

White Supremacy in US. History by Ted Allen

A speech presented at the Guardian Forum April 28, 1973. Ted is presently engaged in writing a book setting forth a Marxist theory of United States history. He is also a member of Harper's Ferry Organization in New York City.

Comrades and friends, I speak tonight on behalf of my own Harper's Ferry Organization and of Sojourner Truth Organization of Chicago and I thank the Guardian Forum for the opportunity to present our views on the relationship between the question of proletarian revolution and Black liberation.

From the first we have made it clear that we would not be presuming to present here a theoretical analysis such as *is* possibly suggested in the title of this Forum. In the past it has been the Black Marxist-Leninists who have led in developing theory on this question. It is reasonable to assume that they do the same again. The importance of that work can not be exaggerated. We ourselves are studying the question and we will be glad to share with others the results of our research and thinking.

We believe that three centuries of history show that the key to bourgeois domination in this country is white supremacy, as we have said before: The principal aspect of United States capitalist society is not merely bourgeois domination but bourgeois white supremacist domination. It follows from this that proletarian revolutionary strategy in the United States must direct the main blow at white supremacy. Historically the principal aspect of the US working class movement has been not merely opportunism but white racist opportunism. The principal aspect of opportunism in the US working class movement is not merely white supremacism, but the acquiescence of white workers in the system of white skin privileges imposed by the bourgeoisie.

It is from that standpoint that we can, without presuming, say a few things about the question of the theory of the Black nation. First, we are sure that whatever answer is ultimately accepted by the Black Marxist-Leninists, the central struggle will still be directed toward the overthrow of the bourgeois white supremacist order. Second, the theoretical position taken by the Communist Party (with the help of the Communist International) in 1929 and 1930 was a body blow to white supremacist ideology—whatever the eventual judgement may be made of it in other respects. (1) It removed the question from the sphere of "natural" history impervious to social action, and placed it as a phenomenon of social history, of class struggle. Now the proletarian movement had in its hand a guide to escape from its congenital curse of white racism. For the first time an American vanguard party was to challenge the white workers to their primary proletarian duty to "sieve by the throat" the beast of white chauvinism, the historic despoiler of revolution in this country. Third, experience showed that under ruling class ideological pressure the tendency developed to forget the part of the resolution on fighting white chauvinism and to do essentially as the Socialists had done before: leave everything to the magic solution of self-determination which would come with socialism. This subverted the intention of the resolution and is a problem that must be kept in mind in the discussions as they develop today. Fourth, we think that to speak of a "dispersed nation" is a contradiction in terms. Parts of a nation dispersed outside its homeland to some other part of the territory under the rule of the same oppressor nation, is a national minority. This is not a mere question of precise terminology,

it is a question of historic tasks and perspectives. For a nation the right of self-determination means the right to separate and establish its own government on its own territory, to be free to organize its internal economy and to dispose of its relations with other nations according to its own best advantage. Obviously, these are perspectives not appropriate to a national minority. To characterize a people as a dispersed nation is by implication to make true self-determination as a nation impossible for them. It restricts the meaning of self-determination to the perspective of autonomy in secondary questions and that dependent upon the agreement of the oppressor nation or the ex-oppressor nation.

The study of the earliest colonial pre-history of the US is as meaningful for an understanding of our present condition as the re-examination of early childhood experiences may be for understanding of adult behavior. Let us therefore start at the beginning, early colonial Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina.

The capitalist system of product! on was in force from the beginning in these colonies. The central problem of the plantation bourgeoisie was what form of labor was best for its needs. It could not work the land under a feudal system of hereditary bondage to the landlord's ground. That would not work because of the unlimited availability of free land on the frontier. Wage labor was not feasible because it would be *so* costly in relation to wages in England as to lower profits below the critical point for colonial development.

The method struck upon was unpaid labor for a fixed term, usually five to seven years. To get an adequate supply of labor was an enormous problem to the planters. After the English Revolution of 1640-1660 demand for labor expanded in England and limited the supply of English labor available to the colonies, the planters turned increasingly to African labor.

Up to the 1680's little distinction was made in the status of Blacks and English and other Europeans held in involuntary servitude. Contrary to common belief the status of the Blacks in the first seventy years of Virginia colony was not that of racial, lifelong, hereditary slavery, and the majority of the whites who came were not free. All bondmen stood somewhere 'midway between freedom and absolute subjection.' (2) Their common lot led them to make common cause and to a qualitatively different relationship between Black and white labor than what it came to be later. Blacks and whites ran away together. Black and white servants intermarried. In 1661 Black and Irish servants joined in an insurrectionary plot in Bermuda. (3) In 1663 .in Virginia former soldiers of Cromwell's defeated New Model armies who had been transported to servitude plotted an insurrection for the common freedom of Black, white and Indian servants. (4) The leaders of Bacon's rebellion in 1676 enlisted Black and white bond-servants to bolster the faltering revolt. "Bacon's followers having deserted him he had proclaimed liberty to the servants and slaves which chiefly formed his army when he burnt Jamestown the Virginia colonial capital." (5) Upon defeat of the rebellion, Capt. Thomas Grantham, acting on behalf of the Governor, was by a policy of conciliation able to arrange the surrender of a part of the rebel forces at a place called West Point. "Grantham then went over to the south bank of the York and marched a few miles to Colonel John West's brick house, which served as the chief garrison and magazine of the rebels. There he found four hundred English and Negroes in arms. These clamored that

Grantham had betrayed them in causing the surrender of West Point ' and thereupon some were for shooting me, and others for cutting me to pieces.' Grantham had to talk fast, promising them all pardon and freedom for the Negroes and English servants, considerably exceeding the powers granted him by Berkeley...Most of the men he persuaded to disperse to their homes, but eighty Negroes and twenty English refused to deliver up their arms..." (6) Bacon's quarrel with Governor Berkeley was a contradiction within the bourgeoisie. Those nearer the frontier, such as Bacon, sought to advance themselves by an immediate war of extermination against the Indians, who numbered about four hundred in several tribes. The 'establishment' had another, more gradual approach. The Black and white bond-servants exploited this contradiction within the ranks of their masters to strike for their freedom.

This was class struggle: the planters strove to lengthen the period of servitude and the servants did what they could to shorten it and to secure their rights. From the planters standpoint the ideal servant would be one whose term of service would be for life. But the urban bourgeoisie in England had rallied the armed support of the lower classes there to win their revolution. It would have been impossible to secure that support and at the same time be sending shiploads of such to life-long slavery in the colonies. The most ready source of labor was supplied by the African slave trade and so the main source of surplus value became the exploitation of Black labor. But what proved to be most important was not that the mainland planters turned to slave labor, but that in doing so the bourgeoisie drew the color line between freedom and slavery. The decision cast the mold in which has been stamped three centuries of American history.

The turn to Black labor became for the planter bourgeois: a special reason for the continued import of white servants—to keep the Blacks in subjection, who were as prone, if not more so, to run away and rebel as white labor. Thus, on December 10, 1691, the House of Commons approved a petition of "merchants, masters of ships, planters and others, trading to foreign plantations... setting forth that the plantation cannot be maintained without a considerable number of white servants, as well to keep the Blacks in subjection, ">s to bear arms in case of invasion." (7) And "they were really more important" for the former than for the latter.(8) Even though the principal reason for the continued importation of white servants was the need for their productive labor. "Protection against a Negro insurrection (writes Warren B. Smith p. 30) was secured in two ways: first by limitations and restrictions especially designed to prevent slaves from congregating: second, by providing a proportion of white men sufficient to defeat conspiracies or outbreaks. Bills (in the South Carolina Assembly)'for the better security of the inhabitants of this province against the insurrections and other wicked attempts of negroes and other slaves' alternate with those "for the better securing the Province from Negro insurrections and encouraging of poor (white) people by employing them in Plantations."(9) Why was it that nonslaveholding whites, especially servants still imported in large numbers as productive labor, assisted in upholding and maintaining the slave status of the Blacks? Why did they participate in the inconvenient and dangerous slave patrols?

The answer lies not in feelings of racial superiority – that these became dominant is true, but that they had not been enough is proven by the early years of united action. It was the bourgeoisie's deliberately contrived policy of differentiation between white and Black labor through the system of white skin privileges for white labor that allowed

the bourgeoisie to use the poor whites as the instrument of social control over the Black workers.

With deliberateness, the planters wrote their policy in law. In 1682, Virginia law made color the mark of slavery and hence made freedom a privilege of a white skin. In 1705 the distinctions between white servants and Black slaves were fixed: Black slaves were to be held in life long hereditary slavery and whites for five years, with many rights and protections afforded to them by the law. One of the very first white skin privileges was the exemption of white-servant women from work in the fields and the requirement through taxes to force Black children to go to work at twelve, while white servant children were excused until they were fourteen.

The capitalist planters in this way made white supremacy the keystone of capitalist rule in this country where it has remained ever since and they fixed it in place with the mortar of race privileges for white-skinned labor, privileges which left white labor poor, exploited and increasingly powerless with respect to their rulers and exploiters.

Once the reason for the failure of the Black slave revolt is understood, the reason for the general failure of Proletarian challenge to bourgeois power in this country is also understood. "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the Black it is branded." (10) The man who said that wrote to Abraham Lincoln in January 1865. "The workingmen of Europe," said Karl Marx, "feel sure that as the American War of Independence initiated anew era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American anti-slavery war will do for the working classes." (11)

Now more than a century later the Ascendance of the working class in the US seems less imminent today to us than it did to Marx then. The error Marx made in that prediction was not his fault, but ours. He understood the fatal paralyzing effect of the white-skin privileges on white workers who do not repudiate them, but we did not. "While the (white) workingmen, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor, or to support their European brethren on their struggle for emancipation.."(12) Instead of making common abolitionist cause with Black labor, as Marx knew, the organized white worker had fallen in behind the leadership of the industrial bourgeoisie who no more wanted abolition of Black slavery than did the slaveholders of the South. White labor turned its back on abolition and enlisted under the banner of a whites-only Free Soilism.

Now Marx hoped that "this barrier to proletarian solidarity had been swept off by the red sea of Civil War." But the bourgeoisie, now led by its industrial division, sealed in place again the loosened keystone of power, with new mortar of white-skin privileges for white labor in land distribution, immigration, and industrial employment. Thus, it came about that the (white) National Labor Union which reached an affiliated membership of half a million or more after the war under the leadership of a stone white chauvinist William H. Sylvis, pretended interest in the Black worker, but adamantly opposed Black reconstruction of the South and the opening of the "whites only' trades to Black workers. Thus, was a second seal put on the cause of the US proletariat--and on its hopes for a labor party, the eight-hour day, a democratic land policy, and a fair immigration policy.

Many people on the Left consider the 1930's as a period of great triumphs of working class struggle and generally regard it as a standard to be emulated today.

Others point to the aftermath, the decades of war, cold war reaction, brought up to date by Wallace and Nixon. They say that basically, the events of the thirties added up to a defeat for the proletariat because the bourgeoisie was able to use reforms to blunt and turn aside any serious threat to their power. "Roosevelt saved capitalism," they say.

Both views are in error, in our opinion, although the first is the more common and more serious error. There is nothing wrong with revolutionaries advancing demands for reforms, or in fighting for them or in winning the fights. What we must always do is to be sure that in accepting our hard won concessions we use the fighting courage gained by that victory to attack with greater vigor the limits and conditions that the ruling class has set against further concessions.

The 1930's opened with a ringing call to struggle against white chauvinism. "The struggle for equal rights for Negroes (said the Communist Party resolution of 1930) must certainly take the form of common struggle by the white-and black workers...it is the duty of the white workers to break the walls of segregation and jim crowism which have been set up by the bourgeois slave-market mentality... They, the white workers, must boldly jump at the throat of the 100 per cent bandits who strike a Negro in the face. This struggle will be the test of real international solidarity of the white workers." Now an American working class party had taken up as its aim the principle that DuBois had set forth in 1913: "The Negro problem is the great test of the American Socialist."(13)

In the early thirties the Communist Party held to this resolve in its mass work in the South and in the North. But in; the name of anti-fascist unity it converted itself into an auxiliary of the New Deal and strengthened the tendency which did the same for the rapidly expanding industrial union movement. "It is quite obvious," said Eleanor Roosevelt of her husband, "that in his relationship with Congress he had to hold the Southern vote..." (14)

The Communist Party and the working class movement didn't have to "hold the Southern vote;" that was Roosevelt's problem, not theirs. But they made it theirs, for to do otherwise would mean to risk the concessions offered by the New Deal—all of which were cast in the mold of white-skin privileges. "Beginning in 1936 there is little said about white, chauvinism in the official statements" of the Party (Squire, p.64) and, in the South, instead of being glad that black workers "were more easily organized than whites," the AFL and CIO organizers backed away, since, "to organize Negro workers first was to risk alienating the whites." (15)

The one great problem facing the workers in the 1930's was unemployment. The gap between the unemployment rate of Black and white in the North was 75% in 1930, 115% in 1937 and 133% in 1940. In the South where 80% of the Black people lived, the gap had increased from zero to about 15%(16) Where "labor's greatest victories" were won, the white-skin privileges of white labor were increased the most. As Dr. E Franklin Frazier puts it: "The New Deal policy of protecting the (white) worker's right to organize and the Negro's right to employment were often in conflict."(17) How that conflict was resolved is seen in the figures just given.

The accent on the white-skin privileges of white labor continued in the post war period. In 1940 the national Black unemployment rate was 20% higher than the white rate. (18) By 1952 the national Black unemployment rate had become double that of the white rate and has averaged even higher in

the years since.(19)

The post war degeneration of the trade union and political aspects of the U.S. working class movement was not caused by the "betrayal of the New Deal" by Cold War Democrats; rather it was the inevitable consequence of the white chauvinist opportunism dominant in the days of "labor's" apparent greatest advances. White labor's chauvinist indifference to national oppression of Black labor in the United States in the depression-and-war period foreshadowed the general support given by the U.S. trade union movement to the efforts of U.S. imperialism to repress national liberation struggles in the Phillipines, Korea, Malaya, Guatemala, Iraq, Bolivia, Venezuela, Indo-China, the Congo, Palestine, Columbia, Cuba and elsewhere.

This post war period of utter opportunist degeneracy of the "labor", movement, however, has been the era of glorious resurgence of the liberation struggles of the Black people in the United States, as well as of similar struggles of the Puerto Rican, Chicano, Indian and other oppressed non-white peoples in the state territory of the U.S. This dramatic and instructive contrast is a manifestation of the fact that World War n ushered in the period of the great national liberation struggles of the oppressed nations and peoples of the colonial and semi-colonial world, headed by the Chinese and Cuban revolutions.

This Black liberation struggle not only fought its own battles but resurrected the revolutionary movement among whites, particularly the youth—and what is most important—resurrected it on the basis of racial solidarity as principle number one.

The ruling class under stood the seriousness of this situation. It reacted with a combination of concessions and repression. But the trouble with the repression was the damage to the image of "the leader of the free world". The trouble with the concessions was even more serious because they could not be continued without loosening the keystone of bourgeois power. For these concessions by their very nature had to chip away at the white-skin privileges of white labor in employment, housing education, etc.

The bourgeoisie found away to choke off the concessions and reverse the trend without the National Guard. But this could only be done by an overt appeal to white racism on the part of the white workers. This was the function of the Wallace movement and its eventual effective merger with Nixonism. Whether it was changing the color of the corpses in Vietnam (as Bunker said of Vietnamization) or "defense" of the white neighborhood, this appeal was specifically aimed at the white youth and the white worker son the basis of their racially privileged situation.

What is essential to understand, especially now, is that Nixon's "southern strategy" is basically FDR's "Southern vote" brought up to date and applied in a tactically different situation. This fact is of key importance because the wheel is bound to turn again.

The thirty year boom is running down. The bankruptcy of the U.S. dollar reveals that for all the talk of an oil shortage, the world market is overfilled with commodities. The capitalists are trying to get by with a program of austerity, keeping the white workers employed while cutting down on their standard of living. But there are limits to this process. The payments on the house and car and school taxes must be made. And the spreading of work by cutting out overtime can go only so far, given the state of technological development prevailing. A deterioration of the conditions of the white workers lives and some degree of radicalization of them is sure to come.

Whether this impending crisis and resulting radicaliza-

tion of the masses produces a mass proletarian class conscious movement suited to its historic tasks, will depend first of all on how well the vanguard elements take to heart the lessons of the thirties and of previous crises. It is our great advantage as compared with preceding generations of revolutionaries in this country that we live in the epoch of world wide national liberation revolt. Thus situated in history we can better understand the lesson stated by C.L.R. James, in Negroes and American Democracy (1956):

"Every white worker, whether he knows it or not, is being challenged by every Negro to take the steps which will enable the working peoples to fulfill their historic destiny of building a society free of domination of one class or of one race over another."

Opponents of our line make two main but contradictory arguments. On the one hand they say that this will split the working class by alienating the white workers. On the other hand at the same time denounce racism as the number one enemy of the working class.

We believe that it is impossible to hold both of these positions at once. The reason is that in every struggle against racism the moment of truth must come.

It is all right to fight for a greater share of jobs for Blacks, but can that be done when white workers are being laid off?

It is all right to organize a plant on the basis of a strong stand against job discrimination against Black workers, but when the organizers go after the white workers will they refuse to soft-pedal that issue?

It is all right to be for better housing and schools for Blacks but when the mortgage-ridden, speeded-up, moonlighting white worker is being talked to will the organizer ask him to stand out for an open community—property values be damned?

Unless we can answer yes to such critical questions which sooner or later must come down, then we are not really fighting racism, but once again taking the bourgeois road of "the Southern vote" and the "Southern strategy." In Shaw's words, "the direction of least resistance rather than line of greatest advantage." (Man and Superman Act III)

Socialist revolution is not possible where the majority of the workers do not want it and workers who want white-skin privileges do not want socialism. God knows, our experience at repudiation is all too limited, but like a non-swimmer in deep water we have to begin to move and learn to swim by saving our lives.

