

To Be or Not To Be—Negroes

By CYRIL BRIGGS

To be or not to be Negroes!

Around this question, about as aimless as that of which came first, the chicken or the egg, certain groups of upper class Negroes are conducting a widespread agitation.

These people have spun the theory that the oppression of the Negro people arises out of the race designation, **Negro**. It is this designation that degrades the Negro people, they contend—not the conditions imposed upon the Negroes by the lynch rulers.

As "proof" of their contention they point to the chauvinist distortion of Negro into "nigger"—a term correctly objectionable to the Negro people and to the revolutionary white and Negro workers. They trace the contemptuous "nigger" of the slave drivers to the Latin word "niger" (black) used by Portuguese explorers of the 15th century to designate the black people of West Africa.

They Neglected

They neglect to tell us, however, the source of "darkey," "coons."

Surely these terms did not derive from "niger," but were exclusively the creation of the arrogant white ruling class of the old slave empire of the South for the people whose unrequited labor enabled them to

live in idleness and luxury.

They seriously maintain that by dropping the racial designation, **Negro**, the Negro people can escape or, at least, lighten their oppression. Simply let Negroes stop calling themselves Negroes, and presto! their bonds will be broken! This is their magic formula, their slavish substitute for the national-revolutionary liberation struggle.

This fantastic theory has penetrated deeply into the ranks of the Negro masses. It has influenced even some class-conscious Negro workers. It has given rise to a confused babel of proposed substitutes for "Negro." These range from Afro-Americans, Ethiopians, colored people, etc., to the vague designation of "race citizens," "race men and women," advocated by the Chicago Defender and used in its columns to the exclusion of "Negro." At least one Negro paper has adopted the still more vague designation, "Our Group."

Outgrowth of Wrong Theory

This theory is the outgrowth of another theory spun by Negro reformist leaders: that Negroes are oppressed and persecuted merely because of the color of their skin. In the same family is the reactionary myth (peddled by Dr. DuBois, Schuyler, etc.) of a solid white

world unitedly aligned against the Negro people, and the idea of a mythical, non-existent "colored race" comprising all the darker peoples (the pro-Japanese Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, which is also known in some sections of the country as the Society for the Development of Our Own).

These false and reactionary theories clearly give objective aid and support to the imperialist oppressors of the Negro people. The object of their creators is to head off the rising resistance of the Negro masses to jim-crow oppression and to divert their indignation into reformist channels harmless to the enemy. Another purpose of these theoreticians is to smash the solidarity of Negro and white workers which, under the bold, correct leadership of the Communist Party is developing in numerous joint struggles against their common oppressors.

Deny Class Struggle

These theories deny in effect the class struggle by lumping together the opposing camps of the working-class and its exploiters, the ruling class of bankers, industrialists and rich landowners. They serve to cover up the burning questions—the life and death struggles—confronting the oppressed Negro people,

thereby hampering the national-revolutionary struggle for land, freedom, equality. They seek to hide from the Negro people the truth that they cannot achieve national liberation without helping and developing the proletarian revolution, just as it is impossible for the revolutionary white and Negro workers to overthrow American imperialism without the direct support of the Negro people.

These theories express the strivings of the upper class Negroes for a "solution" of the National Question within the frame-work of the oppressive capitalist system—a "solution" that would force the white capitalists to concede them a greater share in the jim-crow exploitation of the Negro masses. Clearly such a "solution" would not meet the basic needs of the Negro people for land, bread, freedom, equality. The class interests of the upper class Negroes (landlords, business men, etc.) are inextricably bound up with the jim-crow capitalist system. Unable to compete in the open market with the white capitalists, they can develop their enterprises only on the basis of the jim-crow isolation and segregation of the Negro masses.

(Tomorrow: Bourgeois Racial Theories)