

Marxism And The Negro Struggle

Articles by

Harold Cruse

George Breitman

Clifton DeBerry



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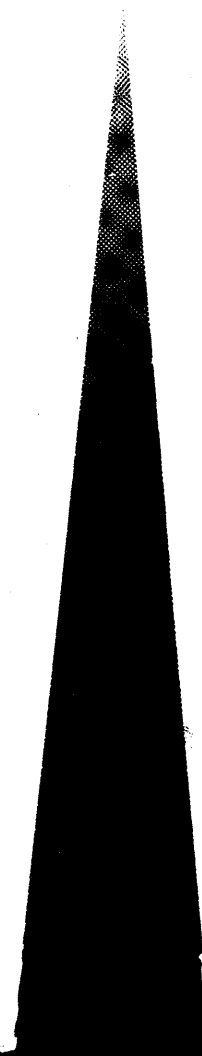
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GEORGE BREITMAN

CLIFTON DE BERRY

Pioneer Publishers

New York, N.Y.

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-labor donated-

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Marxism and the Negro

By HAROLD CRUSE

Part I

When the Socialist Workers Party (Trotskyist) announced in the New York Times, January 14, that it had nominated a Negro, Clifton DeBerry, to run for president it allows us the opportunity to discuss in depth a question that has long been agitating many individuals, friends and foes, concerning the relationship of Marxism to the Negro movement in America today. We emphasize "today" because some years ago it was impossible to be objective about this inasmuch as the Marxist movement as represented by the Communist Party was so indissolubly linked with practically everything Negroes attempted to do that it was impossible not to find a Communist or two under the bed if one looked earnestly enough. Hence, some very relevant issues about Marxism were distorted and confused by a barrage of heated denials and accusations about the "Red Menace."

Today, the relationship between the Negro movement and the Marxist movement has gone through a succession of qualitative changes on both sides. Today the Negro movement has developed to its

highest level of organizational scope and programmatic independence in this century. In the meantime, the dominant trend in American Marxism, the Communist Party, has declined to the low status of a weak, ineffectual sect creating a vacuum in "revolutionary" politics which the Trotskyists are desperately trying to fill. But the eclipse of Communist Party Marxism went hand in hand with the decline of labor union radicalism in America. White labor (as differentiated from black labor) went conservative, pro-capitalist and strongly anti-Negro. This created a serious and a practically insoluble dilemma for the Marxist movement because the theory and practice of revolutionary Marxism in America is based on the assumption that white labor, both organized and unorganized, must be a radical, anti-capitalist force in America and must form an "alliance" with Negroes for the liberation of both labor and the Negro from capitalist exploitation. No matter what the facts of life reveal to the contrary, no matter what the Marxists say or do in terms of momentary "tactics," this is what

the Marxists believe, and must believe or cease functioning as a Marxist tendency. For Karl Marx's dictum on this question was that "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." Today, the Trotskyists consider themselves to be the most "orthodox" of Marxists.

The fact that white labor in America today is clearly unsympathetic to the "emancipation" of either Negro workers, or the "petite bourgeois" Negroes, or the "intellectuals," as the Marxists are fond of citing, poses, as was said, a serious dilemma for the revolutionary Marxists. On the other hand, the Negro movement's rise to the ascendancy as a radical force in America completely upsets Marxian theory and forces the Marxists to adopt momentary tactics which they do not essentially believe in. In short, they become opportunistic. Here we refer to the white Marxists, the black ones are another question which is currently personified in the case of DeBerry. However, the realities in America today force the Marxists to deal with the Negro movement as the de facto radical force but this does not hide the fact that the Marxist movement is in a serious crisis. Moreover, the greater the Negro movement becomes as an independent force, the more the Marxists must strive to ally themselves with the Negro movement, but the deeper does the crisis become for the Marxist movement itself. For the "alliance" it attempts to forge with the Negro must be one where the Marxists dominate in order not to be absorbed. This "alliance" is meant to build the Marxist party, not the

Negro movement, in order to rescue the Marxists from their own crisis. In the Fall, 1963 issue of the International Socialist Review, the Trotskyists, in discussing the Freedom Now "movement," said:

The present tasks of the SWP in connection with the Negro struggle for liberation are:

(4) To expand and strengthen the party's cadre and forces in the Negro organizations and the civil rights movements, by: (a) recruiting revolutionary Negroes and helping to train them for leadership in the party and mass movements.

Elsewhere the Trotskyists said:

In the same way the influence of the colonial revolution... upon vanguard elements of the Negro movement has helped prepare the emergence of a new radical left wing. In all these cases, it is the task of revolutionary Marxists to seek to win the best elements of this newly emerging vanguard to Trotskyism.

However, the real issue at stake here is: Who is destined to be the dominant and decisive radical force in America—Black Radicals or White Radicals. And this is a question that will and must be settled outside the scope of any existing "theory," Marxian or otherwise, because there is no "theory" that covers this development. Such an American theory (if it is ever written down) will have to come from blacks. Hence, we have the most unprecedented situation yet seen in the western world—a Marxist movement with a time-honored social theory which does not work out in life with a mass following,

and a viable Negro movement of masses in movement which is stymied because it has no social theory or program to take it further. World historical trends have brought both the old Marxist tradition and the new Negro movement face to face on either side of a profound impasse. The Trotskyists, being the most astute of all Marxists, attempt to bridge the chasm by nominating a Negro for president! But this desperate gesture cannot cure the Marxian crisis by enlisting the Negro potential. Moreover, it is not the right remedy for what really ails the Negro movement at this juncture. It is the same thing as offering an impoverished man with a wife and ten kids a Palm Beach vacation with some political V.I.P.'s and all the trimmings just "to get away from it all." What'll happen to the man's family? These are some of the reasons why the SWP's presidential announcement caused so much confusion, anger and suspicion within the ranks of the Freedom Now Party movement concerning "white radical influence." For DeBerry also linked himself with the Freedom Now Party without the party's permission to do so—a well-known Marxian type of maneuver in Negro affairs.

As the Negro movement stops and gropes about for its methods of entering its next stage this question of Marxism's influence will keep bobbing up in different situations. Hence, it is necessary for black radical "thinkers" (as opposed to the "strugglers" or "street-men" as some proudly call themselves) to get a clearer understanding of why the Marxists act the way they do and why they are in a crisis. The Ne-

gro movement is also in a crisis despite its late achievements—a crisis which is linked to world developments broader than our own problems and with roots in events which pre-date us.

The crisis of Marxism in Europe and North America has its roots in the confused events of the Russian Revolution of 1917. In the case of the Socialist Workers Party, it was Leon Trotsky, its guiding revolutionary thinker, who first said that a socialist revolution was even possible in Russia. This was in 1905 when none of the Russian Marxists agreed to that possibility (not even Lenin). Trotsky was denounced as a ridiculous visionary for saying this but later won other Russian Marxists over to his thinking. Thus Trotsky was actually the theoretical father of the Russian Revolution and Lenin was the chief architect and leader.

Marxism, as Marx himself developed it, did not foresee or predict a "socialist revolution" in a backwards agrarian country such as Russia. According to Marx, the revolution he predicted had to come about in a highly industrialized nation which had necessarily created a large, industrial class of workers, well organized and well-trained in the production skills of capitalist industry. The capitalist class of owners would get richer and more compact due to monopoly growths, and the working class would get poorer and poorer to the point where they would revolt and overturn the system and expropriate the owners. Recognizing full well that they were revising the original view of Marx, both Trotsky and Lenin then agreed that if a socialist

revolution was possible in Russia—a large agrarian country with only a small degree of industrial development—then this revolution could not stand alone. It would have to be supported by simultaneous revolutions in the advanced nations of western Europe.