A proletarian party not based on this principle cannot grow, survive and win in this country.

FOOTNOTES

1. "The Communist" Feb. 1931.
2. James Curtis Ballogh, A History of Slavery in Virginia (John's Hopkins Press 1902 Johnson Reprint Corp. 1968) p.31
3. W. N. Sainsbury, Calendar of State Papers, America & West Indies: 1661-1668, Colonial Papers, Vol. 19 No. 47, (London 1880) William Frith Williams, An Historical Account of the Bermudas (London 1848) pp.41-42. Edward D. Neill, Virginia Carolourm (Albany 1869) p. 296n.
4. op. cit. pp. 295-296. Henning, William W. (digest of) Virginia, The Statistics at Large of, 11 vols. (Richmond 1799-1814) Vol. II. Virginia Magazine of, History and Biography Vol. 15 (July 1907-1908) pp. 38-43
5. Wilcomb E. Washburn, The Governor and the Rebel

6. op. cit. p.88

7. Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliament Respecting North America, Ed. Leo Francis Stock (Washington DC 1924) 5 vols. Vol II p.46

8. White Servitude in Colonial South Carolina, (University of South Carolina Press (Columbia) 1961) p. 30. Warren B. Smith.

9. ibid. parenthesis added.

10. Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, (New York: Modern Library) Ch. X, Sect. 7, p. 329.

11. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Civil War in the United States, (New York: International Publishers, 1937) p.281.

12. ibid.



Escape. Graphic: Culver Pictures.

"... They Would Have Destroyed Me": Slavery and the Origins of Racism

Theodore Allen

In the period before the Civil War, one of the standard arguments made for racial slavery was that it made possible a practically air-tight system of social control. The strife-torn and ism-riddled plight of wage-labor societies in Europe was contrasted with the long tradition of social peace in the South, where, despite intramural grudges, the great majority of the poor whites would side with the slaveholders in any confrontation between black labor and the plantation bourgeoisie.

The high courts of South Carolina well understood that "the peace of society... required that slaves should be subjected to the authority and control of all freemen when not under the immediate authority of their masters"; that where "a slave can invoke neither Magna Charta nor common law", social peace depended upon "the subordination of the servile class to every free white person,"

If the black bond-laborer sought to flee, any white person had the legal right, indeed duty, to seize the fugitive, and stood to be rewarded for the deed. "Poor white men," writes one historian, "habitually kept their eyes open for strange Negroes without passes, for the apprehension of a fugitive was a financial windfall."

Chancellor William Harper of South Carolina confidently reassured those who were apprehensive of another Santo Domingo in the American slave states. "It is almost impossible," he wrote, "that there should be any extensive [insurrectionary] combination among the slaves." The reason was simple: "Of the class of freemen, there would be no individual so poor or so degraded (with the exception of here and there a reckless outlaw or felon) who would not ... be vigilant and active to detect and suppress it."

"We do not govern them [the free states] by our black slaves but by their own white slaves. We know what we are doing—we have conquered you once and we can again ..."

John Randolph of Virginia, opposing the Missouri Compromise of 1820

The pioneer slaveholding sociologist George Fitzhugh described in terms even more explicit the indispensable role of the poor whites in the social order established by and for the plantation bourgeoisie. "[The poor whites]," he said, "constitute our militia and our police. They protect men in the possession of property, as in other countries; and they do much more, they secure men in the possession of a kind of property which they could not hold a day but for the supervision and protection of the poor." Here Fitzhugh has perfected our definition of racial slavery. It is not simply that some whites own black slaves, but that no whites are so owned; not simply that whites are by definition non-slaves, but that the poor and laboring non-slave-holding whites are by racial definition enslavers of black labor.

Contrast the serene sense of power expressed by Fitzhugh and Harper in the nineteenth century with the troubled mind of the seventeenth-century planter elite at the time of Bacon's Rebellion. "How miserable that man is," wrote Sir William Berkeley to his friend Thomas Ludwell, "that Governes a People where six parts of seaven at least are Poore, Endebted, Discontented and Armed." Since 1642, whenever kings had reigned in England, Berkeley had served as Royal Governor over Virginia, which then had

two-thirds of the total population of the South. Now in the last year of his time, he was to be driven from his home, his capital city was to be burned, and most of his territory was to be taken over by armed rebels.

"While the workingmen, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative, of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor ..."

Karl Marx, letter to Abraham Lincoln, 1865

Colonel Francis Moryson, who had served many years in the government of Virginia, and who for that reason was chosen as one of the King's Commissioners to inquire into the state of affairs of the colony in the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion, expressed wonderment that in Virginia, "amongst so many thousand reputed honest men there should not be found a thousand to fight five hundred inconsiderable fellows." He could only conclude that "the major part of the country is distempered."

To understand how the anxiety of the Berkeleys and the Morysons was transformed into the self-assurance of the Harpers and Fitzhughs, is to understand the origins of racial slavery in this country. (1)

II

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Virginia and Maryland, the tobacco colonies, experienced a severe and protracted economic crisis. It was a period of intense class struggle, including armed struggle, of the people against the bourgeoisie. It was in Virginia that these events reached their fullest development. There, the proletariat — one-fourth to one-half of the population — was the most consistent combatant of all the poor and oppressed masses struggling to throw off capitalist domination. (2) These proletarians were politically more advanced, as indeed were the other rebelling colonists, than even the Leveller left wing of the Revolution in the Mother country, England. But the most significant fact of all, from the present point of view, is that the Afro-American and European-American proletarians made common cause in this struggle to an extent never duplicated in the three hundred years since.

From the time of the 1663 Servants' Plot for an insurrectionary march to freedom, to the tobacco riots of 1682, there were no fewer than ten popular and servile revolts and revolt plots in Virginia. The decisive encounter of the people against the bourgeoisie occurred during Bacon's Rebellion, which began in April, 1676 as a difference between the elite and the sub-elite planters over "Indian policy", but which in September became a civil war against the Anglo-American ruling class.

When Bacon's forces besieged, captured, and burned the colonial capital city of Jamestown and sent Governor Berkeley scurrying into exile across the Chesapeake Bay, the rebel army was composed mainly of European and African bond-servants and freedmen recently "out of their time".

After Bacon's death, late in October, the rebel cause declined due to faltering leadership. The eleven hundred British troops that were sent in eleven ships to aid the Cover-

nor's cause did not leave England until around December first, and they did not arrive in Virginia until the shooting was over. But armed English merchantmen were employed with effect on the rivers to harry the rebels. The captain of one of these ships was Thomas Grantham, whose policy of unabashed deception and lying, combined with exploitation of class differences among the rebels, played a decisive role in bringing about a final defeat of the rebels in January, 1677. Despicable as his role was, Grantham's account of his exploits is a historical record of the most profound significance.

Grantham procured the treachery of the new rebel general, Laurence Ingram (whom Grantham had known before), and Ingram's Lieutenant, Gregory Walklett, to help him in securing the surrender of the West Point garrison of three hundred men in arms, freemen and African and English bond-servants. A contemporary account says, however, that

"... the name of Authority had but little power to ring the sword out of these Mad fellows' hands . . . [and therefore Grantham] resolved to accost them with never to be performed promises." [of pardon for the freemen and freedom for the bond-servants, African and English]

Then Grantham tackled the main stronghold of the rebel forces, three miles further up the country, and, in Grantham's own words :

"I there met about four hundred English and Negroes in Arms who were much dissatisfied at the Surrender of the Point, saying I had betrayed them, and thereupon some were for shooting me, and others for cutting me in peeces : I told them I would , willingly surrender myselfe to them, till they were satisfied from his Ma[jes]tie, and did engage to the Negroes and Servants, that they were all pardoned and freed from their Slavery : And with faire promises and Rundlets of Brandy, I pacified them, giving them severall Noates under my hand . . . Most of them I persuaded to goe to their Homes, which accordingly they did, except about eighty Negroes and twenty English which would not deliver their Armes...."

Grantham tricked these one hundred men on board a sloop with the promise of taking them to a rebel fort a few miles down the York River. Instead, towing them behind his own sloop, he brought them under the guns of another ship and forced their surrender, although "they yielded with a great deal of discontent, saying had they known my resolution, they would have destroyed me." Grantham then proceeded to disarm these last of the rebels and to deliver them to their respective owners.

The transcendent importance of this record is that there, in colonial Virginia, one hundred and twenty-nine years before William Lloyd Garrison was born, the armed working class, black and white, fought side by side for the abolition of slavery. (3)

III

The bourgeoisie had succeeded in crushing the revolt, as they were again able to do, but only with great difficulty, in the tobacco riots six years later. All this, however, was merely a defensive action; their basic problem remained and was more pressing than ever: The securing of an increasing supply of plantation labor and the establishment a stable system of social control for its maximum exploitation.

The supply of labor could be increased in two ways: by

increasing the number of bond-servants, and by lengthening their time of service. From the standpoint of maximum profit the ultimate step would seem to have been to combine these two approaches to the fullest extent, to tap all possible European and African sources and to extend the period of servitude to life. This, of course, would have required the resort to forced transport of European as well as African bond-servants.

On the basis of perpetual servitude the 250,000 African laborers brought to the southern colonies up to 1790 had developed into a bond-servant population of 650,000. On the same basis, the importation of thirty-eight thousand European life-long bond-servants would have been sufficient to develop more than the maximum number, never more than 100,000, that were actually used in the southern colonies. Perpetual servitude, furthermore, afforded the plantation capitalist important incidental benefits aside from the extension of the period of service. The children of these bond-servants would belong to the master, as lifelong bond-servants; the women would work in the fields along with the men; deprived of all civil rights, they would be more completely exploitable; and the benefits of improved labor skills, where they developed, would accrue exclusively to the master, not at all to the servant.

The sale price of life-time bond-servants was almost twice the price of limited-term bond-servants. But even at a doubled price, 38,000 European bond-servants sold into perpetual bondage like that of the Africans, would have cost only one-half to two-thirds as much as what the plantation bourgeoisie actually paid for the 125,000 to 150,000 European bond-servants they did import.

How are we to account for this deviant behavior of the class whom Shakespeare mocked in Timon's satiric encomium to glittering gold, and who practiced so religiously the folk wisdom about a penny saved, a penny got? This brings us to the hard part, of the question, "Why racial slavery?" The hard part is, not "Why were African bond-servants reduced to perpetual servitude?", but "Why were European bond-servants not reduced to perpetual servitude?" (4)

IV

Domestic political and economic considerations would have made it impossible to impose such a policy as a general thing in England. But, a policy of forced transportation to perpetual servitude, restricted to convicts only, in England, and to Irish and Scottish rebels, "vagrants", and "rogues", and the extension to life of the terms of all such categories of servants already in the colonies, would not have imperiled the fundamental ruling power of the bourgeoisie in England. If this course was not followed, it was not for reasons of social order in England, but of the establishment of a system of social control in the unique conditions of the plantation colonies. The Anglo-American bourgeoisie did not make slaves of black and white together because it was not in its power to do so in the historical context, to have attempted to do so would have put in mortal jeopardy what power it did have, considerable as that power was. The non-slavery of white labor was the indispensable condition for the slavery of black labor. This is no mere conjecture; it is a fact that the events of Bacon's Rebellion, and of the whole turbulent quarter-century following 1660, made unmistakably clear.

The defeat of the popular forces in this struggle cleared the way for the distinctive southern plantation system. In that economy the disparity of wealth and social power between the few grandees and the great mass of the dependent poor was much more developed than in the rest of the country; and the middle-class presence was corres-

pondingly weak and insignificant. Under these circumstances, the plantation bourgeoisie established a system of social control by the institutionalization of the white race whereby the mass of poor whites was alienated from the black proletariat and enlisted as enforcers of bourgeois power.

V

The most common form of resistance to bond-servitude was to run away. English and Africans working side by side in the field or in the tobacco shed plotted their escape, met at their rendezvous, and fled to freedom together. The Assemblies of all the plantation colonies enacted cruel and vicious penalties for such "stealth of oneself". The form of corporal punishment most commonly used was flogging and branding, but mutilation and even death were legal retribution against the captured fugitive. The most common form of penalty, because it was most profitable to the owners, was to extend the period of service: for each day away, added service of two days in Virginia, seven in South Carolina, and ten in Maryland. But by the law of 1661, if, in Virginia^ any English bond-servant ran away in company with 'Shy' African life-time bond-servant, the English bondservant would have to serve the penalty time twice, once for his own absence and once for the African's. (5)

Another, most elementary and human, form of servant solidarity was marrying without the consent of the master. Not only did the marriage impose some barrier to extremes of exploitation, but it led to 'lost' time when a wife became pregnant. For this "offense" there were severe legal penalties. The usual penalty was a year's extension of time for marrying and a year for a pregnancy. The children of bondservants were themselves bond-servants until they were over twenty years of age. But the heaviest penalties were those for white women who bore children where the father was African. For those women the penalty was as much as seven years of extended service and a severe whipping at the public whipping post, with the child to be a bond-servant until thirty-one years of age.

This policy was generalized on the largest scale in connection with Bacon's Rebellion itself. Governor Berkeley condemned Bacon and his followers as rebels and traitors when the rebellion was primarily a quarrel among white planters over 'Indian policy'. Berkeley captured Bacon, then pardoned him and gave him blessing to an anti-Indian campaign. But when, in the second phase, the rebellion became directed primarily against the elite and, as it necessarily had to do, united black and white bond-servants and free poor, Berkeley, in victory, treated the captured rebel leaders with such vengeful severity as was said to have evoked from King Charles II, his sovereign, the remark that "that old fool has hang'd more men in that naked country than I did for the Murther of my Father." T.H. Breen notes the same pattern: "Had Bacon somehow confined his dispute to the upper class, he might have been forgiven for his erratic behavior, but once the servants, slaves and poor freemen became involved, he had to be crushed."

However, special repressive measures for specific acts of solidarity by whites with blacks were not sufficient. The social turbulence of the time showed that the unifying effect of the common lot of bond-servants was stronger than the divisive effect of the penalties for specific illegal acts. Edmund S. Morgan makes a perceptive comment in this connection: "It is questionable (he writes) how far Virginia could safely have continued ..., meeting discontent with repression and manning her plantations with annual importations of servants who would later add to the unruly ranks of the free ... There was another solution which allowed Virginia's magnates to keep their lands, yet arrested the dis-

content and repression of other Englishmen "

VI

The shift to African labor was precipitate after 1685, the newly rechartered Royal African Company, with the unsolicited aid of the interlopers, now making England the world leader in the traffic in human beings. Stressing the importance of "a trade so beneficial to the Kingdom", the Lords of Trade and Plantations adjured the governors of all the American colonies to see to "the well supplying of the Plantations and Colonies with negroes at reasonable prices." The result was that the number of African lifetime bondservants in 1708-09 in the three main southern colonies exceeded the number of European bond-servants by 12,000 (tithables) to none in Virginia, 4,657 to 3,003 in Maryland, and 4,100 to 120 in South Carolina.

Now a new note is heard; the terms "deficiency laws", "quota", and "the need for white servants", appear with increasing frequency in the records. "White servants rarely come of late," said one of William Penn's trustees, "and consequently the country is in danger of becoming a country of negroes." The Council of Trade and Plantations urged the King to direct the colonial governors to enforce strictly "the acts for increasing the number of white men in their colonies " The King, William of Orange, complied just seven days later. On October 8, 1698, South Carolina enacted its first 'deficiency law' providing penalties for plantation owners who failed to maintain a ratio of at least one white bond-servant for every six male Negroes above sixteen years of age on each plantation. Governor Francis Nicolson reported in 1698 his concern that in Maryland and Virginia the ratio of African bond-servants to English bond-servants had risen as high as six or seven to one. The Council of Trade and Plantations voiced similar fears that in Jamaica, in 1709, the plantation owners were not maintaining their required "quota" of white men to African bond-servants, in spite of the fact that each plantation owner was liable to a fine of five pounds sterling for every three months and for every white bond-servant of his "deficiency". The editor of the Calendar of State Papers for 1716-1717 makes the general comment that "Everywhere the problem of increasing the white population by means of the import of indentured labor was coming to the fore."

Turn, and turn again. First prefer white labor, then black labor, now white labor again. Why? Of course these European bond-servants were to be exploited, and heavily exploited, on the plantations. That point was made repeatedly. To cite one example, in 1682, "Sundry merchants possessing estates in America" were anxious lest the enforcement of the anti-kidnapping laws in England inhibit the flow of bond-servants to the colonies. They urged consideration of the fact that "every white man's work at tobacco for a year is worth 7 (seven pounds sterling) to the king." That was just the part of the profit that went to the king, and did not include the profits of the planters, shipmasters and merchants. When we note that European bond-servants were selling at less than three pounds per year of unexpired term and that their maintenance came to practically nothing, we can see how remunerative their exploitation was for the owners.

But labor is labor, smoke the pipe or sniff the snuff; taste the sugar or rice. You cannot tell whether African, English or Irish labor made it for you. The renewal of interest in white men for bond-servants was, therefore, not due to any special qualities of their labor power, in which they were the same as the Africans.

VII

The reason was simple. The special demand for white servants was now primarily to "people the country", to serve in the militia, to serve as a basic means of social control based on the perpetual and hereditary bond-servitude of Africans and Afro-Americans. There are literally scores of documents in the records of the time which attest to this fact. I mention a few.

