

Abstract of Com. Coolidge's document on Negro question.

- Com. Coolidge's 124 points can be roughly classed under five major headings:
- I. Historical background, or what goes under the heading of "The Place of Slavery in Creating the "Negro Problem", p.6
 - II. Negro as an oppressed race and race consciousness, including the section, p.8, "Race Consciousness vs. class consciousness"
 - III. Previous mistakes on the Negro question in all movements, "reformism error" (Coolidge means liberal), "Social reformism" (Coolidge means Social Democracy" and "Negro Particularism" p.3
 - IV. Opposition to LT, p.15 LT's "ignorance of the Negro in the US was probably profound and complete."
 - V. Attitude toward rank and file Negro members in our party, and proposals for future work p.19 "There is nothing more nauseating than to see a Negro picked to do "Negro" work who doesn't know his head from a hole in the ground."

I. "The place of slavery in creating the Negro problem", p.6

p.6 Point 28 states: "Present disabilities suffered by the Negro in the U.S. have their roots in his three centuries of slave status. These disabilities were not removed by emancipation. The most significant result of the Civil War was not so much taking the shackles off the Negro as the unshackling of Northern capitalist enterprise. The emancipated slaves were not prepared to take a place in industry...." (My emphasis)

p.6, Point 29 states: "The freedmen therefore were not integrated into industry as were the white workers..... They (Negroes) became through no fault of their own shock troops of industrial reaction. They were reserved as strike breakers and as a reserve for the heaviest of common labor...." (My emphasis)

p. 6 Point 26 and p. 7 point 31 : "The establishment of slavery in the colonies was a demonstration of the late development of capitalism in the colonies..... Furthermore in that particular economy (tobacco, rice and cotton) slave labor was so cheap that the development of other methods of production were not indicated.The presence of the Negro was really a boon to young capitalism. A planned and conscious scheme of dual exploitation was adopted.....Thus was the Negro reenslaved by the bourgeoisie with bonds which remained unbroken to the present day."

II. Negro as oppressed race and race consciousness

p.1, points 6 & 7: "The suppression of civil liberties, the denial of democratic rights the confinement of the lowest brackets in the economic scale & the withholding of cultural and educational advantages to the "race" as a group is the correct sense to speak of the Negro as an "oppressed race".....It does not follow that the Negro group is economically, politically and socially homogeneous." (My emphasis)

p.2, point 7: "Negroes do not think alike or act alike. They do not march together nor strike together."

p.2, point 11: "With the above reservations and restrictions we can now proceed to further examination of the meaning of the struggle of the Negro for liberation, for his democratic rights....It is the struggle of an oppressed race (with the explanation cited above) to ~~not~~ bring itself up to the level of other groups and races. This is a struggle to escape the status of second class citizenship, to deliver oneself from a special and peculiar semi-slave category." (My emphasis)

p.7, point 33: "In self defense, under the blows of the bourgeoisie the machinations of bourgeois politicians, the ruling class engendered hostility of white workers, the cupidity and misleadership of Negro leaders; the Negro masses developed the theory and practice of race consciousness."

p.8, point 36: "In a discussion at a meeting by the Buffalo Workingmens Welfare Committee a new member objected to the statement in the Declaration of Purpose that Negroes should demand social, political and economic equality. This man said that he did not want social equality, that he was willing and preferred to confine his social life to "my own people". This is "race consciousness" as used and meant by Negroes."

p.8, point 39: "Race consciousness" as enunciated by Negroes is not a gateway to united mass militancy and revolt.... As meant by Negroes and advocated by their leaders, great and small, the doctrine of "race consciousness" is devoid of revolutionary content or revolutionary potentiality" (My emphasis)

p.9, point 40: "The "race consciousness" theory promotes acceptance of jim-crow."

p.9, point 43: "The doctrine of "race consciousness" is a theory which promoted acceptance of capitalism and of bourgeois democracy in place of white. It places the Negro masses in the contradiction of accepting in black face ~~what~~ the thing which is the root cause of his misery in white face."