But such did not happen. There was a revolution in Russia but it had to stand alone because supporting revolutions elsewhere did not succeed. The result was that the most important single event of the 20th century was transformed into its gravest tragedy. Moreover, it put the Marxist parties in western Europe, the U.S., etc., in a serious dilemma—a dilemma which over the years has deepened into a series of crises. This is because every social revolution that has taken place since the Russian Revolution has also developed out of industrially backward, agrarian, semi-colonial or colonial conditions while the working classes of the advanced white nations became more and more conservative, pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist. Moreover, the very fact that the world revolutionary initiative had passed from white nations of the capitalist world to non-white nations of the colonial and semi-colonial world introduced another factor in revolutionary politics, the racial factor, which the western Marxists never admitted should be a factor of any importance at all. Workers, in their opinion, regardless of race and national differences, should all think alike on the question of capitalism and imperialism. The Trotskyists still function under this grand illusion. This is why Clifton DeBerry, in the Socialist Workers Party's an-

nouncement, had to project his support of the Freedom Now Party on the basis that it is "a step toward independent political action by labor and Negroes." By this he means white labor and Negroes (emphasis ours). But the leaders of the Freedom Now Party never made any such pronouncement. The Freedom Now Party is a step towards independent black political action. Clearly, the Trotskyists do not really want this. Because Marxism is in a crisis in America they must attempt to project the idea of the Freedom Now Party in their own Marxist image, with the old worn-out, discredited theme of Negro-Labor unity.

The Trotskyist theoreticians realize very well that a truly independent black political party which functions irrespective of what white labor does or does not do will further deepen the already serious crisis of Marxist creed in the West. It could show that Marxian ideas about capitalism in advanced countries are not to be taken seriously. A whole raft of Marxian formulations would be further called into question. In any event, none of this would be the fault of the Negro. Rather, it would be the fault of the Marxists for being dishonest with themselves and misleading generation after generation of innocents about the true nature of the Russian Revolution. What was this revolution? How did it really occur and why? What did it achieve? The Communists and the Trotskyists, twin branches of the same withering tree trunk of western Marxism, have been attacking and accusing each other over these questions for almost forty years. Why?

Let the Trotskyists tell it—it was because Stalin and the bureaucracy "distorted" and "betrayed" the "socialist revolution." But the Trotskyists have only inherited a problem in "socialist theory and practice" that Trotsky made for himself. Who was it but Trotsky, himself, who first claimed that such a revolution was possible? All the facts reveal that Trotsky got the very kind of revolution he actually made and deserved (and then disowned) it because it wasn't really "socialist." He accused the Stalin bureaucracy of "terrorism," of "smothering democracy," of "suppressing the opposition" of taking away the political power of the workers' soviets (councils). But it was Trotsky, himself, who set such precedents by ordering the brutal suppression of the Kronstadt sailors' revolt of 1921 long before the Stalin bureaucracy set in.

The Russian Revolution logically turned out just the way it had to, considering how and where it was achieved and what the social objectives were it set for itself. Trotsky helped formulate these objectives. Nothing was betrayed—it was the Russian Revolutionaries who "betrayed" themselves and the Russian masses suffered. After Trotsky's revolution it was imperative that the Communists industrialize a backward country in as short a time as possible because there can be no socialism until there is enough of an industrial base to socialize (i.e. nationalize). Hence, all the political conflicts between Russian factions centered around the great, pressing problem thrust on them by their own revolutionary seizure of power: How to plan and administer

nationalized property, most of which had to be built before it could be administered. This was no ordinary task and the nature of the revolution, itself, brought to the fore just the type of individuals needed to perform the operation—Stalin and his Stalinists, single-minded, dictatorial, brutal and practical. Not the Trotsky type at all. Trotsky opposed this natural trend of his own revolution and was expelled from Russia.

According to a strict interpretation of Marxian formulations, Trotsky tampered very loosely with Marxian "laws" and reaped the whirlwind. This premise of course absolves Marx of responsibility for the tragic, anti-socialist aspects of the Russian Revolution. The intent is to argue that if Marx was right about the workings of "historical laws" and Trotsky was a Marxist then something was wrong about Marx's "historical law" formulations. Either this, or Trotsky was a Marxist who gravely misinterpreted the functioning of Marxian laws. But it was Marx, himself, who insisted: "One thing is certain: I am not a Marxist." Meaning what? Are we to take it to mean that because his prophecies about advanced capitalist societies, the white nations, did not materialize that we are entitled to say that Marx was wrong because he, himself, failed to properly interpret the very laws he is credited with being the first to discover? If this is the case then we have a strong premise for taking Marx at his own word. If he, himself, admits he was not a "Marxist" then who was really a Marxist after he passed away? Whose claim to be a Marxist must anyone take

seriously?

We pose these questions because the Trotskyist nomination of DeBerry for president grows out of the Marxists' belief that the "historical laws" have pre-ordained the Negro movement in America to be used as a kind of transitional social phase leading to the "Marxian revolution." In this instance we are to suppose that the Trotskyists are applying the "methods and principles of historical materialism," i. e. the "laws" correctly "before the fact." But even to grant the Marxists, for the sake of argument, the validity of their own Marxian premises, we have to say that their application of the "method" is no more "Marxian" than others that failed to bring, in their opinion, "Marxian" results. This might surprise or even shock the Trotskyists, coming as it does from non-Marxist radicals of the Negro movement. However, it is not that we are prejudiced against "Marxism" per se. We study Marxism just like we study objectively all social science schools of thought which claim to be "scientific." What we strenuously object to are the "methods" that the Marxists use.

Fundamental to all Marxist formulations is the dialectical method of theory and practice. Marx made it amply clear that his method was dialectical; hence, any approach to social life which is not dialectical cannot be Marxian. We would tend to agree with many, such as the late C. Wright Mills, who said of Marx, "His method is a signal and lasting contribution to the best sociological ways of reflection and inquiry available." (Emphasis ours.) We make a distinction here between Marx's original

method and the applications of his latter-day disciples. We reject these findings precisely because they are not, in our opinion, arrived at by the dialectical method of reflection and inquiry.

How did Marx arrive at his conclusions about the role of the working class in capitalist society? Through the application of one of his prime laws of dialectics: The law of the unity and conflict of opposites. In dialectical processes social phenomena, e.g., classes, ideas, institutions, etc., are not static, but go through constant development and changes. Capitalistic production creates capitalists and workers (opposites) who come into conflict because their class interests are not identical. Capitalists exploit workers by not paying them their full labor value. Capitalists seek highest rate of profit through intensified exploitation of the working class. The conflict of interests generates "class struggle," e.g., strikes. Marx observed that the basis of class struggle lies in a "contradiction" between the methods of production and the "social relations" of production (private property). These "contradictions" can be resolved only by a social revolution wherein the working class overthrows or otherwise expropriates the capitalists. This description of dialectics, while simplified, explains why Marxists have considered it to be the historic role of the working class in capitalist societies to usher in the socialist era.