The same letter from merchants possessing estates in Virginia and Maryland made the point that they "have no white men to superintend our negroes, or repress an insurrection of negroes" The Council of Trade and Plantations reported to the King on September 8, 1721 that in South Carolina "black slaves have lately attempted and were very near succeeding in a new revolution ... and therefore, it may be necessary... to propose some new law for encouraging the entertainment of more white servants in the future. The militia of this province does not consist of above 2,000 men." In his preface to volume sixteen of the *Calendar of State Papers*, Fortescue writes that by 1697-98, "The system of defense by white servants had broken down." "The defense of the West Indies," he tells us, "depended, apart from the fleet, entirely on the militia, which was composed of white servants." But the island plantation colonies were finding it impossible to hold European servants once their time was out because of the strict limits of land available for occupation by freedmen. The record is replete with dire pronouncements on the consequences of the relatively small and diminishing number of white men in those islands. In 1688, the Governor of Barbados complained of the Quaker planters' failure to maintain their fair share of the number of white bond-servants "required to suppress the danger of an insurrection by negroes." The Governor of Jamaica wrote to the Prince of Wales on 24 September 1716 that his island was "...almost defenceless, as well from the want of white people to prevent any insurrection of the Negroes, as ships of war to secure the coasts, trade and navigation...." The House of Commons, on November 3, 1691, received "a petition of divers merchants, masters of ships, planters and others, trading to foreign plantations ... setting forth, that the plantations cannot be maintained without a considerable number of white servants, as well to keep the blacks in subjection, as to bear arms in case of an invasion."

Parliament, in 1717, responded to these cries of alarm by making transportation to bond-servitude in the plantation colonies a legal punishment for crime. Persons convicted of felonies, for which the death penalty could be imposed, could instead be sentenced to fourteen years' transportation to the American plantations. Persons convicted of lesser offenses were liable to seven years' servitude. A study cited by A.E. Smith, for the years 1729-1770, indicated that at least seventy per cent of those convicted in the Old Bailey court in London were sent to Maryland and Virginia. Thenceforth "His Majesty's passengers" constituted a large proportion of the white bond-servant population in the southern | plantation colonies, being a majority of those arriving from England. Nevertheless, the majority of the total number of European bond-servants coming to the southern colonies (including those who originally disembarked at Philadelphia or other non-South ports) were, for the greater part of the eighteenth century, Irish, Germans, and Scots. Aside from convicts, the number of European bond-servants in Maryland more than doubled between 1707 and 1755. Whereas the number of white servants in Virginia in 1708 was negligible, Governor Gooch reported to the home government that great numbers of bond-servants, white as well as black, had been imported into that colony since 1720. Separate bond-servant statistics are lacking for South Carolina, except for 1708, when, out of

only 120 European bond-servants. However, it is generally agreed that a majority of the Europeans coming to the colonies were bond-servants; therefore, as the white population of South Carolina increased from 4,000 to 25,000 between 1708 and 1755, the white-servant immigration must have amounted to several thousand. (6)

VIII

The bourgeoisie could get European bond-servants to come to the southern colonies, but how was it to avoid another Bacon's Rebellion or Servants' Plot in which African and European bond-servants would join in challenging the ruling elite? How was the bourgeoisie to turn that old situation around, break up the solidarity of black and white, and then enlist the poor whites in the social control apparatus of the ruling class? Professor Morgan, at one point in the article previously cited, comments as follows: "I do not mean to argue that Virginia deliberately turned to African slavery as a means of preserving and extending the rights of Englishmen." Quite right; but reverse the order of the clauses and you have a profoundly correct statement: The plantation bourgeoisie deliberately extended a privileged status to the white poor of all categories as a means of turning to African slavery as the basis of its system of production.

The seventeenth-century Anglo-American plantation bourgeoisie drew the color line between freedom and slavery, a line that had not previously existed under English custom or law. (7) James C. Ballagh, in his well-known old essay, *A History of Slavery in Virginia*, first published in 1902, detailed how the Virginia Assembly, "in a long series of... statutes ... first drew and applied the color line as a limit upon various social and political rights, and finally narrowed its application definitely to the negro race with respect to liberty and customary or legal privileges and rights." This drawing of the color line was accomplished by defining who was to be a slave; then, of course, everybody else would be by definition a non-slave. The process took place over a period of nearly half a century.

In 1662 the Virginia Assembly decreed that all persons born in Virginia were to follow the condition of the mother. This was a direct result, according to Ballagh, of "fornication" of Englishmen with Negro women; but it was also intended as a "deterrent to the female" English. For, as the historian Philip Bruce put it, "It is no ground for surprise that in the seventeenth century there were instances of criminal intimacy between white women and negroes. Many of the former had only recently arrived from England, and were therefore comparatively free from . . . race prejudice" It was in this connection that the very first legislative enactment of white-skin privilege for white labor was passed when, by excluding white women bond-servants from the list of taxable persons, the Assembly provided for the general exemption of white women bond-servants from field work. In 1662 interracial fornication by "Christian" men was made punishable by a fine double the amount otherwise imposed for that offense. In 1705 a white servant woman became liable to five years added servitude for this offense, and the son or daughter born in result of the "crime" was to be a bond-servant until he or she became thirty-one years of age.

After 1670, baptism in Christ in Virginia was to have no emancipative effect in this world. But this left still free those Negroes who came from Spanish, Portuguese or English territory already baptized. In 1680, therefore, the Virginia Assembly decreed that imported servants were slaves unless they had been born of Christian parents in a Christian land and first purchased by a Christian. That seemed to cover all contingencies, except for the limited-term black

bond-servants, free Negroes and Indian slaves. In 1705, the last step was taken: All servants who were brought into the country, by sea or land, were to be slaves, unless they came as three-star Christians as specified in the 1680 law. Only blacks were slaves, not Indians, in Virginia. (8)

There remained the question of the free persons of color. But their position was clearly defined as one of a lower status than any white person. In 1705, for instance, the law forbade any Negro to own any white servant. In 1723, free Negroes, who had until then been voters on the same basis as whites, were deprived of this right. Some years later, Lieutenant Governor William Gooch justified this and other special deprivation of rights to free Afro-Americans: The purpose, he explained, was "to fix a brand on free negroes and mulattoes... (because) a distinction ought to be made between their offspring and the descendants of an Englishman." He deplored the "pride of a manumitted slave, who looks upon himself immediately on his acquiring his freedom, to be as good a man as the best of his neighbors." Gooch was determined to break that simple pride, and "to preserve... a distinction between them (free Negroes) and their betters." The Council of Trade and Plantations in England, who had asked the question, indicated its satisfaction with the answer.

The white-skin privileges of the poor free whites were simply reflexes of the disabilities imposed on the Negro slave: to move about freely without a pass; to marry without any upper-class consent; to change employment; to vote in elections in accordance with the laws on qualifications; to acquire property; and last, but not least, in this partial list, the right of self-defense.

Not only the free whites, but the white bond-servants were given privileges in relation to the African. In 1680 the Virginia Assembly repealed all penalties that had been imposed on white servants for plundering during Bacon's Rebellion. The language of the act implicitly excluded from this benefit any Afro-American freedmen or limited-term bond-servants who had taken part in the Rebellion, Negro children were made tithable, hence workable, at twelve years of age, while white bond-servants were exempt until they were fourteen.

In 1680, Negroes were forbidden to carry arms, defensive or offensive. In 1705, the specified freedom dues for a white bond-servant included a musket. In 1680, the law provided that any Negro who raised his or her hand against any Christian white would be liable to receive thirty lashes, well laid on. Under the law of 1705, a white servant raising a hand against the master, mistress or overseer was liable to an extension of a year of his or her servitude. Under the same law, the killing of an Afro-American life-time bondservant was legal if the bond-servant resisted "correction" by the master or his agent. Here is a classic clear distinction between race and class oppression.

In 1680, it was made legal to kill a fugitive Negro bond-servant if he or she resisted recapture. In 1705, the law specified that a white servant might not be whipped naked except by order of a Justice of the Peace. The same law gave the white bond-servant the right to seek legal redress against the master for severity of treatment or for inadequacy of provisions.

In 1705; white bond-servants, upon completion of their terms of servitude, were to receive under the law the following freedom dues: men, 10 bushels of corn, 30 shillings in money, and a musket worth 20 shillings; women, 15 bushels of corn and 40 shillings in money. The Afro-American laborers were not to receive freedom dues, since they were not to have freedom. (9)

IX

In 1692, representatives of Virginia in England made the point, that Virginia and Maryland, being on the continent, could not keep the bond-servants under control so simply as the authorities could do on the island colonies, of the West Indies with the help of the fleet. From Virginia reports of insurrectionary plots by Negroes became frequent. The editor of the Calendar of State Papers describes Virginia in 1728-29 as "a community filled with anxiety and in constant dread" on this account.

The experience of Bacon's Rebellion had shown that the continental colonies were too far from England to be controlled by troops based in the Mother Country. The Crown was unwilling to maintain at its own expense a permanent army in the colonies for this purpose. Although the plantation owners on some occasions appealed for British troops for the maintenance of order against the rebellious population, they were unwilling to pay the cost. Increasingly, therefore, the colonial governments concerned themselves with the development of the white militia.

From almost the beginning, members of the colonial ruling elite and their key agents, auxiliaries, and employees were generally exempted from militia duty. The Act of 1705 thus excused "Any present or past member of the colony council, speaker of the house of burgesses, attorney-general, justice of the peace, or any person who has borne commission of captain or higher in the colony, ministers, clerks, schoolmasters, overseer of 4 or more slaves, constable, miller" Under that law bond-servants were also excluded from the militia. In 1723, however, when exemptions were in each instance required to find and furnish "one able white man" for a substitute, no specific exclusion of bonded servants was provided in regard to those who might serve as substitutes. In fact, it was provided that "nothing in this Act contained, shall hinder or deter any captain from admitting any able-bodied white person, who shall be above the age of sixteen years, to serve in his troop or company in the place of any person required by this act to be enlisted."

By 1727, the special form of militia known as the slave patrol was established in Virginia to deal with the "great dangers that may... happen by the insurrections of negroes" The patrols were to be appointed by the chief militia officer in each county, and employed for the purpose of "dispersing all unusual concourse of negroes ...and for preventing any dangerous combinations which may be made amongst them at such meetings." The poor white men who constituted the rank and file of the militia were to be rewarded for this service by such things as exemption from attendance at regular militia musters, and for payment of taxes and parish levies." An article in the Act of 1727 that especially catches the attention is the one that specifies the militia pay-scale in pounds of tobacco according to rank. The poor whites when on patrol duty were to receive pay according to that scale.

And paid for what? — to crush plots and rebellions such as their own grandfathers may have taken part in along with black bond-servants fifty years before.

X

But their own position, vis-a-vis the rich and powerful — the matter that lay at the root of that old civil strife — was not improved, but weakened, by the white-skin privilege system. That system, after all, was conceived and instituted as an alternative method to that of Grantham and Berkeley, but with precisely the same aims and same effect. On that we have the most unimpeachable testimony.

In 1831, less than a hundred miles from the spot where the "four hundred English and Negroes in Armes" had wanted to shoot Berkeley's mendacious Captain, or cut him in pieces, there occurred that brief proletarian uprising known as Nat Turner's Rebellion. That event sent a premonitory shudder through the frame of the United States ruling plantation bourgeoisie. It brought to the surface thoughts and dreads not ordinarily spoken. All that winter and spring of 1831-32 the Virginia Legislature and the press debated the meaning and possible consequences of this battle cry of labor enslaved. They were looking to their defenses, and they talked much of the poor whites.

T. J. Randolph, nephew and namesake of the author of the Declaration of Independence, put the rhetorical question to his fellow legislators: "... upon whom is to fall the burden of this defense (against slave-proletarian revolts): not upon the lordly masters of their hundred slaves, who will never turn out except to retire with their families when danger threatens. No sir, it is to fall... chiefly upon the non-slaveholders... patrolling under a compulsory process, for a pittance of seventy-five cents per twelve hours...."

George W. Summers of Kanawha County made many in the House of Delegates wince. "In the character of Patroles," he said, the poor white "...is thus made to fold to his bosom, the adder that stings him." Summers, of course, was as opposed as all the rest of the members to freeing the poor white of "the adder" by establishing equality of black and white labor in Virginia.

"Civis", an Eastern Virginia slaveholder, pointed out that in his part of the state more than half the white minority had "little but their complexion to console them for being born into a higher caste."

Another slaveholder, who signed himself with the prophetic name "Appomattox", spoke of the status of the white workers in terms surely even wiser than he knew: "... forced to wander vagabonds around the confines of society, finding no class which they can enter, because for the one they should have entered, there is substituted an ARTIFICIAL SYSTEM of labor to which they cannot attach themselves." (10)

Profoundly true! The artificial, i.e., unequal, system of labor prevented them from "entering" their own class by "attaching themselves" to the proletarian class struggle.

In these Virginia debates we hear published to the world the social degradation that a century and a half of white supremacy had brought to the poor whites, who had forgotten those blood-vows sworn by the triumphant light of the Jamestown fire, and in the gloaming waiting for Grantham.

FOOTNOTES

For publication here footnote references have been condensed and greatly reduced. A standard reference used in this essay is the CAL-NDAR OF STATE PAPERS, COLONIAL, published by the British Public Record Office. The source for the laws of Virginia frequently cited in the text is W. W. Hening, STATUTES-AT-LARGE OF VIRGINIA (11 Vols.; Richmond, 1799-1814). A complete set of references can be obtained by writing to RADICAL AMERICA.)

1. Edmund S. Morgan and T. H. Breen have recently made notable contributions to an integral theory of early colonial history by suggesting a connection between the social turbulence in Virginia between 1660 and 1692, including Bacon's Rebellion, and the establishment of racial slavery. (See Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox", JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY, June, 1972; and Breen, "A Changing Labor Force and Race Relations in Virginia, 1660-1710", JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY, Fall, 1973). It seems to me, however, that their efforts fail fundamentally to establish that connection, and their well-begun arguments trail off into unhelpful, indeed misleading, speculations. This essay is an attempt, by a resifting of familiar materials in a different light, to discover that crucial link.

2. The "slavery-as-capitalism" school of American historians in-

cludes W.E. B. DuBois, Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Lewis C. Gray, Roger W. Shugg, Carl N. Degler, and Winthrop D. Jordan. Eric Williams and C. L. R. James view Caribbean slavery in the same light. Karl Marx invariably referred to the American plantation economy as capitalist enterprise. If one accepts this view, there is no reason for denying that the slaveholders were capitalists—a plantation bourgeoisie—and the slaves were proletarians. Of course, that form of labor was a contradiction of the basic requisites of general capitalist development—a contradiction that was purged away in the American Civil War. The fact remains that for a time that form of labor was not a barrier to rapid capitalist accumulation, but its main engine. Finally—academic considerations aside—the question of who is or who is not a proletarian has absolutely no significance except in relation to the class struggle conducted by propertyless laborers against their capitalist exploiters. Such laborers constituted the majority of the rebels in the Civil War phase of Bacon's Rebellion, and of the entire population of the plantation colonies.

3. Important published accounts of Bacon's Rebellion are to be found in Wilcomb E. Washburn, THE GOVERNOR AND THE REBEL (Chapel Hill, 1957), and Charles M. Andrews, ed., NARRATIVES OF THE INSURRECTIONS, 1675-1690 (New York, 1915). Unpublished sources include Captain Grantham's "Account", in the Bath Mss., Vol. LXXVH, folios 301-302; and the George N. Chalmers Collection, "Letters Relating to Virginia", I, folio 49, in the New York Public Library.

4. Winthrop D. Jordan, in his WHITE OVER BLACK (Chapel Hill, 1968), suggests this same question and makes the unsupported assertion that the plantation owners could have enslaved non-English Europeans if the owners had been able to conceive of such a monstrous transgression against white Christian fellowship. Since I am here occupied in presenting positive theses, I leave polemics aside. Just one note: "White-over-white" perpetual slavery was instituted in Britain, for Scottish coal miners and salt-pan workers, in 1606, a year before Jamestown was founded, and it was not completely ended until 1799. Only objective difficulties, not moral or racial principles, prevented a wider practice of the system and eventually were decisive in bringing about its discontinuance. See "Slavery in Modern Scotland", EDINBURGH REVIEW, Vol. 189 (1899), pp. 119-148.

5. The most important secondary sources on European bond-servants in Colonial America are A. E. Smith, COLONISTS IN BONDAGE: WHITE SERVITUDE AND CONVICT LABOR IN AMERICA, 1607-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1947); Richard B. Morris, GOVERNMENT AND LABOR IN EARLY AMERICA (New York, 1947); and Marcus W. Jernegan, LABORING AND DEPENDENT CLASSES IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1607-1783 (Chicago, 1931). The most useful specialized studies for this essay have been E. I. McCormac, WHITE SERVITUDE IN MARYLAND, 1634-1820 (Baltimore, 1895); and Warren B. Smith, WHITE SERVITUDE IN COLONIAL SOUTH CAROLINA (Columbia, 1961).

6. In the continental colonies, even in the good times, no more than one-third of the European bond-servants were able to complete their terms of service and establish themselves as independent farmers; and by the end of the seventeenth century, the proportion was only five or six per cent. (T. J. Wertenbaker, THE PLANTERS OF COLONIAL VIRGINIA (New York, 1959). But the situation of the freedmen in the insular colonies, Jamaica, Barbados, and others, was even worse. Bond servants completing their terms there left the islands by the thousands. Those who did not succeed in getting away began to constitute a destitute proletarian white sub-class. The special measures enacted, or at least considered, by the Anglo-Caribbean ruling class to provide some safety margin of racial privileges in this circumstance, anticipated similar measures in the continental plantation country. Among them were the exclusion of non-whites from work as skilled tradesmen, and the extension of the franchise in order that these destitute whites might then be able to sell their votes to the bourgeois candidates at election time.

7. Which came first, racism or slavery? In the post-World War II era of national-liberation upsurge, a related controversy has occupied much attention of American historians. One side, the "psycho-cultural" side, holds that white supremacy is "natural", the result of an "unthinking decision"; that it derives from human attributes not subject to effective eliminative social action. The other side, the "social" side, believes that racism arises from socio-economic, rather than natural, conditions; that (at least by implication) it is susceptible of elimination by social action.