p.9, point 44: Members who accept the theory of "race consciousness must become protagonists & advocates of self-deter. (My emphasis)

II

p.9, point 45: "But while the Negroes continued to talk about "race consciousness" they refused to follow Garvey. It is true that for a time he had an immense following but it was short-lived and today the Garvey movement is dead."

p.10, point 46: "The fact that Garvey planned to set up his republic in a foreign land was not the decisive factor that made Negroes indifferent. Again and again the proposal has been made for the establishment of a 49th state in the U.S. by Negroes. The response has been almost zero."
(My emphasis)

p.12, point 60: ""Race consciousness" leads to the cult of Negro Nationalism. This is the belief that the Negro as a homogeneous oppressed group can or should attempt to take his place in the country as a self-contained and self-sufficient national entity. The logical development of this concept is the advocacy of the formation of Negro state. The fact that Garvey planned to build his state in Africa is not important. The important point is the effort to separate the Negro as Negro, politically and socially. Furthermore Negro Nationalism also rejects the idea of class and the class organization of society. Negro nationalism is bourgeois in its ideology. It would only change the color of the exploiters."

p.13, point 65: "The Party, in my opinion, must definitely reject the theory of "race consciousness" as I have defined it. It is a reactionary doctrine. It can only retard the day of the liberation of the Negro masses."

p.14, point 67: "Assigning the Haitians a separate culture is not based on the fact that they have a state but primarily because of their history and the mode of development of these people over more than a century...I would say the Haitians have a different culture from "white" France even though both speak substantially the same language."

p.16, point 80: "They (Negroes) are jubilant when they read of the the black kingdom of Abyssinia despite its slavery and mud road capital city. But as for them they prefer to spend their lives in the red mud of Georgia."

p.11, point 54: Theory of "race consciousness implies class homogeneity of the Negro groups. It thereby becomes a theory of class collaboration."

p.10, point 49: "The general class oppression to which Negroes are subjected is identical with the exploitation and oppression of the white workers...It is at & point 50 this point that the interests of the Negro as a group (Own emphasis) and the interests of the white worker coalesce & become identical...This is the fundamental approach in a class society and there can be no other. This is a the PRIMARY DISABILITY OF THE NEGRO. (own emphasis) Negroes do not understand this. "here are some "Marxists" who seemingly do not understand it.... But the Negro has a SECONDARY DISABILITY (own emphasis): that is his oppression and exploitation as a Negro. It can have no solution (my emphasis) separated from efforts to eliminate THE PRIMARY DISABILITY...This is a class s
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III Previous mistakes on Negro question

p.9, point 15: "Three serious mistake have been made....There is the reformist error which makes the struggle for democratic rights in bourgeois democracy the only struggle and the totality of one's aims. Secondly, there is the other type of reformism, social reformism, which takes the position that no special forms of struggle are indicated in the case of the "egro, that the transformation from capitalism to socialism will solve the problem."

This position ignores the painful fact that men's "minds" are not changed instantly with the other overthrow of capitalism. The third mistake is ~~the~~ Negro Particularism...By Negro Particularism I mean the advocacy of separatist tendencies within the framework of bourgeois democracy in the US...Secondly by Particularism or Exceptionalism I mean the doctrine that Negroes as Negroes are or are liable to become the chief driving force of social change in the U.S." (My emphasis)

p.16, point 79: Is it probable that Negroes will desire to separate from the new socialist state? I am convinced that they will not.

p.16, point 82: "Negroes who have any intelligence know that they could not maintain a separate state. It would undoubtedly be a bourgeois state of some sort. If not then there would be no reason for separation from the new socialist state." (My emphasis)

p.23, point 111: "Members forget or never knew that Negroes have been accepting the leadership of white people for over 300 years in one or another and in one organization or another."

(NB: Coolidge says he will grant the Negroes self-determination if they wish and then goes all out to prove that not only they do not wish it, but if they did it would be reactionary!)