However, Marx came to these conclusions about the working class in Europe over a hundred years ago

and these predictions still have not been borne out in the advanced capitalist societies of western Europe and North America. Yet, it must be stated that according to his own dialectical premise of analysis Marx had every right to make such predictions. All the evidence abounding in the social and political life of Europe in Marx's time pointed to revolution. Moreover, the failure of the social revolution to materialize in the advanced capitalist countries does not, at all, invalidate Marx's dialectical method. What does become invalid is the subsequent "application" of the dialectical method by the followers of Marx in the 20th century. We say this because if one accepts the premise of dialectics then we accept the view that everything in social life is constantly changing, coming into existence, and passing away. But, if this dialectical pre-

mise is "truth" then why is it assumed that everything in society is subject to the processes of change except the (historical role of the working class in advanced capitalist nations)? Why is this white European, North American labor movement itself exempt from dialectical change in terms of class position, ideology, consciousness, etc., and in terms of what other groups, or classes, this labor movement fights, supports or compromises with in the "class struggle"? Has it not become abundantly clear that the white labor movement in the advanced capitalist countries has, indeed, abandoned the Marxian "historical role" assigned to it? Do we not have the right to claim, then, that European and American Marxists who still hew to this "white working class" line are practicing mechanistic materialism rather than dialectical materialism?

Part II

Classical Marxism rejects all forms of mechanistic materialism because it "denies any genuine evolution in the sense of the emergence of new forms and new qualities of new things." Hence, the very premise of dialectical thinking demands, in this instance, an admission that "new forms of social consciousness" can develop within capitalist societies which are of more political relevance than even the "social consciousness" of the conservatized labor movement. Any other conclusion than this is manifestly anti-dialectical. Hence, fundamental to the crisis in all the schools of western Marxism of the advanced capitalist countries (the

white nations) is the crisis that has long gripped the philosophical system of thought, the "kernel" around which the entire political, economic, cultural, theoretical and programmatic structure of Marxism must hinge. It is a crisis of dialectical materialism which was conceived by Marx as a method which had to comprehend the reality of of the world, but is no longer able to do so. The reality of world revolutionary events are running far ahead of Marxian theory.

In 1939, when the European white working class was armed to the teeth along the borderlines of their nations ready to spread war and mayhem against themselves all

over Europe, and half the world, Trotsky, writing about "Marxism in the United States," could say with the most lofty detachment:

"By the example and with the aid of the advanced nations the backward nations will also be carried away into the mainstream of socialism."

Here is expressed in the most graphic manner the supreme illusions of the western (or in Trotsky's case) the "westernized" white Marxist. They cannot let go of the idee fixe of the white working class "saving" world's humanity. Rooted in their preconceived notions, their undialectical ideas, is the deeply ingrained "white nation ideal." Hence, "socialism" becomes like "capitalism" a white-nation conception, the great "white working-class" prerogative. Thus, the "white man's burden" shifts from the capitalist's missionaries to the socialist's revolutionaries whose duty to history is to lift the "backward" peoples from their ignominious state to socialist civilization even if the whites have to postpone this elevation abroad until they have managed to achieve it at home. But in so doing, the white Marxist's dialectical conceptions of world developments become a distorted image of the reality that is taking place before their very eyes.

Hence, the dialectical analyses that Marxists project concerning world developments are, in truth, mechanistically gross distortions of the original dialectical methods of Marx who was essentially true to his method for his own time and circumstances. It was not the fault of Marx that the world changes for this was already explicit in dialectic-

tics. But the distortions of today's western Marxism lie in the fact that Marxists treat dialectical materialism only from the standpoint of how the impersonal productive forces develop, how the material forces evolve in society and bring about class relationships, or cause human society to go through stages from feudalism to capitalism. Or further, how capitalism penetrates the underdeveloped world and brings the latter into the capitalistic network, etc. But Marx pointed out that "In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will." (emphasis ours)

Which means that men are subject to the blind forces of the laws of social production unless they become "socially conscious" of what is happening to them. But how men become socially conscious is a problem of the Theory of Knowledge and Reflection which is an inseparable category in the dialectical method of social inquiry. If men did not comprehend the nature of material forces they could not be able to intervene into the process of these forces in order to shape events, i. e. to control blind forces. Thus, men, or classes, or groups, or even nations could not assume the task of "revolutionizing" societies unless they are positioned to do so and also have the necessary consciousness to shape events. In this regard, social developments can position certain classes to shape events, give them the potential, yet such classes remain without the consciousness or the will to make history.

But there are always other

classes and it is the implied function of dialectics to correctly perceive what classes are being brought to the forefront of social consciousness by "blind" material forces. This class will become the social force chosen by "historical laws" for historical roles rather than pre-conceived classes that history has left behind. Lenin dealt most thoroughly with how men or classes receive their sense perceptions of the real world, but Marxists today bypass this aspect of dialectics because they believe the social role of the "proletariat" alone settles this question for all time.

White Marxists have tried to make world reality fit their dialectical preconceptions, but world developments require that dialectical conceptions embrace world reality. But such conceptions cannot come from the minds of western Marxists whose philosophical views have become provincially rooted in the crisis-reality of the western world and cannot transcend the conceptual limitations of that world. They talk "revolution" but revolution is being made by others. Hence, world social developments run ahead of the world social theory. Warde says that the principles of historical materialism are applicable everywhere "provided they are applied with full consideration of the facts in each case." But the question Warde does not discuss is: "Who is to determine this? Those who are making the world revolution or those in the West whose 'dialectical' views are anchored down to the lethargy of the white working class?"

The Marxian Theory of Knowledge (dialectics) implies that if the

"backward peoples" of the world are carrying themselves into the "mainstream of socialism" instead of being led there by the "aid of the advanced nations" as Trotsky saw it, then the "backward peoples" must replace the white working class as the "chosen people" of the dialectical functionings of world society. Hence, if "historical science" or "dialectics" is to be considered really scientific it must be developed and verified in life by the inclusion of the social experiences, the history, the ideas and political philosophies, the points of view of the backward peoples. In short, it is the social reflections of backward peoples that count today the world over. For it is their social consciousness that is determining which way history is moving. Hence, dialectical materialism is no longer the "philosophy of the proletariat" (i.e. the European proletariat) as the western Marxists would have it.

It is the fate of the Marxists to be imprisoned within their illusions and that is the source of their crisis. They cannot deal with the race question in America in terms of their dialectical method except superficially which they must attempt to conceal by all too obvious practices of political expediency, such as the DeBerry nomination. This must, of necessity, bring them into serious conflict with the Negro movement itself. For the Negro movement has its spiritual affinities not with the white working class of America whose status vis-a-vis American capitalism is qualitatively different from Negroes'. White labor's heyday is behind them in the history of the 1930's. The

American Negroes' movement is currently a semi-colonial revolt which is more inspired by events outside America than within it. We can much better explain the Negro movement's relationship to world developments today by quoting Leopold Sedar Senghor, president of the African republic of Senegal, from his pamphlet on African Socialism:

"We are not communists. . .

"The paradox of socialistic construction in communist countries in the Soviet Union is that it increasingly resembles capitalistic construction in the United States of America. . . And it has less art and freedom of thought.

"But a third revolution is taking place, as a reaction against capitalistic and communistic materialism, and which will integrate moral, if not religious values, with the political and economic contributions of the two great revolutions. In this revolution the colored peoples including Negro Africans, must play their part, they must bring their contribution to the construction of the new planetary civilization."

Of the Negro American in this "third revolution" Senghor quotes Paul Morand as saying:

"The Negroes have rendered an enormous service to America. But for them one might have thought that men could not live without a bank account and a bathtub."

The living facts of the world revolution today are more persuasive than any revolutionary theory that ever came out of Western Europe since the death of Marx. We do not hold Marx accountable

for any deviations or distortions that either history or men have imposed to detract from his doctrine. He was a towering product of his times and his conclusions about the society of men tore away the veil that hid the profound forces that moved societies. However, his forecasts have been negated by the very dialectical process he, himself, revealed. Yet, to say, nay insist, that history should act just the way Marx thought it would is to do an injustice to a great thinker and imply, thereby, that dialectics is a philosophical fraud as many have tried to do (even some who called themselves "Marxists"). But neither history nor dialectics which is history's inner clockworks stand still. Neither is history prone to bestow special historical prerogatives on any special class of people forever. It is the peculiar juxtaposition of time, place, and social circumstances which decide who is going to play the role of prime movers of history. Hence, we can well understand Marx's own assertion "I am not a Marxist." It would have been an historical tribute to Marx's self-effacement if Leon Trotsky had admitted: "Though I played fast and loose with Marx's laws, I am no dialectician."