Evidence of early instances of enslavement of Afro-Americans is stressed by the "psycho-cultural" school as proof of the "natural antipathy" of white and black. On the other hand, as Jordan (foremost of the "psycho-cultural") puts it, "Late and gradual enslavement undercuts the possibility of natural and deep-seated antipathy toward Negroes... if whites and Negroes could share the same status of half freedom for forty years in the seventeenth century, why could they not share full freedom, in the twentieth." (Winthrop D. Jordan, "Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery", JOURNAL OF SOUTHERN HISTORY,

vol. 28 (1962), pp. 19-30, loc. cit., p. 20.

Of all the historians of the "social" school whose work I have read, only the black historian Lerone Bennett, Jr., in his article, "The Road Not Taken", *EBONY*, vol. 25 (1970), no. 10 (August), pp. 70-77, and in Chapter III of his new book *THE SHAPING OF AMERICA* (Chicago, 1975), succeeds in placing the argument on the three essential bearing-points from which it cannot be toppled. First, racial slavery and white supremacy in this country was a ruling-class response to a problem of labor solidarity. Second, a system of racial privileges for white workers was deliberately instituted in order to define and establish the "white race" as a social control formation. Third, the consequence was not only ruinous to the interests of the Afro-American workers, but was also "disastrous" (Bennett's word) for the white worker. Others (such as the Handlins, Morgan and Breen) state the first two points to some degree, but only Bennett combines all three.

Although I learned of Bennett's essay only a few weeks ago, the same three essentials have informed my own approach in a book I have for several years been engaged in writing (and of which this present article is a spin-off), on the origin of racial slavery, white supremacy and the system of racial privileges of white labor in this country.

The comparative study of the systems of social control in the various slave-labor plantation colonies in the Americas, combined with a study of Bacon's Rebellion, its origin and aftermath, can contribute much to the resolution of the question, in favor of "deliberate choice" and against "unthinking decision." In the continental plantation colonies (Virginia was the pattern-setter) the Anglo-American ruling class drew the color line between freedom and slavery on race lines; any trace of African ancestry carried the presumption of slavery. The same Anglo-American ruling class drew the freedom-slavery line differently in Jamaica and Barbados (as did other European ruling classes elsewhere in the Americas). The poor white became not only economically, but politically and socially, marginal in the British West Indies generally. In the southern continental colonies the bourgeoisie came to base their system of social control upon the white proletariat and semi-proletarian and subsistence agricultural classes. In the southern plantation colonies the free person of any degree of African ancestry was forced into an illegal or semi-legal status, as a general rule. The same Anglo-American ruling bourgeoisie deliberately created and nurtured this group as a petit-bourgeois buffer-control stratum in the Caribbean island societies. These are all decisive differences which cannot be explained on the basis of "psychology" or "English cultural heritage."

Finally, and more important, while the Anglo-American bourgeoisie had, by their prior experience in Providence (Bahamas) and Barbados, learned the profitability of equating, or seeking to equate, "Negro" and "slave", the masses of European (at that stage almost all English) bond-servants in Virginia had not accepted that point of view. Instead, they intermarried, conspired, ran away, and finally revolted in arms together with African bond-servants. Racial slavery could not have existed, and did not exist, under those circumstances. Under such circumstances, to attempt to solve the "labor problem" by increasing the number of African bond-servants, reducing them to hereditary lifetime servitude, and making them the main productive labor base of the society would have been like trying to put out the Jamestown fire with kerosene.

8. In South Carolina, in the earliest years of the colony, Indians were enslaved more extensively than was ever the case in other colonies. But this practice was, on the whole, counter-productive for a number of reasons. The Proprietors were anxious lest the practice cost the colony the services of those Indians who were serving as returners of runaway Africans. The European indentured servants were enticed with promises of land (only exceptionally realized); but no such illusions were possible for the Indians, who could only lose what land they had under the European plan. The English were, furthermore, concerned not to increase the danger of Indian collaboration with the Spanish and French. I do not share the occasionally expressed opinion that relatively few continental Indians were enslaved because of a lack of adaptability to agriculture.

9. To contrast the status accorded European and African bond-servants is not to suggest that the life of the white bond-servant was anything other than hard and oppressive. A. E. Smith believes that "the vast majority of them worked out their time without suffering excessive .CO cruelty or want, £and) received their freedom dues without suing for them." Presumably he means the "majority" of those who survived their period of service. He concedes that "the system of white servitude was cruel" on account of the hard labor it imposed on persons "generally unfitted for such a life", and so much so 'that in the early colonial period "fifty or seventy-five out of every hundred white servants died without ever having a decent chance at survival." (op. cit., pp. 278, 303-4.)

Morris says that the shift to main reliance upon African laborers did not bring with it an improvement in the conditions of the European bond-servants. They continued to be "subject to the severest disciplin-

ary measures." He cites with approval Edis' well-known comment that "Generally speaking they [the European bond-servants] groan under a yoke worse than [Biblical] Egyptian bondage." Morris relates in some detail the record of more than a score of cases of brutal treatment, including murder by violent blows and deliberate starvation, rape, torture, and inducement of suicide, in which the masters, with rare exception, were only lightly punished, if at all. Morris decided not to add more examples because to do so "would be to give the screw many a turn and in the long run immunize the reader by harsh repetition." (op. cit., pp. 484, 486-497.)

10. Randolph's speech to the Virginia House of Delegates, January 21, 1832, was published as an abolitionist pamphlet, and is available at the NYPL. Summers' speech to the House of Delegates was given four days earlier, and was printed in the *RICHMOND ENQUIRER* on February 2, 1832. "Civis's" comments appeared in the newspaper on May 4, and those of "Appomattox" on March 3.

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The Roots of Class Struggle in the South

Ken Lawrence

How many people know which is the most unionized state in the United States? ... the least unionized ?

The answers are that the most unionized state is West Virginia and the least unionized state is North Carolina, with South Carolina less than two per cent away.

The reason I start with that is that I want to draw a picture of the working class of the South a little bit different from the familiar one, which is Southerners as victims, Southerners as helpless, and so on. I think that's a picture that's useful to liberal politicians and businessmen who have certain designs on the South — which entail the working class being subservient to their ends, etc. But I don't think it's a very helpful picture of what's decisive about the South for workers — in terms of their ability to fight and win what they're after. What I think is decisive about the South, in the sense that we're interested in, is the tremendous unevenness of development.

That's reflected by the fact that West Virginia is the most unionized state in the country, and North Carolina is the least unionized state, and they're not very far apart. And they both are part of the Southern region, the region in which we are active. And so you have — and over and over again we're going to see this kind of thing happening, where you have advanced layers of the working class (advanced in the sense that workers have gotten themselves together and fought together and won what they were fighting for) side by side with the most oppressed layers of the working class in the whole country, black and white. This is the situation of working people in the South. And what this offers, more than any other part of the country, is a real explosive combination — on the one hand, an example of development, side by side with perhaps the greatest need for struggle and victory. And this, in turn, allows the concept of combined development, that is, where the most oppressed layers are capable of leaping over whole stages of development and appearing on stage with all the equipment that the most advanced layers have already achieved, because the example is right there before them.

So anyway this is not going to be the traditional picture of the South enumerating how poor it is, or something like that, but rather the peaks of struggle which have thrust the whole working class, not just in the South but throughout the country, forward.

USING STATISTICS

I just want to add one more preliminary note, which is that ordinarily, statistical studies, which are largely sociological, are the place people begin in making these evaluations. And historically that's an excellent guide, and we will use it a great deal. But in periods like the one we're entering today, statistics become less a weapon, as they don't serve our immediate needs. In other words, in 1955, if you were trying to draw a statistical picture of the working people in the South, the 1950 census would give you a pretty good approximation of where you were five years later and the situation you were dealing with. In 1965, the 1960 census wouldn't have been as adequate because things were changing more rapidly, especially urbanization and mechanization of agriculture, but it still would have been pretty close. But today, in 1973, things are changing so rapidly that the 1970 census is already largely outmoded in terms of providing the kind of information that we need. And for

that reason among many others, the historic picture, the sweep, and the similarities to past periods are a more decisive weapon to be put at the service of working people to see where we are now in comparison to similar periods in the past, and where we're going, and how to get there. And that's really the purpose of this work.

I want to give you an example of this business of where we are today, because it was quite a shock to me to find out. Just to run down a comparison, I'll take Mississippi, where I live, and compare it with the United States. Only about seven per cent of Mississippi's workers are engaged in agriculture, and that percentage is falling rapidly. These are statistics for non-agricultural employment in 1966. In the United States, mining had 1% of non-agricultural employment; Mississippi had 1.1%. Contract construction: the United States had 5.1%, Mississippi had 6.0%. Manufacturing: the United States had 29.9%, Mississippi had 31.9%. Transportation and public utilities: the United States had 6.5%, Mississippi had 5.2%. Trade: the United States had 20.7%, Mississippi had 18.8%. Finance, insurance and real estate, the United States had 4.8%, Mississippi had 3.4%. Services: the United States had 15%, Mississippi had 11.6%. Government employees: in the United States there were 17.0%, in Mississippi there were 22%. So you can see the United States has caught up with Mississippi.

And that's pretty much the general picture. There's throughout the country no longer the image that many of us have carried around with us, of the South; and especially the places that have been traditionally the rural agricultural South are industrially and sociologically not very different any more from the rest of the country. So, again we can say that the picture we're drawing and the needs we feel are very contemporary; they're not backward, they're not retarded, but the situation we're confronted with in the South, at least as far as the nation's economy and political structure are concerned, are as advanced as almost any place in the country, and certainly as advanced as the country as a whole.

Now, in this presentation it's not going to be possible for me to be comprehensive in terms of telling you even all the things that I think are important in the history of labor in the South. And I'm going to try to cover what I think are a few very significant happenings that will illustrate, I hope, situations that are valuable as precedents for the kinds of things that we're going to be spending the rest of the week-end on, especially the question of fighting racism and the question of organizing the unorganized. So I hope nobody will be disappointed if I leave out their favorite strike or anything like that. I'm not trying to be comprehensive. This is a kind of introduction to study for anyone who wishes to pursue it.

Now especially in the South, it's really important to distinguish between the history of workers and the history of unions, even though most historians write them up as one and the same. They're not the same. And above all, they're not the same in the South. And the fact that historians usually don't make the distinction means that most labor history, as written, is pretty distorted. And you'll see examples of this. Ray Marshall of the University of Texas is today the recognized authority on Southern labor, after publishing a book a few years ago called *LABOR IN THE SOUTH*, which is the most comprehensive book in recent times on the subject. And he's received platitudes from everybody, saying that it's the greatest thing. And because it's the only thing available, there's no question about it. It's got a lot of good information, and I recommend that people read it, but very cautiously.

BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

Marshall tells us that the first union in the South was the Typographers Union in New Orleans, founded in 1810. By 1863, the labor movement in the South was running behind that in the rest of the country. There were only 10 city labor assemblies in the United States in 1863, one of which was in Louisville, Kentucky, and the rest of the South didn't have any such institutions. But anyway, from 1810 up until the Civil War, unions were scattered, small and weak, but they were increasingly frequent and they were developing and growing. One of the earliest strikes was organized by workers at the Tredegar Steel Co., in Richmond, Virginia, where 200 white workers struck in 1847 when the company was preparing to increase its slave work force to more than 600 workers. Two hundred white workers struck to prevent that, but they lost.

And this brings us to the point that's the big problem in studying labor history as union history, which is that the bulk of the work force of the South was not free white workers but was African slaves who were working on plantations. And they weren't allowed to unionize legally. Nonetheless, the strike, which was not a very powerful tool in the hands of white workers—who could be threatened and replaced by black slaves—the strike was a very important weapon which was used very effectively by slaves. And throughout the period in the 20 or 30 years before the Civil War, there were slave strikes over and over again. The major demand of slaves when they struck was to replace the sunup to sundown gang labor system with the task system. The way they would do it usually was that all the slaves on a given plantation or several plantations would run off and hide in the woods or the swamps, and send one person in to negotiate with the overseer or the master, demanding that the slaves get the task system, which would allow them, after they had finished their assigned daily tasks, to tend to their own gardens, their families, or what have you. And they very commonly won this. The task system became the norm by the time of the Civil War. But of course none of that working class militancy shows up in histories of unions because none of that was conducted by unions. And yet, there's no question in my mind that it was the most significant, and certainly the most victorious, kind of struggle going on among the working people of the South at the time.

THE CIVIL WAR

And for the next period, the period of the Civil War and its aftermath, the most important book of history, from the standpoint of working people, is *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA* by W. E. B. DuBois. In fact, it's remarkable that when you look around for a history of working people in the South of that period, there's almost nothing else, and certainly nothing as detailed and explicit as the book by DuBois. He begins: Chapter One is called "The Black Worker." Chapter Two is "The White Worker." Chapter Three is "The Planter." Chapter Four is "The General Strike." And we kind of get the image that he's speaking our language—telling us about how things happened then that are the things that we're interested in. And very few of us, that I know of, were taught in school to view the Civil War as a general strike of working people. And that was what won it. But that was what DuBois not only says but proves, and seals his case by offering Abraham Lincoln's testimony to the effect that what he's saying is true. DuBois says it was the black worker—the founding stone of a new economic system in the nineteenth century, and for the modern world—who brought Civil War in America.

And the point of this is, of course, that up until the 1850's,

the rulers of the North and the rulers of the South made every possible attempt to reach a compromise that would avoid open warfare between them. That the one group that was not willing to compromise, that constantly, regardless of any compromise that was made, was going to continue to fight for its freedom, was the black slaves. And they did. And as a result, none of the compromises worked, and the Civil War was brought on. And DuBois goes further than that. He says that the plight of white workers throughout the world is traceable to Negro slavery in America. And that's a remarkable statement. That says to me, and I take it seriously, that in order to understand the problems of white workers, not just back then, but in the world today, you have to have an understanding of Negro slavery in the United States.

I highly recommend *BLACK RECONSTRUCTION* as a place to start. It'll not only tell you a great deal, but it also provides a way of reading other material that doesn't give the information in the form that we need it, and allows you to see things that you might not see otherwise. DuBois says that the South lost the Civil War because of economic weakness, because its "whole labor class, black and white, went into economic revolt." And in his Chapter Four, "The General Strike," he's got an introductory note. This is his description of the general strike:

"How the Civil War meant emancipation and how the black worker won the war by a general strike which transferred his labor from the Confederate planter to the Northern invader, in whose army lines workers began to be organized as a new labor force."

That's a remarkable thing, and it's a remarkable chapter. And if ever there was a proof of the central role of black working people in the whole development of the working class in the United States, that furnishes the absolute proof. He says that half a million black slaves withdrew their labor from their Southern planter masters, and the South was doomed. Shortly after the black general strike, poor whites in the South went into open revolt against the Confederacy. In one year alone, 1864, DuBois notes that 100,000 poor whites deserted the Confederate armies.

I agree with DuBois that the Civil War was the greatest upheaval of working people in U.S. history, even though official labor history doesn't see it that way. The revolution was so successful in terms of building alliances, and then actually creating black-white unity after the Civil War, that the planter class was forced to enact what they called the Black Codes in order to try to re-establish their domination overworking people. And it's interesting to see who they were scared of when they were enacting the Black Codes. DuBois quotes the Mississippi statute: "That all freedmen, free negroes and mulattoes in this state over the age of 18 years, found on the second Monday in January, 1866, or thereafter, with no lawful employment or business, or found unlawfully assembling themselves together, either in the day or night time, and all white persons so assembling, with freedmen, free negroes or mulattoes, on terms of equality, or living in adultery or fornication with a freed woman, free negro or mulatto, shall be deemed vagrants, and on conviction thereof shall be fined in the sum of not exceeding, in the case of a freedman, free negro or mulatto \$50.00 and a white man \$200.00 and imprisoned at the discretion of the court, the free negro not exceeding ten days and the white man, not exceeding six months." Now, I think that's pretty remarkable that the rulers of Mississippi while they were passing their racist slave codes, decided that the people they had to punish the most severely were the whites

who got together with the blacks, that this unity was clearly the biggest threat they could see, and they outlawed it accordingly.

HOW TO READ LABOR HISTORY

I want to show you here one of the problems with the people who think they're writing objective history and really aren't. Just what we've already examined up to the Civil War and a little bit after, I think, makes it pretty clear that the people who were in the forefront of struggle were always the black slaves and later black freedmen. For a long time the greatest hindrance to them was the fact that the poor whites were in one way or another manipulated into serving as agencies of oppression by the planter class, and so on. And yet in this labor history by Marshall, Marshall says on page four, "The presence of the Negro depresses wages, reduces skill, curtails purchasing power, diverts white workers' attention from the economics of the race issue, and furnishes an enormous potential supply of industrial workers." Now just from what I've gone through so far, I would expect any historian who was just dealing with these facts fairly, to have written instead, "The presence of the whites depresses wages, reduces skill, curtails purchasing power," and so on, because in fact that is what happened for the first hundred years or so of capitalist development in the South, more often than not.

THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA

Following the Civil War, there were several different kinds of labor organizing. The first attempt nationwide was the National Labor Union, organized primarily by a man named William Sylvis, who, despite his racism, considered it essential to build unity between black and white working people. He toured the South in 1868, attempting to establish this. However, the National Labor Union itself very quickly faltered on this issue, despite appeals by Sylvis, by Frederick Douglass, by every leading black leader in the country. The union would not take a forthright stand on a completely open policy for all workers, and it fairly quickly faded from the scene.