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Draft

Com. Coolidge, Com. Trotsky and the Negro Question

Com. Coolidge writes: " It is reported that Com. T. held the view that the N. in the US is a nation, basing himself in part on his belief that the N. here has a separate language. During the National Training School in the lecture devoted to "The N. & the Unions", I made reference to this position of Com. T. I said that his ignorance of the N. quesx in the U.S. was probably profound & complete." (My emphasis)

I doubt that the presumptuous air that Com. C. has indulged in here flows from so abysmal ignorance of Com. T's position on the N. ques. on the part of Com. C. as he alleges is profundity of Com. T's ignorance of the N. ques. Rather the presumptuousness flows from the fact that Com. C. is arguing "against his own kind of opponents. He is not arguing against Com. T's position, but against a position he himself has elaborately wrought out of thin air, labelled wrong and "exposed" We shall soon see how Com. C. puts up his straw men and mows them down. But before analyzing C's vehement opposition to his own straw men, it is necessary to know what in reality is the Party position, not the one C. ascribes to it, but it is as formulated in documents, and how it arrived at that position.

The Background

When the Stalinists were dizzily advocating "self determination for the black belt", the Party, as per usual, had no position. Com. Sh. made a study of the N. question in which he proved--at least to the satisfaction of the present writer who then held his position--that the slogan of economic, political and social equality for the Negroes was sufficient to solve the Negro problem in America. Trotsky disagreed. He stated that just because the Stalinists were for ~~the~~ self-determination, we need not necessarily be again that slogan; that in no case should we definitely commit ourselves against the slogan for all time since it was a question the Negroes themselves must decide and if they should ask for it, first we would have to fight for it, or, if we were in power, would have to grant it. He emphasized that he, Trotsky, had not studied the Negro question and had no definite opinion. But he was drawing from his experiences during October

many nationalities asked for self-determination after October. Naturally, it was granted them. But the crucial point was that not only had the Tsarist Empire not known of ~~some of these nationalities~~ but even the Bolshevik leaders did not know they existed as separate cultural entities. It was only with October that ^{expressed} these groups began to feel they were men who wished to decide their own fate. Therefore, concluded, T, it would be wrong, on the basis that the Negro did not now ask for self-determination, to shut the door on that question for the future.

Com. Swateck visited Com. T. during that period ^{after} ~~and~~ a very ~~brief~~ brief conversation with him was convinced of the correctness of Com. Trotsky's position. During that conversation, Com. Trotsky inquired, parenthetically ~~Swateck~~, wasn't it true that some of the Negroes used a different language? That conversation was reproduced for the information of the membership. In its majority, I should say, the NY membership was much opposed to the fact that a few brief questions and one single instance of a definite opinion based on the Russian experience were sufficient to "convince" Com. Sw. that Shachtman was wrong & Tr's position, which he had never elaborated as such, right. But that was an opposition to Cannonite methods of arriving at political position, ^{rather} than to either position as such. As a matter of fact we knew so little of Negro history that for the maj. of us that was the the 1st we had heard that there was such a Negro tribe in Am.

Com. Sh. did not pursue his position. If my memory is right, he had never published or even mimeographed the results of his study and only the N.Y. membership who heard his oral report at AMY educational knew of it other than by third-ear hearsay. The minute it was known that Com. T. did not share Com. Sh's views, ~~Com. Wright~~ ^{Pravins} embarked upon a what he thought was T's position; study to prove ~~the Shachtman~~ ^{who favored self-determination}; that "study" was never completed. ~~But~~ some comrades on the West Coast/had made a study but I had never seen it.