Hence, in America today the Socialist Workers Party must strive to conceal the theoretical bankruptcy of Western Marxism by the highly questionable political strategy of entering into political competition with a Negro political party (which is not even established) by using a Negro candidate for high office. Some capitalists trying to crash in and exploit the Negro economic market could not

have been more crass and opportunistic. But what is revealed here that is more striking than mere crassness is the unreality that hovers around much of what American Marxists do. Basic to all is the Marxist illusions about the "working class-socialist myth" as concerns the Russian experience. For the Trotskyists to be forced to let go of this dead issue would be to force the admission that the Trotskyist Fourth International is and always has been rather utopian. For after the seizure of power in Russia by the Bolsheviks and the creation of soviets the problem became more Kantian than Marxian. The Marxist revolutionary idealists assumed that Marxist elites once in power would act in accordance with the Kantian "categorical imperative" and perform their functions according to an ethical code of "right conduct." This has been and always will be a problem of revolutions.

However, the hard American realities, and the Negro movement force the Trotskyists to push all these issues that once agitated the international revolutionaries years ago into the background, depart from the book, and play it pragmatically by jumping on the bandwagon of the black political party idea. But this cannot work. The Freedom Now Party will not be used to save the Marxist tradition in America from its own illusions about the nature of a social reality today. The problem of Clifton DeBerry's role as a Negro Marxist of the western mold is a contradictory thing that cannot be solved within the context of the political, social and cultural philosophy which the Freedom Now Party will attempt to

mold. In view of what Leopold Senghor says on the matter of communism, an American Negro Marxist becomes a rather misplaced figure in the real scheme of things. And his position is made all the more ridiculous if he is involved politically in beating the "dead horse" issue of Stalinism vs. Trotskyism. What can this really matter to the "third world" in view of the fact that Russia's place and impact on the 20th century revolution is established and well-known? Trotskyists in the west have been reduced to the role of ferreting out Stalinist vestiges in world revolutionary currents, analyzing the "distortions" of revolutions already made, projecting an ideal of the "socialist revolution" that has never been seen or experienced, while rehashing Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution"—an undialectical concept because everything, including revolutions, are a process of change and developments. Trotskyists are the "purists" of the Marxist camp—astute, analytical and possessed with the insight to refine, from their own point of view, every aspect of historical materialism. But they cannot escape the theoretical net of the crisis of Marxism in the west. Hence, Clifton DeBerry becomes a mere pawn whom the Trotskyists can attempt to foist on the black political party wearing a king's crown that is much oversized.

The Negro movement possesses inner qualities of different degrees of nationalism and integrationism whose economic, political, cultural, and psychological implications are too much for Marxian theory today. To attempt to confuse these

unknown qualities with the white labor mystique of the Marxian left would be to disrupt the natural development of the Freedom Now Party, confuse the real native issues of the Negro with the unreal and irrelevant view of the Marxists concerning American realities. Such intrusions will be fought with every weapon at the FNP's disposal.

The Freedom Now Party is predicated on the idea of achieving independent black political power in the U.S. through economic, cultural and administrative approaches. In this fashion, the Negro movement in America becomes aligned with the real nature of the world developments involving non-white peoples. In this realignment of

world social forces the reality is that white capitalist nations, including all the different classes within these nations, from upper bourgeoisie to lower proletariat have become, in fact, bourgeois and relative middleclass strata vis-a-vis the non-white peoples who have become, in fact, the "world proletarians." This is the real outcome of "dialectical" processes in our age. If world unity of different peoples is ever to be achieved within a democratic framework, this unity must be sought along the paths of "social consciousness" that clearly reveal future possibilities rather than the "dead ends" of the past that we have encountered before in radical politics.

Marxism and the Negro Struggle

By GEORGE BREITMAN

What Marxism Is and How It Develops

The Negro movement continues to unfold with ever-increasing scope and power, but, like most mass movements, empirically — feeling its way along through experiment, trial and error. It is working out its positions, policies and orientation step by step under the press of immediate necessity.

Since the system against which it is rebelling is capitalist, its policies are becoming more and more anti-capitalist, implicitly for the most part, but explicitly too. But the most advanced elements of the movement (radical and nationalist) have not yet projected or adopted a clear-cut ideology or a comprehensive program of social revolution based on a thorough examination of U.S. monopoly capitalism and the ways and means to end its domination.

Need for Theory

The need is felt for the movement to broaden its perspectives and formulate a fundamental theory for its action. Some Negro intellectuals are trying to fill this need. Inevitably, this begins with analysis and critique of existing theories. Having rejected liberalism, that is, liberal capitalism, behind which Lyndon Johnson,

Walter Reuther, Roy Wilkins, James Farmer and Martin Luther King are all united, the Negro intellectuals are faced with the task of defining their attitude to Marxism, the theory and practice of scientific, revolutionary socialism.

Marxists can only welcome the most searching examination and criticism by black radicals. The one thing we ask is that Marxism be discussed as it really is, and not as one of the many straw men substituted for it through malice or ignorance in this country, where the misrepresentation of Marxism is a national industry.

This elementary condition for fruitful discussion is not met in Harold Cruse's article on "Marxism and the Negro" in the May and June issues of *Liberator*. Primarily a polemic against the Socialist Workers Party, this article is designed to support Cruse's thesis that Marxism is unrealistic, unable to adjust to revolutionary reality, dominated by "white" thinking, and intent on exploiting and dominating the Negro movement. Cruse's depiction of Marxism is on a higher level than one finds in most of the capitalist press, but it too suf-

fers from many errors and distortions. We shall start with his conception of Marxism in general.

Estimate of Marx

Cruse tips his hat to Marx, acknowledging that he was a great thinker, whose dialectical materialist method of analysis vastly expanded the world's knowledge about society. But he can find nothing positive or creditable to say about 20th century Marxists. He accuses them of merely repeating what Marx said, of being inflexible, of clinging to outdated ideas and failing to adjust to changed conditions. Simultaneously, he accuses them of the opposite fault — of *not* repeating what Marx said, of being too flexible, of deviating from Marx so much that they don't really deserve to be called Marxists.

Heads I win, tails you lose: When modern Marxists repeat what Marx said, they are parrots, and when they don't repeat what he said, they are not Marxists. Let us take up first the second of these charges — "deviation."

As a theory Marxism began with Marx, but it did not end with him. If it had, if Marxism was only what Marx discovered and formulated a century or more ago, it would have no claim whatever to being called scientific; it would be classified now as some kind of dogma or cult, and the world would have stopped debating about it long ago. Marx developed his theory and worked out some of its laws on the basis of the knowledge and conditions of his time. His theory would indeed be useless today if other thinkers, using his method, had not added to it and brought it up to date in the light of subsequent

knowledge, different conditions and new experiences.

Cruse criticizes the 20th century Marxists for adding to what Marx started, adapting his ideas to conditions that did not exist in his day, and applying his theory in circumstances it was impossible for Marx or any other human being of that time to foresee. This would make sense only if one expected a theory to have magic qualities: to be full grown and fully developed at birth, to apply to all times and places in the same way, to be perfect, unimprovable. No one makes such demands of other theories and sciences. Modern evolution is not, cannot be, the same thing as the findings of Darwin a century ago, but it stems from them, it is an extension of them. Similarly with Marxism.