During the same period one very interesting thing happened in the South. In 1868, in Pensacola, Florida, stevedores, who were mostly black, formed the Pensacola Workingmen's Association and went on strike the same year. And very soon after they were organized, they began to run into a different kind of trouble. This was the center of a rich supply of Southern lumber at the time, and for many years Canadian lumberjacks came to Florida in the wintertime to cut wood. In the winter of 1873, job competition, because of a general depression, strained to the breaking point. And the Canadians, who had come down to work in lumber, attempted to steal jobs from the blacks — the jobs as stevedores on the docks. So the Pensacola Workingmen's Association members armed themselves and protected their jobs. The British government requested of the American government that British citizens of Pensacola be protected from "riotous mobs of colored men." The American government sympathized, but it was not capable of suppressing the union, and the Canadians were in fact not allowed by the workers to take the jobs. The governments of Pensacola and of Florida tended to side with the Canadians, since they were white, but did not actually intervene to try to destroy the union, and so it won. And the union was quite popular in Pensacola, as a matter of fact, and had such great support that in the next session of the Florida legislature, the legislature essentially protected the union by licensing steve-

dores and requiring six months' residence in Florida before they could get a license. So this early, nearly all-black union fought from 1868 to 1873, didn't compromise, and won just about everything that it was actually fighting for.

Now the next remarkable thing, to me, that happened in the South was that, following the Hayes-Tilden compromise that removed the Reconstruction armies from the Southern states (the last vestiges of them; there weren't too many left) 1877 was also the year that mass proletarian violence swept the United States. As a matter of fact, there's a book by Robert V. Bruce called 1877: YEAR OF VIOLENCE, which describes the whole thing. And interestingly enough, it was black and white railroad workers together in Martinsburg, West Virginia, who began the strike. And because the armies, as part of the compromise, were not paid and therefore not available to break strikes, as they always had been up until that time, the strike swept along railroad lines that covered the whole country, and taught the ruling class quite a lesson, I think. It was probably the biggest nationwide upheaval there's ever been in the United States.

THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR

Now, the next organized labor movement in the country was the Knights of Labor, which actually was organized in 1869 but did not get into the South that early. But the success of the Knights of Labor is very sobering for people who have been raised to believe that Southern workers are somehow congenitally anti-union, which is a theory that's frequently offered.

Here are the figures: The Knights of Labor came into the South for the first time in 1879. In the first year they had 475 members. The next year, they had 1,855 members. The first year they had 6 locals; the second year they had 28 locals. By 1886, which was the peak year of the Knights of Labor nationwide, in the Southern states there were 21,208 members in 487 locals. So we have this anti-union South that we're told so much about, in seven years going from 475 members to over 20,000.

CLAUDE WILLIAMS: Was that white?

No, no. The Knights of Labor very officially and systematically organized without discrimination. Not only racially — they organized industrially, which after their fade, didn't happen again overall until the occurrence of the CIO. They did discriminate against a few people. Their constitution excluded lawyers, politicians, physicians, and rum-sellers from membership in the Knights, but otherwise they organized everybody, black and white. But I'll tell you, one of the interesting things is that a lot of writers have written that the Knights were segregated in some places; even though they organized everybody, they supposedly organized them into segregated locals. And Jan and I have been doing a great deal of research on the Knights in southern Mississippi, who were overwhelmingly black in the lumber industry and the sawmill workers and so on. And I believe that the reason why that impression is given is not because of the racism of the Knights of Labor, but because of the racism of the newspaper reporters and editors who were writing about it that historians read.

CLAUDE WILLIAMS: That's a very important point.

So, you see things like a reporter for a Mississippi paper, a Pascagoula paper, describing a meeting of the Knights of Labor and talking about the president of the local. And since the president of the local is black, the reporter writes in the report, "so-and-so, president of the Negro section,"

because to him it's inconceivable that there could have been a racially unified union in the South. Because of course there wasn't anything else interracial by that time. In fact, as late as 1946, FORTUNE magazine wrote a big article on labor in the South called "Labor Drives South," at the beginning of Operation Dixie. And one of the points that the author of the article makes is that in the South at that time, and since the end of World War I, the only institution found throughout the South where blacks and whites came together on an equal basis, if they did at all, was in labor unions. And yet, of course, we're told frequently by our liberal friends that workers are the most racist people of all. But that's in itself something that ought to be examined.

The Knights of Labor led strikes all over the South during this period: in the coal mines of Alabama and Tennessee, the cotton mills in Georgia and Alabama, sugar workers in Louisiana, lumber in Louisiana and Mississippi. They were not just a union. They also organized co-ops, producers co-ops. They owned a tobacco co-op in Raleigh, North Carolina; a cooperative coal mine at Mercer, Kentucky; a black cooperative cotton gin at Stewart's Station, Alabama; a cooperative clothing factory at Morgan City, Louisiana; and consumer co-ops which they set up to fight company stores in Pittsburgh, Kentucky; New Iberia, Louisiana; Pulaski City, Virginia; and other places that I haven't found the details of yet. And they also entered politics, and they elected a great number of people. In 1877, the Knights elected a Congressman and 11 of 15 city councilmen in Lynchburg, Virginia. They elected a majority of the city and county government in Macon, Georgia. They elected an alderman in Statesville, North Carolina, and several city officials in Mobile. The following year, they elected the mayor of Jacksonville, Florida, and the mayor of Vicksburg, Mississippi. And in Anniston, Alabama, they elected a carpenter as mayor, and two molders, a brickmaker, a butcher, a watch maker, a rental agent, and a shoemaker as councilmen.

Throughout most of the country, the Knights of Labor declined after 1886 because it was discovered that the Knights' leadership, primarily its president, Terence Powderly, was secretly working to sabotage the eight-hour movement. That news doesn't seem to have reached the South as quickly as the rest of the country, so we find that the Knights are still leading militant activity even as late as a little after the turn of the century. But generally they began to decline in 1886 and didn't amount to too much after that.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

And in most areas, they were succeeded by the American Federation of Labor under Samuel Gompers, which was a distinct backward step in several ways. One was that while the Knights had gone out of their way to advance the cause of working people in the political sphere, the AFL specifically rejected politics as a method of workers' advance. And in addition, the AFL rejected organizing all workers on an equal basis, and instead only organized a craft at a time into separate unions, often at odds with one another, and so on. At first the AFL was officially and rigorously anti-racist. But that was the first thing to go, and by 1895 the AFL had admitted the International Association of Machinists, which had a racist bar in its constitution, and by 1900 the racism had gotten so bad that there were official resolutions of the AFL allowing the executive board to segregate and discriminate whenever they found that it would be to their advantage to do so. And by 1918 the AFL for the

most part wasn't even willing to organize blacks under any circumstances. But even here, it's interesting that this tendency was the greatest in the North, and so much so that Frederick Douglass encouraged black workers to return South because skilled crafts were still open to them in the South and were not in the North. So it's interesting that even to the extent that racism was step-by-step imposed, that the people who run the country had their greatest difficulty in imposing it in the South, again not the traditional picture that we're offered.

In 1892, there was a racially unified general strike in New Orleans, which I believe was probably most significant in laying the groundwork for a lot of things that were to come. Jeremy Brecher, writing in his book, STRIKE!, said that the New Orleans general strike revealed an extraordinary solidarity among all races and classes of labor. And he says it helped to pave the way to the nationwide strike of 1894, two years later.

THE ALABAMA MINERS' STRIKE OF 1894

A book has recently appeared called LABOR REVOLT IN ALABAMA, by Robert D. Ward and William W. Rogers which is about the great strike of 1894, and I want to deal in some detail with this. This is an interesting book. Almost unwittingly, the authors have told the story of how, step by step, racism was imposed on black and white workers in Alabama. They haven't set out to do it, and I don't think they even realize that that's what they do. But they provide all the evidence, and reading it from that perspective is well worth doing. This is a tremendous book if you don't expect too much sophistication from the authors themselves, because it has a richness of detail that makes for good reading.

In 1889, 46.2% of Alabama coal miners were black. To me, that's a very striking statistic. And so I want to compare that fact in the book with the way the book's authors interpret its bearing on the strike. Here's what these authors of LABOR REVOLT IN ALABAMA said about black workers: "While they did not outnumber the whites, they served as a bar to an effective labor movement and as a strike-breaking force always available to the coal miners." What this book proves, by the way, is that that is untrue. While the whites did outnumber the blacks slightly, they served as an effective bar to the labor movement and ultimately divided it.

The first strikes in Alabama mines — and all of this is right in this area, by the way, in the five counties right around here; and it's a remarkable history — the first strikes were in 1879 and 1880, and they were broken by convict labor. And as a result, one of the earliest demands of miners in Alabama was the abolition of convict labor, and that was one of the things that they constantly struggled for, over and over again.

There were still strikes going on up until 1893, and the economic condition of mining as a whole was deteriorating at the time, 'because most of the coal was used to produce iron, and the iron industry was in a state of decline?' as the country was entering a depression. So the major companies, led by the Tennessee Company, slashed wages. And at about this time, the United Mine Workers of Alabama was formed, not to be confused with the United Mine Workers of America, because it's not the same. They had a statewide convention and they made the following demands. They said they would accept a 10% wage cut, provided that they would get the following: all coal weighed before dumping; a check-weighman chosen by the miners for every mine; and reductions in their rent, their store purchases, their mining supplies purchases, and their medical costs.

Note: Earlier versions of this text have contained erroneous figures for Knights of Labor membership in the South.

At first the company's tactic was to try to negotiate separately with black miners and with white miners. But the black miners, who were invited first, told the white miners about it, invited the white miners to the meeting. The company was furious, and nothing came of the negotiations. And when the pay cut went into effect, the UMW of Alabama voted to strike on April 14 of 1894. And the strike spread immediately throughout the five-county area. The first day there were approximately 6,000 on strike and it grew to almost 9,000. The vice president of the Tennessee Company called his system of strike-breaking (he came in to break the strike personally) "division" of the workers. He said if he could divide the workers, it would make them easier to handle. And his strategy was to import black workers. He wasn't able to get any of the Alabama black miners to scab, but he figured that he could divide the workers by importing black scabs, because he imported them all the way from Kansas to Birmingham to put them to work in the mines.

At this time, it's interesting to know what was on the picket signs of the strikers, because the newspapers kept reporting it as if it was white strikers and black strike-breakers. Here's what some of the picket signs said: They said, "Convicts Must Go." They said, "United We Stand." And some of the signs said, "We the Colored Miners of Alabama Stand With Our White Brothers." On April 23, after the first week of the strike, there was a demonstration of 4,000 miners in Birmingham that was 50% black. And one newspaper, writing about the strike, complained about the stubbornness and unity of black miners, "who seemed as determined in their purpose as the white."

On May 16 a black strikebreaker was killed while recruiting scabs. And interestingly enough, three people were charged with the murder: two were white and one was black. Ten days later the governor called out the troops and the war was really on.

The first day that the troops were called out, the commander discovered that one of the bands of Guardsmen called up from Birmingham was unionized, so they were quickly dismissed and replaced by troops from some other part of the state.

The workers held firm. There was a meeting on June 18 at Adamsville, where 800 white and 300 black miners met to reaffirm their support of the strike. And one of the motions of the meeting thanked "our colored brothers for standing firm against attempts to divide them." The miners also understood what was going on. And by this time, the political campaign was beginning to steam up, the campaign for governor and for legislature. And several miners were running for legislature, and a candidate jointly endorsed by the populists and the Jeffersonian Democrats was being supported by the strikers.

Finally, the strike was settled as a compromise, and in typical fashion, from every strike I've ever seen in my life, where workers (just like companies) demand more than they expect to get, so that they will get part of what they're demanding. But these authors (as almost all labor historians), when the workers don't get everything they ask for, write it down as a defeat. And actually, it was not at all, in my opinion. For instance, the wages they won were somewhere in between what they had demanded and what the company had offered. The price of blasting powder, which was a big issue, was reduced. They were not given any new check-weighmen, but the ones that the company had tried to take away were kept. Rents on company houses were cut 10%. And there was no discrimination in rehiring strikers and strike leaders. So that's how that strike ended.

If you read most standard labor history, what you read about going on at this time is not this strike, as interesting and as big a strike as this was, and racially unified in spite of all the handicaps. The strike you read about is the Pull-

man strike by the lily-white American Railway Union, led by Eugene Debs. But this Alabama one certainly gives much deeper picture to me of the kinds of struggles the workers were confronted with than anything I've ever read about the Pullman strike. But that was the famous one.

As far as I know, the Alabama miners' strike was the last important struggle that grew out of the Knights of Labor's philosophy of industry-wide organizing of all people without discrimination. The result, in terms of the labor movement, was that the whole period went into eclipse with the rise of the AFL. Racism was built into unions

A STUDY OF RACISM IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT

There is a recent article by Herbert Hill in SOCIETY magazine, called "Anti-Oriental Agitation and the Rise of Working Class Racism," which shows, among other things how Gompers, using the issue of so-called *coolie labor, was able to confuse the whole AFL with racism. In fact it's interesting that he came from the tobacco industry, from the cigar union. And one of the first things that happened in this anti-oriental campaign was that a new racist institution was introduced into the labor movement — the union label. The union label was first introduced by white cigarmakers in a "buy only white cigars" campaign — "These cigars are made by white union labor. Don't buy Chinese-made cigars." And that was the first union label on record, and was part of Gompers' campaign. And as a result of the anti-Oriental drive, according to Hill, the model was built by which the AFL craft unions then proceeded to expel blacks from all the skilled trades.

And that was accomplished by 1920. Up until 1920, from 1900 to 1920, you found blacks in virtually all the skilled trades. But step by step by step they were expelled by the white tradesmen, under the leadership of the AFL and Samuel Gompers. There were exceptions during this period, and they're important, and they're almost all in the South.

The biggest exception was the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, which was very strong in Louisiana and Texas, and also had members in Arkansas and Mississippi. It was formed in 1910, black and white united; it grew to 30,000 members; two years later it affiliated with the IWW and conducted a very militant strike in 1912. Again, this is a situation that historians write up as a defeat, because all they can see is unions and not workers. The IWW did disappear from the scene, but much that was demanded in those organizing drives, and fought for, was won by the workers. And once again it becomes necessary to separate the two histories in order to see the reality.

There were a tremendous number of successful or un successful strikes, a great deal of proletarian turbulence, up until World War I. After the war, the labor movement (the AFL and the railroad brotherhoods) grew somewhat in the early and mid-twenties. But following about 1925, as the country's economy became more turbulent, the ruling class made a tremendous attack on the working class, slashed wages across the board, smashed unions, etc. The AFL went into a state of decline, and it was just spiraling down ward, not recruiting anywhere, above all collapsing in the South.

THE COMMUNIST UNIONS

At that time, in the late twenties, the Communist Party formed a new, nationwide industrial union called the Trade Union Unity League, under the leadership of William Z. Foster. Two of the most important strikes in the history of the South were led by the Communists. One was the Gastonia textile strike, led by the National Textile Workers

Union. (It was that strike, among other things, that led to the formation of the Trade Union Unity League. The NTWU was actually formed before the whole nationwide union and it became one of the first member unions.) And of course following that, the Harlan, Kentucky, miners strike, led by the National Miners Union. The interesting thing about those to me is that even our own SCEF history book has, by only seeing the union, and not the workers, written up the NMU strike as a defeat for the union. And I would say once again, it takes nothing more than a comparison of how long the workers in Kentucky were able to hold out at previous conditions, compared to miners in any of the other coal fields, to realize that that fight protected those miners longer and better throughout the coming depression and what was to come than other miners who did not engage in a similar struggle. And those unions, as vehicles of that struggle, certainly were a great necessity, and were victorious.

And once again, every time there seems to be new real thrust in the direction of organizing the unorganized, the key, throughout the country, was placing the fight against racism at the front of the struggle. It's interesting, there's a book in which one of the Gastonia organizers wrote his own story of what happened, and he often felt that it was a shame that the Communists insisted on putting the struggle against racism at the center. It wasn't so easy to organize workers, he felt, if he did. But in the long run it was absolutely proven, that by making the fight against racism as a matter of principle, the only major strikes that successfully defended Southern workers in that period -v .-re the ones that the Communists fought very hard to keep racially unified.

TENANT FARMERS AND SHARECROPPERS

Also in the thirties, and another situation which deserves careful study but I'm just going to mention, were the organizations among black and white sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In Arkansas and surrounding states, it was the Southern Tenant Farmers Union that did the organizing, and it was mostly led by socialists. And in Alabama it was the Alabama Sharecroppers Union, which was a Communist union, which conducted some of the great struggles that protected and advanced the lives of the sharecroppers and tenant farmers. And all of these are above all important in understanding the groundwork of the CIO. Without this it's inconceivable that the CIO could have built itself a base. But the tradition of struggle, of militant unionism when the official, labor movement was disintegrating in the South, certainly laid the groundwork.

THE FIRST SIT-DOWN IN AUTO

And when the sitdowns hit the auto industry, the first auto sitdown was in Atlanta in November of 1936. And that's really where the famous Flint sitdown began, because it was the auto workers of Atlanta who sat down and called up all the auto workers in the country to come to their defense. And the workers in Flint, Michigan, who have gotten all the attention, came out a full month ahead of their leadership's schedule of struggle, in order to demonstrate their solidarity with the workers at the Atlanta Lakewood plant.

THE CIO

The CIO didn't organize in the South with the same vigor that it organized in the North, but finally it was forced to, at the end of World War n. just in order to defend itself from runaway plants. And the remarkable thing is that in

the period from 1939 to 1953, in spite of a great deal of reluctance on the part of the labor movement to continue its advance, union membership tripled in the Southern states in that period, and in fact continued to grow up until Walter Reuther took over as head of the CIO (which coincided with the onset of the full blast cold war red-baiting of the unions and the expulsion of the left unions). In the South, as in the rest of the country, the labor movement went into a state of decline, which it's still in today.

