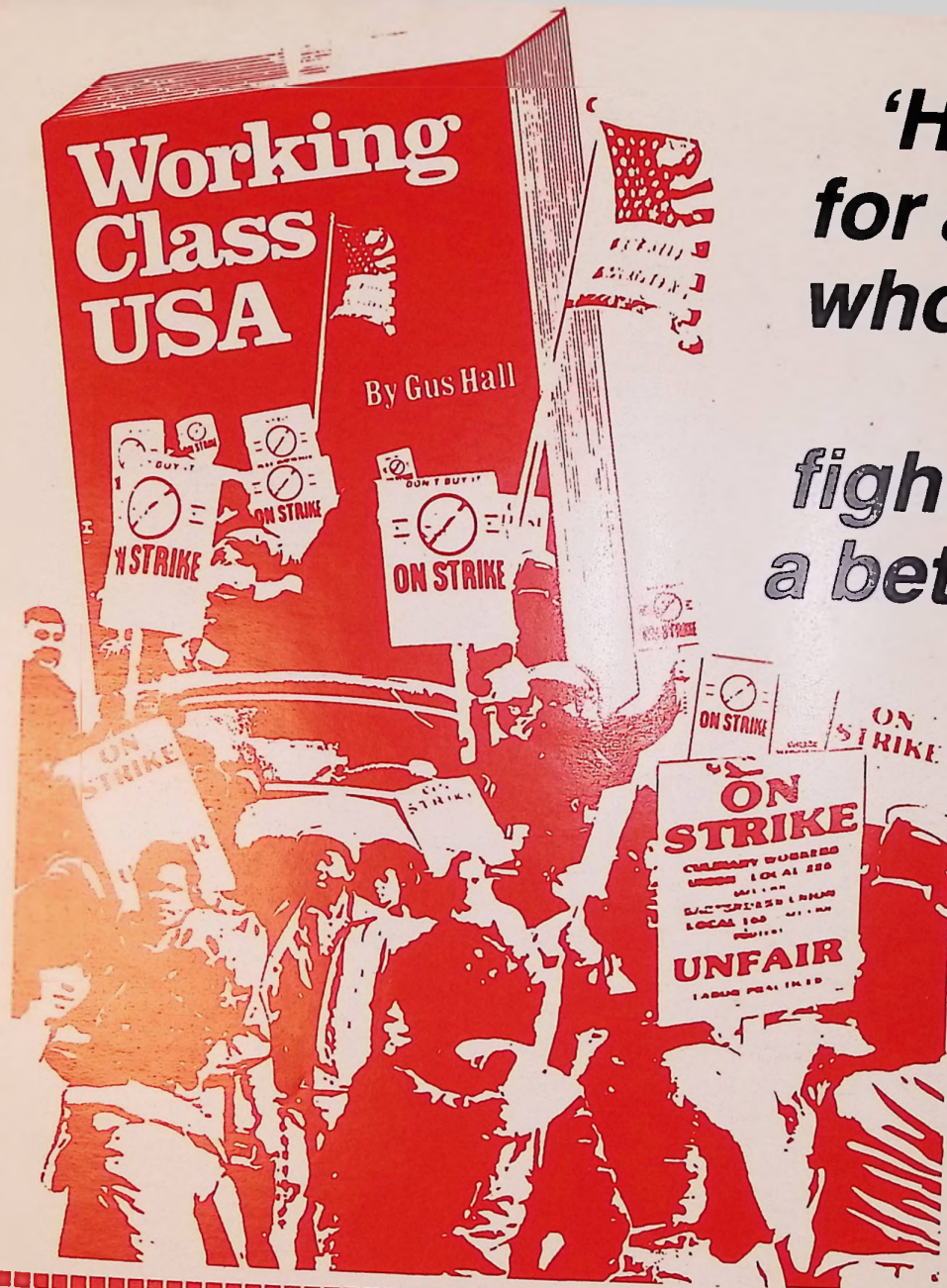
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