"Deviations from Marx"

Cruse would probably concur with these remarks as a generalization, saying that what he is talking against are not extensions of Marx's theory, but deviations from it — deviations so great that they have thrown Marxism into a hopeless and insoluble crisis. We can better understand what he means by deviations from Marxism, and therefore what he means by Marxism, when we turn to the only example he gives of such deviation: the Russian Revolution of 1917. (As will soon be seen, the role of Marxism in the Russian Revolution sheds important light on the real relationship between Marxism and the Negro struggle.)

The chief deviator, says Cruse, was Leon Trotsky, "who first said that a socialist revolution was even possible in Russia. This was

in 1905 when none of the Russian Marxists agreed to that possibility (not even Lenin). Trotsky was denounced as a ridiculous visionary for saying this but later won other Russian Marxists over to his thinking . . .

Serious Dilemma?

"Marxism, as Marx himself developed it, did not foresee or predict a 'socialist revolution' in a backward agrarian country such as Russia. According to Marx, the revolution he predicted had to come about in a highly industrialized nation which had necessarily created a large industrial class of workers . . . (who) would revolt and expropriate the owners . . .

"(The Russian Revolution) put the Marxist parties in western Europe, the U.S., etc., in a serious dilemma — a dilemma which over the years has deepened into a series of crises. This was because every social revolution that has taken place since the Russian Revolution has also developed out of industrially backward, agrarian, semi-colonial or colonial conditions . . .

"According to a strict interpretation of Marxian formulations, Trotsky tampered very loosely with Marxian 'laws' and reaped the whirlwind . . ."

It is true that Marx expected the working class revolution against capitalism to begin in the industrially-advanced countries, and it is also true that it began in a backward, semi-colonial country. But neither fact invalidates Marxism or convicts Lenin and Trotsky of "tampering" with Marxism. On the contrary! The overthrow of capitalism in Russia signalled the beginning of the end of capitalism as the dominant world system and therefore was, in fact,

the first major confirmation of Marx's theory.

The time sequence of revolutions expected by Marx was shown to be faulty or outdated, but that was a minor thing compared to the fact that the working class revolution predicted by Marx actually took place, that the workers decisively demonstrated their ability to take power away from the capitalists, that a gaping wound was torn in the side of world capitalism.

A crisis? Yes, the Russian Revolution produced a crisis all right — for capitalism and imperialism, a crisis that still haunts them. For despite the subsequent degeneration of the Soviet Union during decades of isolation, the Russian Revolution has been an example for the oppressed masses in many lands and has inspired successful revolutions against capitalism and imperialism by other colonial and semi-colonial countries. Some more "crises of Marxism" like that and world capitalism will be finished.

Lenin and Trotsky were, unlike Marx, able to see the possibility of the revolution occurring first in an industrially-backward country because they lived later and, "standing on his shoulders," were able to see farther. Much happened to change the world during the third of a century between Marx's death and the Russian Revolution. That was the period when capitalism definitively passed beyond the industrial stage and entered its monopoly stage (imperialism).

Monopoly Capitalism

Marx had shown that capitalism was inevitably moving in the direction of monopoly, but he did

not live to see it arrive there. The imperialist conquest of the world, the final subjugation and division of Asia and Africa by the advanced capitalist powers, created a new situation. They lodged new and deeper contradictions in the capitalist system — and opened new opportunities for the revolutionary opponents of that system.

In this situation Lenin and Trotsky applied the method they had acquired from Marx. Lenin's theory of imperialism, its corollary insights into colonialism and nationalism, and Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution added new and indispensable features to the body of Marxist thought. They revealed weaknesses in the capitalist structure that had not existed or had not been visible in the mid-19th century: imperialism would break first at its weakest link, the ruling classes in industrially backward countries would not be able to put up as much resistance to revolution as their stronger brothers.

Prime Example

Applied to Russia and acted on, these additions to Marxist theory resulted in one-sixth of the world being torn out of the capitalist stranglehold. How can one ask for a more magnificent example of the creative application of Marxism to a specific country and a specific set of problems and relationships? What Cruse calls "tampering" is Marxist theory enriched and made concrete under special and unique conditions. Marxism would be dead today if not for those additions.

When Cruse sees deviations because Lenin and Trotsky did not merely repeat what Marx had said, he shows an inability or unwilling -

ness to recognize important features of Marxism — its richness, its variety, its ability to cope with changing situations, its unfinishedness. Marxism is not only what Marx worked out a century ago, nor only what Lenin and Trotsky added when they applied Marx's method to the conditions of their time, but also what subsequent Marxists did, do and will do as they apply this theory to other situations, including some that do not even exist yet.

Marxism is a theory in process of development, which grows in power and scope as it is applied to specific situations and to new conditions. It developed when Lenin and Trotsky applied it to the specific conditions of Russia in the epoch of imperialism ("Russianized" it). It developed further when the Socialist Workers Party applied it to the specific conditions of America ("Americanized" it). And it continues to develop as the SWP applies it to the specific conditions of the Negro community in the United States ("Afro-Americanizes" it, as the SWP put in the 1963 convention resolution, *Freedom Now: The New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation*, Pioneer Publishers, 25¢).

Based on Reality

Theory is derived from reality; the more closely a theory corresponds to reality, the better a theory it is. Marx studied the conditions and struggles of the west European workers, learned from them, and incorporated those lessons in his theory. Lenin and Trotsky did the same with the Russian workers and peasants. And from its inception the Socialist Workers Party has been doing

this with the conditions and struggles of the American Negro people, which have always been unique in many respects. Embodied in its theory and program are many lessons learned from the Negro struggle, and from the ideas, feelings and outlook of the masses in the black ghetto.

Nor is that all. The Negro struggle in 1964 is not the same thing it was ten or even five years ago — much has changed. Speaking at a recent Freedom Now Party rally in Detroit, state chairman Albert B. Cleage noted: "Everywhere the black man's whole conception of himself, of his struggle, has changed. You may not know the day you started thinking differently but it has changed." (*Illustrated News*, June 29.) With the change of the black man's conception of himself and his struggle have come many other changes — in goals, strategy, tactics — even changes in the way certain words are defined.

The SWP has been studying these changes, trying to understand their causes, find out their direction and fit their revolutionary aspects into a theory and program of action capable of replacing capitalism with socialism. It has been listening to *and learning from* non-Marxist figures — such as Malcolm X, Rev. Cleage, William Worthy, Jesse Gray, Daniel Watts, James Baldwin, the exiled Robert F. Williams and Julian Mayfield, even Harold Cruse sometimes — who to one degree or another express the thinking, feeling and aspirations of the black ghetto which, as Robert Vernon recently pointed out, is "more solidly working-class and revolutionary in outlook than the trade unions, or

anything else in America today."

From these studies and from its own participation in the struggle, the SWP in the last year or two has developed a number of ideas — Marxist ideas — about black nationalism, separatism, independent black political action, the Negro's relation to the capitalists, to the white workers, etc. Whether these ideas are perfect or less than perfect, whether they are complete or only beginnings toward a more complete grasp of reality, no one can deny that they do grapple with vital questions concerning the Negro people and their allies. Certainly no other party in this country has done more than the SWP along these lines.

A Straw Man

The most discouraging thing about Cruse's article is not that he rejects Marxism, but that he deliberately refuses to confront or even mention what the SWP thinks, says and stands for. Preferring to construct a straw man that even a mental flyweight can demolish, he simply ignores what the Marxists actually advocate and propose. For example, the SWP is the only organization claiming to be Marxist in this country which says that black nationalism is progressive and offers it support and collaboration. Isn't it strange that Cruse can find no space for this fact in an article about the SWP and the Negro movement? Or would stating such a fact undermine the whole structure of his polemic?