THE NEW MILITANCY

Today, although we don't have a clear pattern, we do see that the new upheavals are taking place in new ways, in many cases outside the official, established labor movement, as was the case in the CIO, or with the Communist unions, or the IWW, or the Knights of Labor. The Gulfcoast Pulpwood Association, the United Farm Workers (which is part of the AFL-CIO but has had to develop whole new strategies and methods of operating and reliance on its own methods), and the AFSCME unions (which have not had the rights to organize that the manufacturing unions have had, and have been forced to fight much more militantly just for the most minimal kinds of organizations) are examples of this.

The Mississippi Poultry Workers Union is another example in an area where unions have been defeated over and over again. AH of a sudden a new idea comes forward. Militant unionism, following the GPA example, goes out and fights and wins three out of three elections. Some of the more traditional unions are growing in militancy and their growing strength is a reflection of it. For example, the triumph of the Miners- for Democracy. And UE has begun to come alive among electrical workers in the South in the last couple of years and recently won a tremendous victory in Tampa in a Westinghouse plant. And throughout, in these organizing drives, we see what we've seen ever since the times of slavery — that black workers are the most consistently militant leadership in every one of these new situations.

Mississippi's First Labor Union

by Ken Lawrence

The first labor union in Mississippi was formed by black women on June 20, 1866. On that day their organization, called The Washerwomen of Jackson, sent a resolution to Jackson's Mayor Barrows which said in Part:

That on and after the foregoing date, we join in charging a uniform rate for our labor...the statement of said price to be made public by printing the same, and any one, belonging to the class of washerwomen, violating this, shall be liable to a fine *regulated by the class*. 1

We don't know what became of this organization or its demands, but their example did inspire others to organize. A few days after the women met and passed their resolution, the Jackson *Daily Clarion and Standard* reported that

a number of freedmen of Jackson held a meeting the other day in the Baptist Church for the purpose of regulating the price of wages, and if possible, to get up a strike on the part of those employed for higher wages. 2

According to the same article, the meeting was chaired by a black ice cream vender. Just as we see so often today, the editor reports this "agitation" as the work of "one or two Northern adventurers." 3 An Alabama paper called the washerwomen's demands "exorbitant." 4

In reality these forms of struggle were not the creations of outside agitators. They were a new development in a long tradition of struggle waged by black people as plantation slaves.

The racist historian Ulrich B. Phillips wrote that occasionally a squad of slaves

would strike in a body as a protest against severities... Such a case is analogous to that of wage-earning laborers on strike for better conditions of work. The slaves could not negotiate directly at such a time, but while 'they lay in the woods they might make overtures to the overseer through slaves on a neighboring plantation as to terms upon which they would return to work, or they might await their master's post-haste arrival and appeal to him for a redress of grievances. Humble as their demeanor might be, their power of renewing the pressure by repeating their flight could not be ignored. 5

Mark Oliver told how the slaves would strike on the plantation where he had been a slave in Washington Mississippi:

Some of the slaves had a way of running off to the woods when Master left, 'cause the overseer, who wasn't nothing nohow, but poor white trash, would get a little hard on them. When Master got back, they always got back. When the overseer tell on the ones that been gone, Master say "Well, well, I have to see about that." He ain't going to see 'bout nothing of that kind, so it drops right there. 6

Oliver's father later ran off and joined the Union army, 7 "freeing himself," as W.E.B. DuBois would say. 8

Phillips noted that plantation owners often found that the slave women were "all harder to manage than the men." 9 Annie Coley, another ex-slave, described a plantation struggle fought entirely by the slave women.

But ole Boss Jones had a mean overseer who tuk 'vantage of the womens in the fiel's. One time he slammed a niggah woman down that was heavy, and cause her to hav her baby dead. The niggah womens in the quarters jumped on 'im and say they gwine take him to a brush pile and burn him up. But their mens hollered for 'em to turn him loose. The big Boss Jones came en made the womens go back to the Quarters. He said, "I ain' whipped these wretches for a long time, en I low to whip 'em dis evenin'." But all the womens hid in the woods dat evenin', en Boss never say no more about it. He sent the overseer away en never did hev no more overseers. 10

With traditions like these to draw on, it is not surprising that black women organized Mississippi's first labor union, even at the time when white planters and politicians were trying to re-enslave them with the notorious Black Codes.

It was another three years before white workers organized their first local union in Mississippi, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers in Water Valley. 11 And twenty years later the first interracial labor movement was organized in the state, 12 with some (perhaps most) of the local unions under black leadership. 13

The labor movement in Mississippi has had many ups and downs in the past century. During that time, many organizations have come and gone; many great workers' struggles have been waged, some ending in victory, others in defeat; and many lessons have been learned. But the tradition of organizing begun by the Washerwomen of Jackson is very much alive today.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jackson, Mississippi, *Daily Clarion and Standard*, Sunday, June 24, 1866. Emphasis in original.
2. *ibid.* This event is placed into its historical context in Herbert Aptheker, *To Be Free, Studies in American Negro History* (New York, 1948; second edition, p. 168. Aptheker's source is John H. Moore, "Social and Economic Conditions in Mississippi during Reconstruction" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1937), p. 357. The strike threat is incorrectly attributed to the meeting of washerwomen.
3. *ibid.*
4. *Athens Post*, Saturday, July 7, 1866. The event and the citation are incorrectly given as 1865 in James S. Allen, *Reconstruction, The Battle for Democracy (1865-*

1876) (New York, 1937), pp. 166 and 221.

5. Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery, A survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York, 1918)pp. 303-304. See also John S. Bassett, *The Southern Plantation Overseer As Revealed in His Letters* (Northampton, Massachusetts, 1925), pp. 63-4. For a discussion of the significance of slave strikes see George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup, The flaking of the Black Community* (Westport, Connecticut, 1972), pp. 105-7.
6. Narrative of Mark Oliver, ex-slave, collected by the Federal Writers Project of the Works Projects Administration in 1937, deposited in the WPA collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 227Z. For a discussion of the importance of this collection see Ken Lawrence, "Oral History of Slavery" in *Southern Exposure*, Volume I, Number 3/4, Winter 1974, pp. 84-86. This article discusses how, in some narratives, dialect was imposed and text altered by WPA interviewers and editors.
7. *ibid*,
8. W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York, 1935), chapters I and IV.
9. Phillips, *op. cit.*, pages ,276, 280-1, and 285. See also Bassett, *op. cit*, pages 19-20.
10. Narrative of Annie Coley, ex-slave, WPA collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 226Z.
11. Donald C. Mosley, "A History of Labor Unions in Mississippi" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1965), p. 58, and "The Labor Union Movement" in R.A. McLemore (ed.), *A History of Mississippi* (Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 1973), Volume II, pp. 251, 253. Mosley refers to this as "apparently the first local union established in Mississippi."
12. Federick Meyers, "The Knights of Labor in the South" in *Southern Economic Journal*, Volume VI, Number 4, April 1940, pp. 479-87; Nollie Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest, Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt 1840-1915* (University of Mississippi, 1962), pp. 235-8.
13. For a discussion of sources concerning black leadership of interracial unions, see Ken Lawrence, *The Roots of Class Struggle in the South* (Jackson, Mississippi, pp.3, 7-8.

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White Blindspot

by Noel Ignatin and Ted Allen

Note To The Present Edition

According to my calculations, this is the sixth printing of *White Blindspot*; it is reproduced here with no changes. I wrote the first part in the winter of 1966-67 as a letter of criticism to the Progressive Labor Party, which is today a near-forgotten sect, but which seemed formidable at the time. When PL refused to publish it, it was printed privately by a group consisting of me, Hilda Vasquez, Esther Kusic and Ted Alien. The letter to PL together with one to me from Ted, constitutes *White Blindspot*.

The article, together with others developing and restating the theme (some of which are collected in this pamphlet) has provoked its share of controversy, both informed and uninformed. In general, I consider the article successful in that it said fairly precisely what I wanted to say. Nevertheless, looking back on ten years of controversy, and possessing a greater knowledge of my audience than I had ten years ago, I would today write it somewhat differently. There are a few points in my part of it on which I would lay greater stress, in order to avoid some misinterpretations by both opponents and supporters.

I would emphasize that what is being talked about is not some kind of a stage theory in any way comparable to the two stages of revolution in a semifeudal nation oppressed by foreign imperialism. The article explicitly rejects such an interpretation, but not with sufficient force. Let me repeat here that the article is talking about only one struggle, the proletarian class struggle, in which the rejection by white workers of white supremacist ideas and practices is crucial to the emergence of the proletariat as a revolutionary class.

The second point I would stress is that the "white skin privilege" line is not a general policy of lecturing white workers to alter their thinking and behavior. While some lecturing is necessary (and some fighting as well) the main thing involved is an approach toward strategy which is manifested in the choice of slogans and issues, the character of alliances, methods of organization — in all things which make up the total line of a revolutionary group.

The third thing I would underline is that "repudiation of the white skin privilege" does not mean that our major work should consist of asking white workers, one by one, to give up their relatively good neighborhoods, jobs and schools in favor of Blacks and other Third World people (although individual actions are certainly appropriate and effective at times). The phrase in quotes refers to a policy of struggle, of which mass action is the decisive aspect, against the ruling class policy of favoritism for whites - a struggle which the article tries to demonstrate, is in the class interests of the proletariat as a whole.

N.I.
June, 1976

It is only the blindspot in the eyes of America, and its historians, that can overlook and misread so clean and encouraging a chapter of human struggle and human uplift.

-W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, An essay toward a history of the part which black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880. (p. 577)

The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black.

-Ibid., p. 16

LETTER TO PROGRESSIVE LABOR

In response to your request for comments from readers, I am writing this letter raising what I consider to be the fundamental error in your strategic outlook for the revolutionary struggle of the American working class.

In my opinion this error consists of your failure to grasp and incorporate in your program the idea contained in the following statement by Marx:

In the United States of North America every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. (*Capital, Vol. I, Chapter 10, Section 7*)

While you pay a great deal of attention to the Negro liberation movement, and correctly recognize it as a part of the global struggles for national liberation, you fail to discover the *specific role* it plays in the proletarian revolution in the United States. Thus, in your strategy for the proletarian revolution, you place the Negro question *outside* of the class struggle.

In my opinion, you do this in spite of the fact that you cite Mao's correct words that, 'In the final analysis, a national struggle is a question of class struggle.' In this letter, I shall attempt to demonstrate the truth of my criticism and, in the process, suggest what I consider to be the correct strategy for the American working class.

THE GREATEST BARRIER TO CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

The greatest ideological barrier to the achievement of proletarian class consciousness, solidarity and political action is now, and has been historically, white chauvinism. White chauvinism is the ideological bulwark of the practice of white supremacy, the general oppression of blacks by whites.

The U.S. ruling class has made a deal with the mis-leaders of American labor, and *through them with the masses of*

white workers. The terms of the deal, worked out over the three hundred year history of the development of capitalism in our country, are these: you white workers help us conquer the world and enslave the non-white majority of the earth's laboring force, and we will repay you with a monopoly of the skilled jobs, we will cushion you against the most severe shocks of the economic cycle, provide you with health and education facilities superior to those of the non-white population, grant you the freedom to spend your money and leisure time as you wish without social restrictions, enable you on occasion to promote one of your number out of the ranks of the laboring class, and in general confer on you the material and spiritual privileges befitting your white skin.

Of course there are dislocations in this set-up. Contradictions between antagonistic forces cannot be resolved except by revolution. The masses of white workers produce vast quantities of value, and there is consequently an unceasing struggle over how this value shall be divided - within the pre-imposed limits of the deal.

THE ORIGINAL 'SWEETHEART AGREEMENT'!

But in spite of this unceasing and often fierce struggle, what exists is an opportunistic "contract" between the exploiters and a part of the exploited, *at the expense of the rest of the exploited*-in fact, the original "sweetheart agreement"!

Does this mean that the white workers have no revolutionary potential, that they should be written out of the ranks of the revolutionary forces? Does it mean that, as far as the white workers are concerned, communists must sit passively and wait until the ruling class, of its own necessity (e.g. loss of colonial holdings) moves to cut its losses at the expense of some of the white workers' racial privileges and attempts to reduce them to or near the level of black, brown and yellow workers?

In my opinion it does not mean either of these things. In spite of their privileges, the white workers (except for the aristocracy of labor) are exploited proletarians, victims of "the stupid system of violence and robbery which we call Law and Industry". (G.B.Shaw) In the struggle for socialism, as *well as the struggle for immediate reforms*, without which the working class will never achieve socialist consciousness, the white workers, like their black, brown and yellow brothers, have a "world to win". *But--they have more to lose than their chains; they have also to "lose" their white-skin privileges, the perquisites that separate them from the rest of the working class, that act as the material base for the split in the ranks of labor.*

PL deals with the struggle for the unity of the working class in the following manner, from your convention document.

The unity of black and white workers can be forged only in the course of winning the white workers to struggle against the common class enemy for their own class demands, and by combating racism and by supporting the cause of Black Liberation.

And in another passage, this time from the editorial on Watts in the October 1965 issue of PL, we read the following:

White workers today are generally better off than the black people, who are engaged in a militant struggle for more jobs, housing and full political rights. But even today, where white workers are fighting for the same demands, they are also ruthlessly wiped out, like the unemployed coal miners of Hazard, Kentucky or the 80,000 laid off white railroad workers, victims of the Johnson-bosses-union-gang-up or the teamsters shot at in a recent Tennessee strike.

They, too, meet up with violent repression at the hands of the ruling class.

As more and more white workers lose their jobs due to automation and the inability of the capitalist war economy to grow along with the population, they too will have to fight for their economic and political demands, or go under.

The Johnson administration has only one answer for workers who struggle for a better life-armed terror and suppression. Just as it commits genocide in Vietnam and the Congo, the government does not hesitate to use its army against the black people at home. Similarly, the same thing is in store for white workers who fight back as soon as they feel the squeeze.

By rejecting the racist slanders of the press and the hysteria whipped up by the politicians who serve the bosses, by supporting the black people in their liberation struggle, white workers are protecting themselves and preparing their own defense for the attacks Johnson will unleash against them when he and his bosses cannot meet their demands.

THE "PARALLEL STRUGGLES" FALLACY

Both of these passages are representative of the general line of PL; both *avoid the central question* of the struggle against white supremacy. Both explicit and implicit in the passages cited is the concept that white workers have "their own class demands" which are *separate from the* demands of Negro liberation (which you summarize as "more jobs, housing and full political rights"), and that in the *parallel* struggles of two groups of workers for two sets of demands lies the path to the unity of black and white workers.

This is wrong on two counts: in the first place, it is not correct to reduce the demands of the Negro liberation movement to "more jobs, housing and full political rights" - these are the demands of *all* workers. (Nor is it enough to toss in the demand for self-determination, as you do elsewhere, as a slogan for the *Negro* nation: the writings of Lenin on the national-colonial question make it abundantly clear that self-determination of an oppressed nation is a slogan directed toward the working class of the *oppressor* nation.) The fundamental demand of Negro liberation is and has been for one hundred years *the ending of white supremacy*, the granting to the Negro people of every bourgeois right held by every other sector of the American people, excepting the other oppressed national minorities.

In the second place, the ending of white supremacy is not solely a demand of the Negro people, separate from the class demands of the entire working class. It cannot be left

to the Negro people to fight it alone, while the white workers "sympathize with their fight," "support it," "reject racist slanders" etc. but actually *fight* for their "own" demands.

The ideology of white chauvinism is bourgeois poison aimed primarily at the white workers, utilized as a weapon by the ruling class to subjugate black *and* white workers. It has its material base in the *practice* of white supremacy, which is a crime not merely against non-whites, but against the *entire* proletariat. Therefore, its elimination certainly qualifies as one of the class demands of the entire working class. In fact, considering the role that this vile practice has historically played in holding back the struggle of the American working class, the fight against white supremacy becomes the *central immediate task of the entire working*

The incorrect formulations and evasions which abound in the two passages I have cited from PL documents are not mere slips of the pen. For nowhere in your literature do we find a single appeal to the white workers to fight against white supremacy in the *only way possible*, by *repudiating* their white-skin privileges and joining in a struggle with the rest of the working class for the demands of the entire class.

PROGRAMMATIC ERROR - A HYPOTHETICAL CASE

Your wrong theoretical approach to this question expresses itself in a wrong program. Thus, in an article by Antaeus in PL of Oct.-Nov. 1966, it is stated:

It now remains for a revitalized labor movement, led by the rank-and-file, to fulfill one of its greatest inheritances from its glorious past: to fight the "national interest" squeeze of the Johnsons and the Kennedys, and their corporate masters; to raise the deteriorating standards of the working class, to curb unemployment, *especially* among black, Puerto Rican and Mexican workers, to fight all this by launching a nation-wide struggle for shorter hours at 40 hours pay. (Our emphasis-N.I.)

My, my. It seems that the shorter work week has more uses than aspirin. Now, it is probably true that the winning of the shorter work week would provide more jobs for the Negro, Puerto Rican and Mexican workers.

One can easily compute the mathematics of it: in a factory presently operating with 6 toolmakers, 60 machine operators, 60 assemblers, 6 packers and 3 sweepers, each working 40 hours a week, if the work week were shortened to 30 hours the following changes, more or less, could be expected: in place of the present 6 toolmakers (all white) 8 would be required to produce the same quantity of value in 30 hours that is produced in 40. However, since there is a shortage of toolmakers, they would continue on 40 hours, drawing overtime pay. In place of the 60 machine operators (all white), 80 would be required; the additional 20 would be drawn from those assemblers with the greatest seniority (all white). We now have 40 assemblers left, but need 80; their ranks would be filled by advertising in the "help wanted, women" section, or from the ranks of the unemployed white men. For the increase of two packers required, the plant would hire one white and one Negro. And finally, to provide the additional sweeper (couldn't we do without him since we're now on 30 hours?), a Negro would

be hired, in accordance with the traditional personnel policy.