I continued to hold Com. Sh's position. I felt that Com. T. "did not know enough", etc. of the Negro ques. When I was in Wash., prior to my departure to Mexico, I was instrumental in having a professor at Howard, who was an ex-member of the C.P., draft a document on the Negro in America to be sent to LT. The document may not have been as lengthy as Com. Coolidge's but it had the benefit of being more coherent. Its theme was that the Negro/not only did not wish self-determination but were opposed to it; that in fact it was only the Negro "bourgeoisie" who favored such segregation, only in order to have the privilege of exploiting the Negro masses themselves. As final proof of the professor went into detail of how all the Negro leaders in the C.P. opposed the slogan when ~~the C.P. first proposed it~~ ^{was first proposed} Com. Trotsky's files, I found when I got down in 1936-7 to work there, were filled with just such documents, "proving" that the Negro had no separate culture from that of the US, ^{as a whole,} no separate language, and no desire to be jim-crowed once again now under the euphemistic title of self-determination. So Com. T. "did know" the N. ques.--that is ^{traditional} did know what those who held to the/slogan of social, eco. & pol. equality as sufficient to cover the ques. wished him to know. But he ~~felt~~ ^{felt} that he had not studied the ques. and hence could not have a definitive position on the ques. ^{in fact,} He felt that it was up to the Am. section to elaborate such a definitive position after a profound study of the Am. Civil War, without a thorough knowledge of which he felt any study of the Negro ques. would be incomplete. (He stated, furthermore, that the Negro intellectuals were not the best judges of what the Negro masses wanted. The intellectuals were "emancipated" and wished full social equality with the white. But the Negro masses continued to flock to the churches where they could be free of "white eyes".) ^{(A) Really he felt} that he didn't really need to be "convinced" ~~that~~--as all Trotskyists had rushed to inform him--that Garvey was a faker. What he wished "the American comrades" would ^{self} ~~him~~ ^{is} why such a faker got such a mass following. What in the faker's program inspired the Negro masses to join him, but did not inspire them to join us

Com. J. arrived after I left. His lengthy conversations with T. were mimeographed. At the next convention preceding our expulsion

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from the SWP a Negro Comm. was elected to work out a draft thesis based on these discussion. Com. C. was on that commission and opposed the draft it drew up, not because it advocated self-determination--no one advocated any such thing--or any of the other straw men, such as race-consciousness that he now has put up. I do not know why he did oppose it. I do know that he offered no counter-resolution, despite his voiceferous objections. That resolution we did not reject when we were expelled. The proposals Coolidge now offers ~~afterwards~~ differ in no essential respect from those, despite the big talk of "reorienting the party" and ~~finally adopting a definitive position; in some respects they backtrack.~~ That resolution plus the lengthy discussions should be republished and should serve as a basis for ^{more definitive} elaborating a ~~resolution~~ ^{presumptuousness} ~~the ignorance~~. They will prove conclusively the ~~ignorance~~ of C., not/of Com. T.

II. The Basis

When Com. C. says that before we can have a fundamental position on the Negro ques. we must know our historical background, he is, whether he admits it or not, taking the position Com. T. has so long insisted upon. To that extent his methodology is correct. The trouble is that it is ~~not~~ ^{an enhanced Marxist analysis} ~~superimposed~~ upon a basis of ill-digested facts. He says, for instance, that in the particular economy of the South, "slave labor was so cheap that the dev. of other methods of prod. were not indicated." There is no doubt that slave labor is cheap; but so it would have been in the North. Why did it take root in the South only? He almost hit the right spot when he spoke of the particular economy but he ~~misses~~ promptly diverted from the correct basis by his emphasis on the cheapness of slave labor. ^{It is} It is not the mode of labor that calls forth the mode of production, but the mode of prod. ^{being a result} corresponding mode of labor. Slave labor was not suited to the economy of the No., industrialized even for those days. From the very first days the North had lumber mills, for ex., and was becoming industrialized along with, if not to the extent of, the mother country, ~~and needed~~ ^{and needed} "free" labor. ~~Slave labor, however, was suited to~~ the agricultural South however, particularly the crops specialized in, ~~slave labor was suited,~~ ~~country~~ ~~not so much because slaves were cheap~~ but because they were as productive as the economy had need of. ^{That was done} He would not stop at this point if it were merely a question of abstract theory, but only because C., having established a wrong theoretical basis, proceeds to draw ~~incorrect~~ a wrong and reactionary conclusion when he says that the "disabilities" (C.'s terminology for the double oppression the Negro bears as a proletarian and as a Negro) the Negroes suffered were not removed by emancipation because: "The emancipated slaves were not prepared to take a place in industry." That is as reactionary a phrase as I have ready in any bourgeois textbook where that fact is attested to "to prove" that the master-slave relationship was after all the best relationship -- for the slave! Now, of course, C. did not mean that. That isn't the point. The point is that one says all kinds of