In some cases where the SWP position is widely known, Cruse accuses the SWP of saying things it doesn't really believe in, but he is always careful not to inform his readers just what those things

are so that they can make their own judgment. He never offers evidence of the alleged insincerity, merely asserting that Marxists *cannot* believe the unstated things they claim to believe because then they would have to give up Marxism (at any rate, Cruse's version of Marxism). Of the SWP's pioneering effort to Afro-Americanize Marxism, which should be of some interest to readers of an article called "Marxism and the

Negro," he never gives the slightest hint or notice.

This may be one way to "win" a debate, or to create and strengthen prejudices against Marxism. But it's a poor way to educate black militants, or anyone else, about Marxism, or anything else. Cruse has the right not to discuss what the SWP really stands for, but an article about the SWP is a strange place to be exercising that right.

The Colonial Revolution in Today's World

The main revolution in the world is the colonial revolution, says Harold Cruse in his article, "Marxism and the Negro" (*Liberator*, May and June). And the main trouble with even "the most astute" Marxists of the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International, he contends, is that they do not and cannot understand or recognize this.

The reason why they cannot understand this, Cruse says, is that they are obsessed and blinded by Karl Marx's outdated idea that the workers in the industrially advanced countries are the principal or only revolutionary force in the world.

The result, he says, is that Marxists take a paternalistic attitude toward the (colored) colonial parts of the world, believing that their emancipation must wait until the (white) workers of the industrially advanced countries make their own revolution, after which they will "lead" the colonial people to their freedom. An additional result is that Marxism is obsolete and the Marxists in a crisis which they cannot resolve.

Those are Cruse's charges. Now

let's turn to the facts.

It is a matter of record, which anyone who reads can check for himself, that the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International believe and assert that the colonial struggle is the center of the world revolution today and has been since 1949.

For evidence, we cite one of many documents, *Dynamics of World Revolution Today*, a resolution adopted by the Fourth International at its Reunification Congress in June, 1963, and printed in *International Socialist Review*, Fall, 1963. (Available from Pioneer Publishers as a pamphlet, 35¢.)

This resolution states very plainly that the principal center of the world revolution shifted to the colonial world beginning with the triumph of the Chinese Revolution, and explains why this happened, what its effects have been, what the problems of the colonial revolution are and how these problems can be overcome.

This position is so well known that when Mikhail Suslov, Soviet ideological hatchetman, made a speech last April trying to discredit the Chinese leadership, he said:

"Does anyone think perhaps that the Chinese theory making the regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America the 'principal zone of the storms of the world revolution' represents something original? No, this is the repetition almost word for word of one of the principal theses of current Trotskyism. One can read in the decision of the so-called Fourth International (Trotskyist): 'As a result of the successive failures of the two major revolutionary waves of 1919-23 and 1943-48 — and of the minor one of 1934-37 — the main center of the world revolution shifted for a time to the colonial world.' Here is where the source of the political wisdom of the Chinese leadership must be sought," etc.

Not only is this fact refuting Cruse's contention well known, but it is well known to Cruse too! We can state this categorically because Cruse himself quotes in his article a short passage from this same resolution, *Dynamics of World Revolution Today*. (It is a passage urging revolutionary Marxists to recruit black radicals influenced by the colonial revolution.)

Why does Cruse do this? Why does he misrepresent the SWP's position on the colonial revolution? We can only conclude that he finds it easier to argue against positions that the SWP does not hold than against those it does hold.

The facts are similarly damaging to Cruse's charge that Marxists ("western" or "westernized" or white) have a paternalistic attitude toward the colonial (colored) people. The only example he offers, Leon Trotsky, is about the worst he could pick.

Cruse's sole piece of "evidence" is a sentence in the last paragraph of Trotsky's pamphlet, *Marxism in the United States*. This was written in 1939, shortly before World War II, which Trotsky thought would surely provoke revolutionary outbursts in both Europe and its colonies. Once the socialist revolution began, he wrote, it would spread rapidly from country to country, and: "By the example and with the aid of the advanced nations, the backward nations will also be carried away into the main stream of socialism." He was referring here to all industrially backward countries, including those in eastern Europe as well as the colored countries.

Socialism Messianic?

Cruse, however, considers this sentence "proof" that Marxists have a "lofty detachment" toward the colored people, that Marxist socialism is a messianic "white nation" conception, that revolutionary socialists deem it their "duty to history to lift the 'backward' peoples from their ignominious state to socialist civilization even if the whites have to postpone this elevation abroad until they have managed to achieve it at home." Quite a big indictment to spin out of that little sentence.

But it simply doesn't stand up. Far from believing that workers in capitalist countries are the only revolutionary force, Trotsky insisted many times that "the decisive word in the development of humanity" belongs to "the oppressed colored races" (1932). He repeatedly expressed the view that "The movement of the colored races against their imperialist oppressors is one of the most important and powerful movements

against the existing order and therefore calls for the complete, unconditional and unlimited support on the part of the proletariat of the white race" (1937). This was long before the current colonial upsurge, and it is in this spirit that both the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International have always been guided.

In May, 1940, a year after the sentence cited by Cruse, when World War II had already begun, the Fourth International held an emergency conference where it adopted a manifesto on "The Imperialist War and the Proletarian Revolution" which was supported by the SWP. Trotsky wrote this document, and since he was assassinated a few months later, it represents his final, mature, considered judgment on the question.

It could almost have been written as an answer to Cruse's claim that Marxists think the colonial people should wait for, depend on or trot humbly behind the industrially advanced countries. After urging the colonial masses to take advantage of the war crisis in order to break free from their imperialist masters and urging the workers in the imperialist countries to support the colonial revolt, Trotsky explicitly stated:

No Need to Wait

"The perspective of the permanent revolution in no case signifies that the backward countries must await the signal from the advanced ones, or that the colonial peoples should patiently wait for the proletariat of the metropolitan centers to free them. Help comes to him who helps himself. Workers must develop the revolutionary struggle in every country, colonial or imperialist, where fav-

orable conditions have been established, and through this set an example for the workers of other countries."

So the SWP considers the colonial revolution foremost today, like Cruse, and supports it "completely and unconditionally," also like Cruse. Having disposed of differences invented or exaggerated by Cruse, we can now turn to some real differences.

Cruse holds that the colonial revolutionary movement is the *only* important one; that no other revolutionary movement or tendency today means anything; that how the world goes and how history is made will be determined entirely by the colonial (colored) revolution against the imperialist (white-controlled) countries.

The SWP's world outlook is far less simple because the actual situation is much more complex. It sees the fate of the world being decided by the combined operation of three factors: 1. The colonial struggle against imperialism, which is today the central and most active revolutionary sphere. 2. The struggle for political revolution in the workers states, involving the ouster of the privileged bureaucratic caste that is now dominant and the restoration of workers democracy. 3. The struggle for social revolution in the imperialist states, involving the end of capitalist rule and its replacement by the rule of revolutionary workers and their allies.

To the SWP these three spheres of the world revolution are intimately connected and interdependent. Although they develop unevenly, they reinforce and strengthen each other. Victories for one benefit the others, and vice versa. A correct strategy for

the world revolution, which alone can permanently guarantee the gains won in each of these spheres, requires a realistic appraisal of their potentials, limitations and interrelationships. (Such an appraisal is brilliantly supplied in the already mentioned resolution, *Dynamics of World Revolution Today*.)

Absurd Illusion?