Thus we would have a net gain of two jobs for Negroes. Perhaps exaggerated, but not much. Of course, those who put forward the demand for the shorter work week as a partial solution to the problem of Negro oppression argue that Negroes would benefit from it to a greater extent proportionately, than their numbers in the population, since they make up a disproportionate share of the unemployed. That is possibly so. One can concede the possibility (although not the certainty) that out of the 62 or 63 new workers needed in my example, maybe four, instead of two, would be recruited from the ranks of the Negro unemployed; perhaps even the lily-whiteness of the ranks of the assemblers might be tinted a little.

"FAIR EMPLOYMENT THROUGH FULL EMPLOYMENT" — A WHITE SUPREMACIST SLOGAN

But would this disturb the institution of white supremacy? I am not here opposing the "30 for 40" slogan. But raising it the way you do, to "curb unemployment, especially among black, Puerto Rican and Mexican workers", is merely an echo of the "Fair employment through full employment" argument of Secretary of Labor Wirtz and other spokesmen of the "liberal" wing of the ruling class. Even at its best (which will never be) "fair employment through full employment" is just another way of excusing the practice of leaving the Negroes as the last hired. Under such a slogan we may be assured that the last unemployed man or woman hired - the one that makes it "full" - will also be the one that makes it "fair". In other words, "fair employment through full employment" is another way of saying that job discrimination against Negroes will be maintained as long as it is possible to do so.

The point is: raising the demand for a larger slice of the pie for the working class does not in itself alter the apportionment of the slice *within* the working class. In fact, the ruling class has always utilized every concession won from it to *increase* the gap between white and black, thus turning even a victory of the working class into a cause of greater division. The shorter work week, with the promise of more jobs for those last hired, does not challenge the pattern of *who* shall be last hired, and therefore does not alter the inequality of white and black workers.

Is it not a fact that there have been times when the average real income of the Negro worker has increased, while at the same time the gap between the Negro and white worker has also increased? Thus, while the living conditions of the Negro people may have improved for a time *absolutely*, *relative* to those of the white population they deteriorated. To accept the premise that the way to improve conditions for the Negro workers is by increasing the proportion of the value created that goes to *all* workers is equivalent to institutionalizing the split in the working class, and accepting the inferior status of the Negro and other colored workers.

"IF YOU WANT SHORTER HOURS,
LET ME TELL YOU WHAT TO DO..."

I would go further - the working class will not be able to win the shorter work week, *will not even be able to resist*

the growing offensive of the ruling class, unless it first comes to grips with white supremacy as the chief cause of the division within its ranks.

There is no easy way around this problem. The struggle against white supremacy cannot be replaced by the struggle for a larger portion of the pie to be parcelled out unequally among the workers. The only way to overcome the division in the working class is by overcoming it.

Elsewhere in your literature you raise the demand that 80% of the jobs in the big industrial plants in the Watts ghetto should go to the Negro residents of Watts, since they make up 80% of the area's population. In my opinion, this demand contains some merit, as well as some faults. But taking it for its merit, that it raises the need for a more equal distribution of the existing jobs instead of banking on the same unequal distribution of new jobs, let me place the question: for whom is this demand raised? For the Negro workers and unemployed alone? In that case it is a divisive slogan, and should be dropped. For the entire working class? In that case it is, at least partially, a unifying slogan, and should be supported. But then it is necessary to explain to the white workers, and especially those white workers at the big plants in Watts, why they should support such a demand, even though it apparently threatens some of them with the loss of their jobs.

It is the same with the slogan which I understand was raised in the election campaign of Wendy Nakashima (PLP candidate for state legislature in the 1966 elections - ed.) in New York City last year. I am told that her demand for preferential hiring for Negroes and Puerto Ricans received quite a bit of support in the mainly Negro and Puerto Rican district in which she campaigned. It is easy to see why. But if that is a good demand - and I am convinced that it is - then it must be good also for the white workers, and they must be explained the reasons why so that they may become active partisans of it.

For, make no mistake about it, with the U.S. imperialist economy stagnating or even contracting, the ending of white supremacy, the ending of the privileged position of white workers means fewer jobs for white workers, fewer skilled jobs, poorer housing etc. - if it goes no further than that. For it is obvious that if the rate of unemployment among Negroes is lowered from around 25% where it now stands to about 8% (which is "normal" in this period of imperialist decline for workers not suffering from national oppression or "favored" by white supremacy) then the rate of unemployment among white workers must be increased from the 5% where it now stands (by virtue of their white-skin privileges) to the 8% which is "normal". And likewise with the proportion of skilled and unskilled jobs held by Negro and white workers, and so forth.

IF IT GOES NO FURTHER THAN THAT...

But please note the phrase in my last paragraph: "if it goes no further than that". For the consequences of the ending of white supremacy, which can only be ended by mobilizing and raising the consciousness of the *entire* working class, would extend far beyond the point of spreading out the misery more equitably. The result of such a struggle would be a working class that was class conscious, highly organized, experienced and militant - in short, *united* - and ready to confront the ruling class as a solid block.

The ending of white supremacy does not pose the slightest peril to the real interests of the white workers; it definitely poses a peril to their fancied interests, their counterfeit interest, their white-skin privileges.

As long as white supremacy is permitted to divide the working class, so long will the struggle of the working class remain on two separate planes, one concerned with their "own" class demands and the other, on a more elementary plane (but with a much higher degree of class consciousness) fighting first for the ordinary bourgeois rights which were won long ago for the rest of the workers. As soon as white supremacy is eliminated as a force within the working class, the decks will be cleared for action by the entire class against its enemy.

And what would be the outcome of such a struggle? Well, consider: if it were not for the ideology of white chauvinism, the American workers would by now have a labor party, which would represent a step forward in the class struggle. If it were not for the ideology of white chauvinism, the South would be organized, with all that that implies. If it were not for the ideology of white chauvinism, the American workers could see clearly the racist, imperialist, anti-working class character of the U.S. aggression in Vietnam, and oppose it from the only possible proletarian standpoint - opposition to U.S. imperialism.

Communists (individually this is the task primarily of white communists, although collectively it is the responsibility of the whole party) must go to the white workers and say frankly: you must renounce the privileges you now hold, must join the Negro, Puerto Rican and other colored workers in fighting white supremacy, must make this the first, immediate and most urgent task of the entire working class, in exchange for which you, *together with* the rest of the workers will receive all the benefits which are sure to come from one working class (of several colors) fighting together.

This does not mean that the process will develop in clear stages, i.e., first the ending of white supremacy, then a massive struggle for reforms, then revolution. It is probable that Negro liberation will not take place without the conquest of power by the working class in our country as a whole. What it means is that, in the course of mobilizing the entire working class to fight white supremacy some victories will be won and, most important of all, the ideology of white chauvinism will be widely exposed as the weapon of the oppressor, thus preparing the working class for the assumption of power. In this way the Russian workers, led by the Bolsheviks, made the liberation of their "own" colonies an integral part of *their own class demands* (now let us use your phrase without quotation marks) and thus were prepared to carry out their revolution.

"THE REAL¹ SECRET" - AN INSTRUCTIVE PARALLEL

When we consult the writings of the founders of scientific socialism, we find a wealth of material on this question. In a *Resolution on Relations Between the Irish and the English Working Classes*, written by Marx in 1869 for the International Workingmen's Association, we read the following:

On the other hand, the *English bourgeoisie* has not only exploited Irish poverty in order to worsen the condition of the working class in England, by the fore-

ed transplantation of poor Irish peasants, but it has moreover divided the proletariat into hostile camps. The revolutionary fire of the Celtic workers does not harmonize with the restrained force but slowness of the Anglo-Saxons. In all the big industrial centers of England a deep antagonism exists between the English and Irish workers. The average English worker hates the Irish as a competitor who lowers his wages and *level of living*. He feels national and religious antagonism towards him. He appears to him in much the same light as the black slaves appeared to the poor whites in the Southern States of North America. This antagonism between the proletarians of England is artificially cultivated and maintained by the bourgeoisie. It knows that in this antagonism lies the *real secret of maintaining its power*. (All emphasis in original.)

And in the same year, on November 29, in a letter to Kugelman, Marx wrote:

I have become more and more convinced — and the only question is to bring this conviction home to the English working class - that it can never do anything decisive here in England until it separates its policy with regard to Ireland in the most definite way from the policy of the ruling classes, until it not only makes common cause with the Irish, but actually takes the initiative in dissolving the Union established in 1801 and replacing it by a free federal relationship. And, indeed, this must be done, not as a matter of sympathy, with Ireland, but as a demand made in the interests of the English proletariat. If not, the English people will remain tied to the leading-strings of the ruling classes, because it must join with them in a common front against Ireland. Everyone of its movements in England itself is crippled by the disunion with the Irish, who form a very important section of the working class in England.

Please note the last phrase in the above citation. Now, if Marx could correctly observe that the Irish workers formed a "very important section of the working class in England" in 1869, what are we to say of the position of the Negro workers in the American working class in 1967?

BLACK WORKERS ARE PROLETARIANS - NOT "ALLIES" OF THE PROLETARIAT

This brings me to another error you make. For it follows logically from your first error of placing the national question outside of the bounds of the class struggle that you also isolate the Negro workers from the working class as a whole. In actuality, you relegate the Negro workers to a kind of limbo, peripheral to the main body of the working class, "allies" of the working class - anything but the integral part of it that they are.

The proof of this assertion lies in your underestimation of the importance of the Negro liberation struggle for the future of the American working class. Yes, I say *underestimation*, for that is in fact what you are guilty of *in practice*. I will give you some examples.

You correctly pose as one of the tasks before the working class that of building a third party, a labor party. But just such a party is being born under your very eyes, and

you are blinded to it by your chauvinist (might as well speak plainly) lack of appreciation of the significance of the Negro liberation movement, such as the Black Panther Party in Lowndes County, Alabama, and the Freedom Democratic Party in Mississippi, as well as other stirrings in the same direction throughout the country. Of course these movements differ in their degrees of clarity and maturity, but is there any doubt that they represent motion toward a breakaway from the two-party strangle-hold? Suppose the Negro people succeed in launching such a party, will it not contain within it the essentials of a labor party program, in spite of its label as a Negro party? Will it not then be a prime task for those armed with Marxist-Leninist theory to take the program of such a party to the *white* workers and rally their support for it, whatever its name? And even if this party makes its appearance under less than ideal circumstances, for example under the auspices of a demagogue and opportunist like Adam Clayton Powell, as long as it is a real living party and not still born like the Freedom Now Party of 1963, the same thing will hold true - for let us not forget that the CIO was born in 1935 by one labor faker, John L. Lewis, punching another, William Hutcheson, in the jaw!

If we are dialecticians, we base ourselves on what is new, and look under the appearance of things to discover their essence. And one of the essential features of American history, which must be understood by everyone who hopes to apply Marxist-Leninist theory to the specific conditions of our country, is that *traditionally the Negro people, for very real reasons, have carried forward the demands of the entire working class, cloaked in the garb of Negro rights!*

This is true even now of the Black Power slogan, whose significance is not limited to the Negro people. As a white worker, I declare that I would a thousand times sooner live under the Black Power of Stokely Carmichael than under the "white" imperialist power of Lyndon Baines Johnson!

THE ONLY CHOICE

And this is the choice which today, on one level or another, confronts every white worker. It can be seen most clearly in Sunflower County, Mississippi, where the only alternative to Black Power, for both black and white poor, is Eastland power. But the developing reality of the class struggle will soon bring forward in dramatic contrast everywhere the truth that *there are only two paths open to the white workers: with the boss, or with the Negro workers; abandonment of all claim to share in the shaping of our destiny, or repudiation of the white-skin privileges for which we, in our very infancy, pawned our revolutionary soul.*

Another example is the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union. In your trade union program, you praise it as a necessary response to the jim crow practices of the labor brass. Fine! But you treat it as a stop-gap measure until such time as the racist unions change their policy. Why not instead recognize it as the kernel of a potential workers' controlled labor movement for all workers? You yourselves state that the union officials are now in the process of converting the unions into a fascist labor front. Instead of casting around for a way out of this by looking for some possible new alignments among the faction-ridden labor brass, why not recognize the importance of what is really new? In Mississippi we see the

amazing (for the US) phenomenon of workers organizing their own union to fight the bosses. Are you going to let the fact that these workers are black blind you to the fact that they are, first of all *workers*, and leave you standing on the sidelines with your mouths full of patronizing words of admiration, unable to see that these black workers are today the foremost representatives, not merely of the Negro liberation movement, but of the American working class?

Indeed, under present conditions, with the Negro liberation struggle moving into high gear while the rest of the workers remain backward and relatively quiescent, to speak of the white workers "supporting" the Negro liberation movement is something of an impertinence. *The Negro liberation movement is today doing more for socialism and the class demands of the proletariat than any "working class" movement outside of it, and represents the firm and reliable support for any progressive struggles which may develop among white workers.* More, it represents a solid base from which to develop such struggles. But in order to draw upon the strength of the Negro' people's movement, the white workers must, first of all, break the links which tie them to the bosses (to the "leading-strings of the ruling classes," as Marx wrote Kugelmann) by repudiating the white supremacist contract.

THE SUBJECTIVE FACTOR WAS IGNORED...

If this is not done we will see repetition of what has transpired more than once in our history: the crisis arrives, conditions worsen, the working people are radicalized - and then - *defeat*, because the subjective factor was ignored and the white-skin privilege and its vile ideology were not specifically, directly, consistently and courageously denounced and renounced in words and in deeds.

Up to now in my critical remarks I have dealt only with the white chauvinism in your erroneous theoretical line. But you also exhibit its inevitable concomitant: serious deviations in the direction of bourgeois nationalism. Since I regard the battle against bourgeois nationalism as primarily the responsibility of those Negroes imbued with Marxist-Leninist theory, I will limit myself to pointing out one example from your literature. In the November-December 1966 issue of *Spark*, your west coast paper, you report the speech of John Harris, whom you identify as a PLP organizer, before a mass rally in Watts: "Harris talked about the war in Vietnam and said that Black men should not fight against their Vietnamese brothers, 'who look more like them than the white man who sent them there.'"

Such a statement does not require much comment. If made by a black nationalist, it would be a positive statement and could be supported, but when made by a responsible leader of an organization which claims to be guided by the science of Marxism-Leninism, and then reprinted in an official publication of the organization, it becomes nothing more than shallow opportunism.

The vanguard of the working class is the home of the internationalist workers; while bourgeois nationalism, outside the party, may on occasion play a positive role, within the party it has no more place than the white chauvinism which engenders it.

I would like to conclude this letter by referring to the words of old John Brown. For many years it has been the fashion in American left-wing circles to pay homage to old Osawatomie, while ignoring the lessons he taught us. Usually this is done by dismissing his use of armed struggle under the pretext that it was "appropriate for another era." But there was more to Brown than his determination and heroism; he was a serious and careful student of American social reality. In his last letter to his family, Brown wrote to his children to "abhor, with undying hatred also, that sum of all villainies — slavery."

John Brown clearly understood that all the social evils of our country were summed up in the "peculiar institution" of African slavery, without whose abolition progress in any field would be impossible.

So it was to old John Brown, and so it is to us, his children. For, all the evils of US imperialist rule in its dying days - the barbarous wars of extermination launched against colonial and semi-colonial peoples, the murder by starvation, the mass insecurity, the fascist clamp being tightened on the American people, the trampling on culture and the contempt for the decent aspirations of humanity - all these are concentrated and summed up in the infernal theory and practice of white supremacy. Therefore, the attack on white supremacy is the first order of business for all progressive forces in our country, and the key to strategy for Marxist-Leninists.

Fraternally yours,

Noel Ignatin

March 1967

A LETTER OF SUPPORT

Dear Noel:

A few comments on your draft letter to PL:

Esther and I have, until now, been alone in this view and approach to strategy (at least as far as we know). First of all, nobody else has even posed the problem of strategy; they are "all dressed up and no place to go." We were, therefore, simply exhilarated by your letter; it is a sheer delight, a bull's-eye scored against a well chosen target. It will be most interesting to see what PL will do with it. Let them ignore it at their peril - murder will out!

Some people with whom we have discussed this idea - the attack against white supremacy as the key to strategy in the struggle for socialism in the United States — have grasped the significance of it almost out of sheer class instinct, even without accepting the basic theory from which it is derived and is a part. Such encouraging reaction has been more frequent among Negroes than among whites, but not exclusively among Negroes.

Others, more frequently whites than Negroes, have simply missed the essential point because they are afflicted with what DuBois calls the "Blindspot in the eyes of America." (Black Reconstruction, p. 577) They have come to accept the oppression of the Negro as a fourth dimension of our world, and, so, our point of de-

parture has been too subtle for their notice. Most of them have, therefore, seemed to confuse our attitude with the general abhorrence of white supremacy (an abhorrence to which all respectable people pretend as a matter of course). Then they say, in effect, "So - what else is new?" and proceed to argue along the lines indicated below. In each case, I set forth the lines of our rebuttals to their arguments.

Argument No. 1: That we exaggerate the importance of the Negro question.

You see, they are "old hands," "experts" (usually white) on the "Negro question." All the while their white blindspot prevents them from seeing that what we are talking about is NOT the Negro question, NOT, for instance, the history of the Negro and his struggle for equal rights, etc. — but (as some Negro publicists have previously put it) the "white question," the white question of questions - the *centrality* of the problem of white supremacy and the white-skin privilege which have historically frustrated the struggle for democracy, progress and socialism in the US.

Argument No. 2: That while the fight against white supremacy is certainly important, and even one of the most important tasks, it cannot be regarded as THE key; there are others, equally important, such as the struggle against the Viet Nam war and imperialist war in general, or solidarity with the nationally oppressed peoples of the world struggling against the yoke of imperialism.