Thexhsharizabxxix Knowledge of the 3 centuries of slave status is sufficient to fully of the Negro ~~was~~ not/explain the present "disabilities" (read: dual oppression of the Negro) of the Negroes. Something more is necessary. Instead of analyzing / that something more, however, Com. C. has turned ^{it} into the big bogeyman: race consciousness. Let us watch how he has built his straw man, and moved him down with the superior class consciousness.

III. Race Consciousness and Class Consciousness

Com. C. asserts that "the Negro masses dev. the theory & practice of race consciousness". The N. masses may "practice", that is, feel race conscious but they surely developed no theory about it. Those who did develop a theory, such as the Garvey movement came to take advantage of that feeling, in order to lead it into reactionary channels. Com. C.

Review place in that category of the Survey movement
~~calls that race consciousness and then to turn around and~~
~~xxxxxxxNegroxxxxxplace in the same category of~~
~~xxxxxxx~~ race consciousness the Negro proletarian in Buffalo who said "he did not want social equality, that he was willing & preferred to confine his social life to "my own people" is to put the imperialist faker and the poor man, both of whom speak of the protection of their country in one category. "When the worker says he wants to defend his country, it is the instinct of an oppressed man that speaks in him," wrote Lenin, but C. places both an imperialist faker &

Race consciousness, C. assures us "promotes acceptance of Jim-Crow, promotes acceptance of cap. and bourgeois democracy, "implies class homogeneity of the Negroes and becomes" a theory of class collaboration"

The theory of self-determination directly flows from that; race consciousness gives it the appearance of ~~xxxxxx~~ conflict between races & leads to cult of N. Natl., the logical dev. of which is advocacy of N.State (12). Against whom is C. arguing? Who is advocating either self-determination or the formation of a Negro State? ~~xxxxx~~ No one, *in fact*

fact no one that I ever heard. C. has built up straw men and moved them down

Coolidge assures us that he is for class consciousness vs. race consciousness. Good! How does that solve the special problem of the Negro? That it is a special problem C. admits. In fact, once he puts quotation marks around "race consciousness" and then parrots

IV. "Negro particularism" vs. Coolidge equanimity

A clue to the contradictions can be found in Coolidge's treatment of what he calls Negro particularism, and which he defines as "the advocacy of separatist tendencies within the framework of bourgeois democ. in the U.S. That is the advocacy of Negro going it alone organizationally, socially and economically to whatever extent is possible." He then proceeds to analyze a second characteristic of N. particularism which has nothing at all to do with the first. The second characteristic is "the doctrine that N. as Negroes are, or are likely to become the chief driving force of social change in the U.S." Now, pray tell me, what has the alleged doctrine of the Negro's special revolutionary role got to do with ~~that~~ that of separatism within the framework of bourgeois democracy? None, unless you ~~give~~ ^{emasculate} the chief driving force of social change, and make it synonymous with separatism. What is that C. is trying to stress when he emphasizes that ~~that~~ ~~that~~ he can "think of no reason whatever for holding to this belief" ~~that~~ (I'm presuming that this sentence does not refer to his parenthetical expression as to belief that Negroes are a nation since the latter sentence was not in the parenthesis. If, however, I'm wrong, there still remains the implication that any doctrine that envisages the Negroes as a special driving force of social change is wrong.)As a specially oppressed group with least to lose there is no doubt that the Negroes once awakened will play an especially militant role. Even in a passive way, they now play such a role by their ^{anti-war} attitude, ~~that~~ which is far to the left of the Am. wkgclass as a whole. On the other hand, it is true that the white wkgclass as the majority group in this country will either play the chief revolutionary role, or there will be no successful revolution. ~~That~~ The understanding of that is behind the dissatisfaction that rev. groups are led by "foreigners" or "Jews" in any country, not because of any prejudice against them but because it is a sign of the weakness of the movement, of the fact that it has not yet taken root in native soil. ~~But~~ But within