Cruse regards the very idea of workers revolution in the capitalist countries as an absurd and harmful illusion; he appears much surer of this than the capitalists. For him class struggle between workers and capitalists is meaningless or irrelevant. He lumps together all the antagonistic classes in these countries as if they were one harmonious family (except the Negro people in the U.S., whom he considers a part of the world-wide colonial revolution). He has nothing to say about developments inside the workers states. (Since he says Stalin was the type of leader "needed" in the earlier days of the Soviet Union, he may also think the Soviet workers "need" the Khrushchev type today.)

What leads Cruse to thus exaggerate the strength of the enemy and shut his eyes to the possibility of aid from allies inside the capitalist and workers states? These and related errors flow from his method, which sees only things-as-they-are, fixed and frozen, rather than as a process replete with contradictions, reversals and change (despite all his talk about dialectics).

The class struggle in the capitalist countries is at an ebb? Then it will always be this way! The workers are conservative, apathetic, hogtied by the capitalists and

their labor lieutenants? Then it will always be this way!

This is the same way most people viewed the colonial revolution 25 years ago, and the Negro struggle 10 years ago, when the conditions for today's upsurge were still maturing beneath the surface. The Cruses of that day, prisoners of outward appearances, could also only sigh: It will always be this way! It is not a mode of thought helpful to people who want to prepare for revolutions.

The colonial revolution has made great advances and it will make more. But these advances have not got rid of imperialism, especially on its home grounds. Yet the continued existence of imperialism, with its preponderant economic and military strength, is the main deterrent to further, deeper and faster revolutionary gains in the colonial sphere.

The converse is also true. The abolition of capitalism in the imperialist centers and its replacement by workers states will open new avenues for the colonial revolution. It will bring invaluable economic aid to the colonial revolutions, enabling them to curb or prevent bureaucratism, limitations of workers' rights and other deformations that breed in the soil of economic backwardness and poverty.

A crucial question for revolutionists everywhere therefore is: How to achieve the abolition of capitalism in the imperialist sphere? Must it wait, as Cruse's position implies, until the colonial countries are strong enough to defeat their imperialist foes in direct military combat? And will the imperialists wait until that occurs without launching their own offensive first, including the H-

bomb?

Or are there forces *inside* the imperialist countries that can be welded together into a revolutionary movement capable of disarming the capitalists, throwing them out of power and joining in fraternal collaboration with the colonial revolutionists?

As Clifton DeBerry, Socialist Workers Party candidate for president, wrote in an answer to Cruse (which *Liberator* invited but has not printed yet), the policy Cruse counterposes to Marxism "would in fact leave the colonial peoples subject to an unending threat of imperialist attack."

Hit at Root

The job of ending this threat cannot be done by the colonial revolution alone. "That job has to be done within imperialism's home base," said DeBerry. "It calls for a revolutionary struggle by the workers, non-white and white combined, to abolish the capitalist system from which imperialism springs."

The same error is committed by Cruse when he tries to define the nature of the Negro struggle. To him it is, purely and simply, "a semi-colonial revolt, which is more inspired by events outside America than within it."

While we question the last part of that statement, we agree that the Negro struggle definitely has many characteristics of a semi-colonial revolt, and believe it is to Cruse's credit that he has been one of the foremost propagandists of this idea. (He probably will not be pleased by our assertion that this idea can be traced back to the Marxist Lenin, who was the first, to our knowledge, to include the American Negroes among the op-

pressed national minorities, nationalities and nations of the world; but it is true.)

People unfamiliar with this idea may be able to grasp it by asking themselves: Suppose the Negro people, instead of being scattered throughout the country, were concentrated in one section of the U.S., or in one area outside of the U.S. And suppose that they were dominated by the same forces that now dominate them, and that they were treated, or mistreated, in exactly the same way they are now — denied equal rights, confined to the worst jobs, paid less, unemployed more, etc. Wouldn't it be plain then that they are subjected to a colonial-type oppression?

Not Only Aspect

But while this is one major aspect of the Negro struggle, it is not the only one. Cruse oversimplifies this question, as he does on the world scale with the colonial revolution. Here he reminds us of those blind men, each of whom touched a different part of an elephant — tusk, leg, trunk and so on — and mistakenly thought they understood the whole reality of the elephant.

The aspect of the Negro struggle that Cruse shuts his eyes to is its class aspect. Negroes are exploited not only because of their color, but also because of the class to which they belong in their great majority. They are a part of the working class, the most exploited part, the most proletarian part, and whatever hurts the workers as a class hurts them too — usually first and always hardest.

To ignore the dual and combined character of the Negro struggle is to blind oneself to the

dual sources of its full potential. As both a racial-national and class struggle, it is fed and powered by the two most explosive fuels in modern society. These are the sources of its dynamism, and although race and class operate unequally and unevenly at different times, they are both sources that will contribute to the victory of the Negro struggle.

Any theory which does not recognize and combine both these aspects will prove fatally defec-

tive. The early American socialists, who saw only the class aspect, are an object lesson in how badly astray you can be led by a one-sided grasp of the dual character of the Negro struggle. Cruse is making a similar mistake in the other direction. The Marxist attempt at a synthesis is the most enlightening so far. If it is not yet fully or adequately worked out, then it ought to be — by black radicals as well as the SWP — because it points in the right direction.

The Role of the White Workers

Can Marxism be of help to black radicals in working out a program capable of winning freedom for the Negro people? The Socialist Workers Party says yes. Harold Cruse says no (*Liberator*, May and June). This is a question each person can check for himself by finding out what the Marxists say and do.

Especially what they say and do about the nature of the society we live in (capitalism), its strengths and weaknesses, and the relations its ruling class has with other forces at home and abroad.

The Socialist Workers Party says that American capitalism is a sick and unjust system, which has seen its best days and is slated to be replaced by a new, socialist system. This change will not be imposed by some force outside this country, although outside pressures will help, but will be brought about by internal forces, by classes and groups here inside the U.S., rebelling against capitalist domination and mismanagement.

One of the major internal weaknesses that will bring about the downfall of capitalism is its racism. The capitalists have no inten-

tion of abolishing racism, which benefits them politically by keeping the workers divided and economically by keeping down the wages of all workers.

It is doubtful that the capitalists could abolish racism even if they wanted to, but nobody has to lose sleep over that question because they don't want to. The most they will grant are mild concessions and very gradual reforms (like the 1964 civil rights law) that may eventually make the South like the North, where racism is still supreme, despite all the laws, commissions and constitutional provisions.

Reforms will not end racism, now or a hundred years from now. Rocking the boat is needed to get concessions, but it is not enough to get equality. We need a new captain; we also need a new boat. There are only two ways to achieve Negro equality. One is through a socialist revolution that will end capitalist rule. The other is through leaving this country, separating from it to form a new nation or to migrate to a country free of racism. Neither way is easy.

But is a socialist revolution pos-

sible? The answer would probably be no if racism were the only evil bred by capitalism. It isn't. Capitalism spawns many other evils, which it would take a book to list. The most prominent—and they all generate opposition to capitalist rule—are unemployment, poverty, insecurity, thought control, the growth of ultra-right reaction and the danger of a war that may wipe out humanity.

Nothing to Lose

These evils, which are inherent in capitalism, create the conditions for an anti-capitalist movement which, properly led, can oust the bankers and corporation executives and four-star generals and white supremacists now in control. The members of this movement will come from the classes and groups that have most to gain and least to lose from profound and far-reaching change: revolutionary workers, young —

"Wait! Now wait just a minute," interrupts Harold Cruse, who has been sitting by impatiently up to now. And he launches into his attack on the idea that the workers can play a revolutionary role in this country. His position is substantially this:

There was a period of labor radicalism in the 1930's but it has declined and ended. White workers have become conservative, pro-capitalist and hostile or indifferent to the Negro. There was a time when it seemed reasonable to expect that they would usher in socialism, but it's too late now. The only ones capable of revolutionary action in this country are the black people.