It seems to me that a moment of calm reflection should suffice to bring one to the realization that *the greatest political, social and ideological bulwark* of the imperialist warmakers and colonial oppressors is precisely *white supremacy in America*. Even more than "anti-Communism." For, after all, there are now the "accommodation" Communists and the "bad" Communists. It has got so you can't get a rise out of people anymore with "Iron Curtain" and "We'll bury you." But the peril from those dark-skinned ones, from Lumumba to Mao, that is something that every white-blooded American is expected to grasp instinctively. Seriously, what is the great glaring lack of the peace movement in the United States? It is the poor grasp on the part of the whites in it of the connection between the war question and the struggle against white supremacy, their failure to see the war in Viet Nam as a white supremacist war and to boldly challenge it on these grounds. (Of course, there are exceptions to this among the peace fighters.) Or, again, what is the greatest strength of solidarity of Americans with the oppressed peoples of the world? It is the sentiment of the Negro people. And what is the greatest weakness of that solidarity? It is the habit of white supremacist thinking conditioned by three-and-a-half centuries of oppression of the Negro and extermination of the Indian in America. Again, the fight against white supremacy and the white-skin privileges *is* the key.

Argument No. 3: That the struggle against white supremacy and the corrupting effects of

the white-skin privileges *cannot* be the key for the simple reason that it is not possible to "sell" the idea to the white workers, who have those privileges and are saturated with the white supremacist ideology of the Bourgeoisie. (Some argue further) That *it is not really in the white workers' interests*.

Since this is the whole nub of the task before us, volumes of articles will eventually have to be written on it. Therefore, I'll not attempt to cover the ground of reply in a half-paragraph. But, first of all, those "vanguard" elements who worry about the difficulty of "selling" the rank-and-file on the idea of repudiation of the white-skin privileges should begin their charity at home: they should first "search their hearts" and ask if they, themselves, are sold on the idea of repudiating the white-skin privileges, and if they maintain a 24-hour-a-day vigilance in that effort. But in more objective terms, those who make this argument have openly or tacitly "given up on" the US workers (the white section at least) as a potentially revolutionary factor. They keep looking for some *deus ex machina* to deliver the American workers from what they regard as a historically "hopeless" position. I venture to state categorically on the basis of reading and participating and observing history that socialism cannot be built successfully in any country where the workers oppose it - and *workers who want to preserve their white-skin privileges do not want socialism*. So, again, in America, the fight against white supremacy and the white-skin privilege *is* the key. (Let us note in passing the implicit contradiction in their saying that the fight against white supremacy is "one of the most important" things, and, at the same time saying that the white workers cannot be won to it - and note what is implied by it, the abandonment of one or both, and indeed, of both.)

Argument No. 4: That we - the advocates of the position set forth in your letter to PL - are merely whites reacting subjectively out of feelings of guilt for our complicity in the white supremacist scheme of life in the US. (As if the "feelings" could somehow over-match the actual guilt!)

To any extent that there may be such subjectivism as they warn us against in our argument, the cure lies in accepting old John Brown's injunction to his children (you cite the same letter): "Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them." As you put it in your letter: "There are only two paths open to the white workers: with the boss, or with the Negro workers; abandonment of all claim to share in the shaping of our destiny, or repudiation of the white-skin privileges for which we, in our very infancy, pawned our revolutionary soul." It is *precisely* the subjective factor, the fatal flow of the labor and democratic movement in the United States, the influence of the bourgeois racist doctrine of white supremacy, upon which we *must* concentrate our attention. That this should have its concomitants in the subjective feelings of individuals is only normal, and one

~may say, necessary. John Brown was "subjective" about the abominable system of chattel slavery. (Remember also Marx's "subjectivism" in his bitter comment to Engels: "The bourgeoisie will remember my carbuncles!") If anyone doubts the revolutionary relevancy of such "guilt feelings," he need only begin to "act them out" and the bourgeoisie will let him know it through a thousand agencies!

If that which to us is the big thing is still too subtle for some very good people to see at first, perhaps we can take some comfort from the following recollections: In a letter to Engels (24 August 1867) Marx, speaking of the just-published first volume of *Capital*, said: "The best thing in my book — and on this depends *all* understanding of the facts is the two-fold character of labor according to whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange-value, which is brought out at once in the first chapter..." Yet that "best thing" was a distinction which had escaped the best of the classical political economists, Petty, Smith and Ricardo, because of the bourgeois blinders which prevented them from seeing capital as a historical - rather than a natural - category. Perhaps, too, we can take some comfort in this situation from recalling that Lenin insisted on making the whole distinction between a true revolutionary and "any ordinary bourgeois or petit bourgeois" in the movement turn upon the acceptance of the subtle Marxist idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Again, congratulations on the excellent job you have done in your letter to PL.

Ted Allen

White Supremacy: Implications for Political Program

by David Ranney

(Note: The following is an edited version of a speech presented by the author to a meeting of the leadership of the New American Movement on January 3, 1976 in Pittsburgh. All of the specific arguments against STO's position referred to in the text below have been made by members of NAM. References to names have been edited out since the positions which go with these names are not available in written form. The "expanded remarks" by Noel Ignatin were in reference to the debate which followed Ranney's address.)

I will begin my remarks by outlining some of the practical implications of the position I represent and then go on to develop the theory behind it.

Our political work should have a dual thrust. On the one hand, all of our activities should emphasize equality between the races. There can be no compromise on this. Whatever the subject matter of our work—the economy, utilities, unemployment, education, workplace tactics—we should seek out all instances where inequality based on skin color exists and make the fight against those inequalities a major component of our program. We should never avoid any issue because it is controversial to white workers. We should never compromise issues of importance to Black, Latino or Native American workers for fear that it will "split the class". The fact of the matter is that the class is split and that struggle over racial issues are necessary steps toward real unity.

The second part of the dual thrust that I mentioned is our role relative to Third World organizations. We must see our role as supporting those organizations by: accepting their leadership on questions of race, the political stance that we take and by explaining that stance to white workers. This means that we must enter into our organizing work by placing equality as the key issue. And it means that we must develop a base among white workers so that we are in a position to explain why equality is in the interests of the class as a whole.

Those of you who have argued that this position has no unique tactical implications are simply closing your eyes both to NAM's practice and the practice of much of the white left. To carry through the sort of program implied by our political position on white supremacy means a shift in emphasis in the type of organizing NAM does. It means an overall programmatic emphasis on combatting white supremacy in all of its forms. This will effect not only the content of programs, but also how money is spent, where emphasis is placed in building chapters, and more conscious efforts to work with and support Third World groups.

The theoretical position behind these practical considerations can be briefly summarized as follows. The critical impediment to class struggle and the development of revolutionary consciousness is white supremacy. The material form white supremacy takes is one of a privileged position of white workers relative to Third World workers; while the ideological form of white supremacy is racism -- set of attitudes on the part of white workers that both protects and justifies their relatively privileged status. It is the material

form of white supremacy that must be smashed in order to wipe out racist ideology and unify the class. Thus the key demand in our program must be for equality—wiping away differentials or the relative privileged status of whites in jobs, income health, housing, discriminatory forms of seniority etc.

Some of you have made much of the notion that the "fundamental contradiction" in society is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. We have been accused of "turning Marxism on its head" by focusing our strategic concern on contradictions within the working class. This contention, however, is a false separation. First of all Marxism should not employ the term "fundamental contradiction" in such a static way. Marx noted that the class struggle is one manifestation of the societal contradiction between the forces and relations of production. We contend that white supremacy is a particular aspect of the class struggle and the fight against white supremacy is a crucial aspect of the class struggle itself. If you can agree that white supremacy inhibits the ability of the working class to fight the bourgeoisie, then the struggle against white supremacy is the class struggle. The two can't be separated.

Our position is based on an historical analysis of class struggle in the U.S. and a contemporary analysis of where that struggle is today. It is an analysis which demonstrates that white supremacy began with the categorization of Black people as slave for life in response to Southern proletarian upsurge. It is an analysis which can demonstrate that Black led proletarian movements have been met with the harshest repression and the simultaneous extension of white privilege. It is clearly not a stage theory as some of you have contended because it can show that every blow against white supremacy is a blow against the ruling class.

Philosophically our position rests on the dialectical view that the development of things comes through the interplay of their internal contradictions. Thus the revolutionary development of the working class will come through the interplay of its internal contradictions and race is a critical contradiction within the working class. Lenin argued that the task of revolutionaries is not to fight bourgeois ideas as such, but to fight them as they are spread in the proletariat. And it is this that we propose to do.

One final philosophical point relates to charges that our position represents a petit bourgeois outlook because it rests on personal transformation. This represents a real distortion of our position. What we seek is a class transformation in which the working class as a whole determines in the course of struggle that their emancipation from the ravages of capitalism can not be built on a base of white supremacy. Marx made this very point as applied to slavery in the U.S. and Lenin first used the term privilege to make a similar point with regard to the relationship between Russians and their national groups. We do not advocate exhorting white workers on an individual basis to give up their privileged status. What we do advocate is promoting vigorous struggle with the ruling class with equality at the forefront and to articulate the lessons of these struggles.

Those who have opposed our position have argued that class unity can best be built by finding areas where Black and white workers can unite and avoiding those where they can't. A similar view that I have heard is that we should develop our program in such a way that we emphasize building relations with white workers even if we have to de-emphasize racially touchy issues or make compromises in such areas as seniority and busing.

The tenuousness of these ideas can be demonstrated historically. So long as there is inequality, Third World people will band together and confront white supremacy and whites will tend to pull back - wiping out any unity that is not firmly grounded in equality. Contemporary struggles over housing integration, equal education, layoffs, discriminatory job classifications are examples. While white workers may agree to work with other Third World workers on things of mutual interest, they have tended in the past to cast these things aside when struggle over issues involving equality are raised.

In this context, many white leftists have argued that it is incorrect to use the term privilege to describe the relative position of whites to Third World people. There have been two arguments put forth. One is that privilege is a metaphysical concept because it fails to examine the relationship of race and class. Similarly it has been argued that Black demands are not necessarily class demands. Since 95% of Black people are proletarians, it is hard to understand the point. Demands that will benefit the masses of Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Native American and Asian peoples who are living in the U.S. are proletarian demands. And there is nothing metaphysical about the fact that Third World peoples have the worst jobs, lowest incomes, poorest housing, education and health care. Further, this argument overlooks something noted earlier - that the struggle against white supremacy is an integral part of the class struggle generally.

Another argument along the same lines is that such things as the right to unionize, seniority, decent wages are the product of class struggle and thus can't be termed privileges. The refusal to admit that the status of white workers relative to Third World workers is a privileged status represents a white blindspot. Such things as the right to unionize, seniority, and decent wages have a dialectical property in the context of white supremacy. When these things were won, they were at the same time *both* advances in the class struggle and fetters on that struggle. They were fetters because they failed to deal with or even reinforced white supremacy. Our position would contend that this fetter side of the contradiction has been the dominant one historically.

To illustrate further what I mean by a fetter, let's look at these "products of class struggle" from the dominant side of the contradiction - which is the side most Third World people look at it from. The right to unionize becomes the right to exclude Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Native Americans and Asians from certain unions. The right to seniority becomes the right to use seniority to maintain Third World people in the worst and lowest paying jobs or to condemn them to no job at all. The right to decent wages becomes the right of white workers to have higher wages and better living standards than people who are not white. The failure to look at the development of the working class from this perspective has historically been the most glaring weakness in much of the white left which stems from a white chauvinist perspective.

The fact that white workers have hegemony in unions can use seniority to keep their jobs when Third World people lose theirs, have higher wages, better housing, school and health care, encompasses a privileged status. The use of the term privilege is a recognition that the Third World side of the contradiction is dominant. And so long as this is the case there can be no unified class struggle. Why is this? Because white workers rightfully see that equality means losing their relative advantage and their relative advantage is the essence of white supremacy. It gives whites an edge over Third World people in terms of material advantage and social status - an edge that will not be given up without a struggle.

This does not mean that we are out to smash seniority *per se*. What we do seek are policies that will make seniority work equally for all workers. Nor are we out to force white workers to accept indecent wages. Rather we seek to destroy wage differentials based on race - *whatever that takes*.

To assume that whites will give up their privileged status without a struggle is incorrect. The Boston and Louisville Busing struggles demonstrate that. On the other hand, to assume that in the course of a struggle, whites will always be recalcitrant or submit only through bribes or trickery is an anti-working class stance in the sense that it assumes that white workers are incapable of seeing the gains of equality in terms of class solidarity, class confrontation, and the isolation of reactionary elements in the class. Of course, our program is not an easy one to follow, but that is the nature of a revolutionary movement. Third World workers will confront white workers as they have in the past and are doing right now. For our part, we should actively encourage that confrontation and at the same time work to be in the best position to support the demands and needs of Third World workers to the white workers we are relating to.

I want to stress that our position is *a* positive program for class struggle capable of striking a critical blow to bourgeois hegemony. It is not (as it has often been characterized) a moralistic position that exhorts white workers to stop being racist. It assumes that the resolution of this critical contradiction within the working class can best be dealt with as that contradiction is heightened. It assumes that a resolution in favor of equality is a critical blow to the ruling class and hence is a crucial strategic dimension of class struggle generally. Strategies that seek to minimize this contradiction are self defeating because only through a program that is firmly grounded in equality can a stable working class unity be achieved. Such strategies are ultimately anti-working class because they hinder rather than advance the class struggle.

Expanded Remarks

by Noel Ignatin

It was raised that our position as expressed by Dave means attacking the white workers. We believe that the fight against white supremacy is in the interests of the working class, including white workers. If anyone disagrees, that person should speak up.

The principle reason the bourgeoisie upholds white supremacy is not the quest for maximum profit in an immediate and direct sense. If it were, the employers would give job preference to the cheapest labor available, Black

labor. No, the aim is political control, the maintenance of the white population's support.

People have characterized our position as calling on whites to "give up" hard won gains, such as union job control. In the first place, the struggles were not waged by those who currently enjoy the benefits. In the second place, the ruling class, when forced to concede reforms, always tries to frame its concessions so as to weaken proletarian solidarity. Such is the case with the seniority system, for example, which was fought for by both Black and white workers, but which now often serves to protect the superior status of whites. In a certain sense, the entire struggle of the working class is aimed at overturning past victories: bourgeois democracy, union dues check-off, compulsory education, etc.

In the third place, it is not a matter for whites of "giving up" the relative advantages they hold over Blacks and other Third World people. The bourgeoisie pursues white workers everywhere with tokens and reminders of superior status, and they cannot be given up, but must be *cast off* through militant struggle. What is the ruling class response to any serious effort by white workers to join Black people in the struggle against white supremacy? Attica is one indication.

The question was raised - why do we give greater weight to the struggle against white supremacy than to other issues that hold back the working class, especially male supremacy? In doing so, we are *not* arguing that Black people are more oppressed than women; no one can know exactly the pain felt by another. Nor are we saying that white supremacy has historically been more important in dividing the working class than male supremacy; a good case can be made to the contrary. The reasoning behind our position is this: *of all the struggles in which a popular victory would fatally weaken U.S. capitalism, the fight against white supremacy is the one with the greatest chance of success.* This is so for several reasons, one of which is sufficient to mention here: its link with the worldwide anti-imperialist movements of the colonial and dependent peoples.

Space limitations prevent an adequate treatment of the practical implications of all this. For now, just three points:

- 1) we should choose to do political work in areas where there are large numbers of Black and other Third World people, because their presence makes it easier to raise, *among whites*, the issue of white supremacy in a way that relates to their experience, rather than as lecturing them.

- 2) we should give priority to those issues which have the greatest potential of immediately and directly involving a fight against white supremacy — not to the total exclusion of other issues, but as *a priority*.

- 3) Alan Chamey listed three political groupings among Black people, and suggested we should work with them all. Significantly, he omitted a fourth tendency — the nationalists. Several years ago, when the Republic of New Africa was peacefully pursuing its work of building the New Communities and organizing support for its projected plebiscite on the status of Black people, it was attacked by officials of the State of Mississippi, which tried to assassinate a number of its citizens and, failing in that, is trying to keep them locked up for

long terms. Since then there have been other repressive acts — yet how many on the white left even know of their case? Judging by the fury of its response to RNA efforts to separate from the U.S., one would have to conclude that since its birth the State of Mississippi has been committed to the goal of integration. We have to seek out nationalist formations and find ways of supporting them and working with them on terms which they find acceptable.

Lastly, as to program. Everyone on the left agrees that the fight for jobs is crucial in the present period. Yet most whites ignore the fact that a major aspect of ruling class policy is to shield the white population, as much as possible from the most severe effects of economic crisis by transferring the burden of inflation and unemployment onto Black and other Third World people inside and outside the U.S. The ruling class is willing to take the risk of further angering the oppressed nationalities because the alternative, of equalizing the burden on the working class as a whole, would have harmful political consequences to continued capitalist rule. We believe that such an understanding as we have outlined above must determine our political response to the present economic situation. This means that the fight against racism is not simply another demand in a long list.

A working class program for this period must have as its central feature the fight for equality of Black, Latin and other Third World people! In terms of specific program relating to the struggle for jobs, we propose the following:

- 1) There are already a number of examples of Black and Third World groups and women resisting ruling class attempts to roll back the affirmative action gains of the 60's. In Fremont, California, Kansas City, Missouri, Fairfield, Alabama and now in Chicago, suits have been filed against management and unions in collusion. We should take steps to bring together these various struggles in a national campaign, using both legal measures and mass action, to maintain and extend affirmative action standards. This must include a specific statement of our willingness to set aside union prerogatives where ever they conflict with equal employment rights.

- 2) We should develop a campaign to expose the trend toward shutting down industry in the inner-city and shifting it to the suburbs, perhaps focussing a national organizing effort on the scheme to "decentralize" the postal system.

- 3) We should organize to defeat the Rodino Bill and its various local versions, and to stop the deportation raids on undocumented workers.

We believe such a program is a vital necessity in order to develop among the working class as a whole the unity and will to fight effectively for useful jobs for all.