that over-all truth, special groups do play specially significant parts in a revolutionary struggle. Again Coolidge himself is the best authority against himself when in another section of the document he speaks of why we wish to draw the N. proletariat into our ranks. "The Negro proletarians have become inured to hardships, tough going and iron rations. They are not soft." Fine, those are the qualities a revolutionary movement needs; our special appeal to the Negroes is not ~~only~~ that they are an especially oppressed group and we wish to "help" them but because they ~~xxx~~ comprise especially steeled elements that will "help" bring the revolution on, or when it gets going, help bring it to a successful revolution.

V--Revolutionary vs. Reformist View on Negro problem

Peculiarly enough, the discussion on Negro particularism followed the discussion of "subsuming" the Negro struggle in/struggle of white wkr. or "dissolving" it in rev. struggle. It was the third in a series of mistakes on this question. The other two mistakes were: (1) bourgeois (or what C. calls reformist) error that the "struggle for democ. rts. in bourgeois democ. is only struggle and the totality of one's aims." and (2) the reformist or social democratic (C. calls it social reformist) view that "no special forms of struggle are indicated in the case of the N., that the transformation from capitalism to socialism will solve the problem." Very instructive as to C.'s own attitude is his criticism of this view: "This position ignores the painful fact that men's minds are not changed overnight and that the struggle against race prejudice would not end instantly with the overthrow of cap." (3) It is not the doctrine itself which C. criticizes. It is not evidently wrong now, but will be wrong after (!) the rev. because men's minds do not change overnight. C. thus ~~xxxxxx~~ shifts the solution of the N. problem from this generation and puts it on those that will remain after the rev! My dear man, the fact that men's minds will not change overnight has absolutely nothing to do with the struggle against race prejudice now, nor against the complacent attitude of the S-D as a reformist current which we must combat now. The S-D says that the transformation from cap. to soc. will solve the problem because they do not wish to make any revolutionary moves now; they are satisfied to participate

in the struggle against race prejudice to the extent of the liberals and no more, to circumscribe it that is within the framework of bourgeois democracy, or to doctor up the latter, not transform it. Perhaps here and there there is a member of the S-D who thinks that that is the solution--the revolution will take care of it. But regardless of what they think, the policy leads to push that problem further away from a solution by pushing the revolution itself further and further away from placing it on the agenda of today instead of the tomorrow.

But what Coolidge finds to criticize is not their policy today but the fact that their policy does not envisage the minds of men tomorrow!

How is it that a revolutionary leader is constantly slipping into a reactionary channel he does not "mean" to get to? What is eating Coolidge?

VI Garveyism: contrasting C's attitude and T's attitude

We're back to where we started: the approach to the Negro question.

In addition to saying it was reactionary, he states that the fact that the Garvey planned to set up his republic in a foreign land was not the decisive factor that made Negroes indifferent. (10) But that isn't true. Its reactionary character is precisely in that it demanded a separate state --in Africa. That way the most reactionary Bilbo could support it. Had it demanded it here --it would have raised such revolutionary situation that no only no reactionary could support it, but the Govt. would have to be looking for other ways of solving the N. problem than by giving a few Negroes good Mrs. govt. positions and have/Roosevelt appear on the same platform with a few others. As it is the Negroes preferred Ga. soil that he knew African soil that he did not.

Toward religion too one can easily see the difference in approach. Coolidge tries to avoid the question by stating that all of America is religious conscious forgetting the distinguishing feature that white Am. goes for custom but black Am. goes to a place where he can finally be rid of white eyes.