Labor Mystique?

Then, turning to the theme of his *Liberator* article, he lets the

Marxists have it. They are so obsessed by this "working class-socialist myth," this "grand illusion," this "white labor mystique," that they have lost touch with reality and are virtually out of this world. He says:

"... the theory and practice of revolutionary Marxism in America is based on the assumption that white labor, both organized and unorganized, must be a radical, anti-capitalist force in America and must form an 'alliance' with Negroes for the liberation of both labor and the Negro from capitalist exploitation. No matter what the facts of life reveal to the contrary, no matter what the Marxists say or do in terms of momentary 'tactics,' this is what the Marxists believe, and *must* believe or cease functioning as a Marxist tendency."

If this means what it says, it certainly is a poor argument. When a man insists something "must be," and it obviously isn't, then everybody concludes that man is some kind of a nut, and everybody is right. But if he's obviously a nut, why spend so much space and time refuting him?

The truth is that the Socialist Workers Party does not believe the workers must be radical and anti-capitalist. We are well aware that the overwhelming majority of white workers in this country today are not radical, thanks to capitalist brainwashing, relative prosperity, treacherous labor leadership and political immaturity. That is why socialism in general, and our party in particular, are not stronger and better able to back up the Negro struggle. What we believe is that the workers must *become* radical if they are to solve their problems, and that they will become radical under certain

conditions and at certain times. "Must become" is a different horse from "must be."

Not Inevitable

Marxists have never believed that the workers in capitalist countries must be or have been radical all the time. We do not idealize the workers, knowing full well and from painful experience that they can be and often are infected, corrupted, demoralized, exhausted and disoriented. Their radicalism waxes and wanes, rises and sinks, depending on their conditions, leadership and level of consciousness. (Isn't this also true of the Negro masses?)

The American working class has not been radical during most of its existence. Even when it was more radical than today, during the 1930s and 1940s, it never reached the point of breaking with the politics of the capitalists whom it was battling on the picketlines and creating its own, non-capitalist, political party. The most radical sector of the working class today, the black workers in the ghetto, wasn't always as radical as it is now.

Socialists believe that the working class can become revolutionary — not always, but sometimes. And that on such an occasion, which does not occur all the time or last forever, it can, in cooperation with other non-capitalist forces, and with consistently revolutionary leadership, abolish the system that breeds racism, poverty, regimentation and war. The question of leadership is crucial precisely because such opportunities do not knock at the door often, or for long.

Our assumption, therefore, unlike the one Cruse imputes to us,

is not that the working class can or will be radical all of the time or most of the time, but that the conditions created by capitalism must radicalize it some of the time, and that even though revolutionary situations occur rarely, one can be turned into a successful conquest of power. As the Cuban experience demonstrates, a successful revolution can then quickly alter conditions enough so that the revolutionary consciousness and will of most of the workers will remain high and become permanent.

Cruse does not consider such a working class revolution possible, like most Americans, or even New Left professors like C. Wright Mills. With other sophisticated opponents of Marxism, he lives in a world that is changing with dizzying speed, but he thinks everything is going to change except the workers. Talk about a grand illusion! Even the most ignorant capitalist knows better than that. That's why they distort the teachings of Marxism and try to isolate and suppress socialist ideas and movements.

The future of this country will be determined in large part by the relations among its three major forces: the capitalists, the white workers and the Negro people (mostly workers too). At present the capitalists dominate and have the support of most white workers. Cruse thinks this is going to last forever. It won't, because of the internal contradictions of this system.

The central contradiction is the material readiness of our society for socialism and the ideological and political unreadiness of the white workers to fight for it. Tied up with this is another acute con-

tradition — the readiness of the Negroes to fight for jobs and justice by the most militant means and the unreadiness of organized labor and the white workers as a whole to support the black people.

From our analysis of the social structure, we conclude that the contradiction prevailing between white workers and Negroes is not absolute, but relative; not permanent, but transitory. The alienation between them is no more enduring than the political and ideological partnership between the white workers and their bosses.

Can Narrow Gap

In fact, these two states are interconnected. Any deepening of antagonism between the white workers and the ruling class, any cutting of ties between them, any opening or widening of breaches between them, objectively sets the stage for a lessening of the antagonism and a narrowing of the great gap between the Negro movement and the white workers.

The outlook of white workers is going to be altered from two directions. One is from the independent struggle of the Negroes, which tends to upset the status quo and introduce unsettling elements into class relations. The disrupted patterns of politics in this election year testify to the power of the independent Negro struggle to disarrange and overturn customary modes of thought and action. Is there any reason to think that white workers will not also be shaken up and divided, and some of them torn out of their ruts, as the Negro struggle continues to develop and explode?

The other and more basic modifying factor comes directly from the operation of the cap-

italist system itself. In the next decade automation will create vast armies of unemployed and undermine the security of all workers, even those of high seniority, skill and privilege. America's share of the world market will be shrunk by the colonial revolution and competition from other capitalist countries, and this will drive the capitalists to attack the wage rates and living standards of the employed workers.

Isn't this certain to provoke anti-capitalist sentiments and attitudes, not only among the youth and unemployed, but also among unionists still on the job? Won't such radicalization make white workers more susceptible to suggestions of joint action with the Negro movement? Won't the possibility be opened for a change in the present situation, for united action by the two anti-capitalist movements against the upholders of the system responsible for their common insecurity and misery?

We hope that what we have just written will not be distorted. It is a perspective to be worked for, not an existing reality. We do not think the achievement of joint action will be easy or quick. We are not suggesting that the Negroes should wait until the white workers are ready for collaboration, before they build their own movement, with its own leaders, ideology and program. We are not proposing, and we do not favor, any alliance where the white workers call the shots and the Negroes comply.

We are talking about an alliance of equals. An alliance with radicalized, not conservative, white workers. An alliance against all capitalist parties, not one behind the Democratic Party. Therefore

what we are talking about is the future (less distant than it may appear on the surface) and not today. We concur 100 per cent with the decision of militant Negroes to concentrate on building their own movement and working out tactics based first of all on the situation as it is today.

Coming Changes

What we add is that it will not remain as it is today. A correct over-all strategy has to take that into account too, be prepared for the changes coming, and promote them. For they will benefit Negroes as much as white workers.

The SWP's 1963 convention resolution (*Freedom Now: The New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation*) stated that the first stage of the alliance we foresee and predict will very likely be the knitting of ties between the black vanguard and the revolutionary socialist vanguard. We

continue to seek such ties. We are on the side of the Negroes wherever they clash with prejudiced and privileged white workers. We support and work with black radicals even though they have crossed off the white workers forever as any help to their struggle.

We feel no inconsistency in doing so because we are confident their own experience will teach them, as it will teach white workers, that collaboration between both camps is ultimately indispensable if the power structure is to be toppled and not simply shaken and renovated. Experience will prove that the monopolists cannot be dislodged from their seats of power except by a transformation of the relations among the three main forces — a dialectical transformation of the capitalist-white worker partnership into a Negro-white worker alliance against the capitalist regime.

The Need and Result of Independence

A program to win the Negro struggle for equality must be based on a correct analysis of its main features. Among these are its independence, its vanguard role and its need for independent political action. We shall compare the Socialist Workers Party positions on these questions with what Harold Cruse claims are its positions (in *Liberator*, May and June).

Cruse says the growing independence of the Negro movement produces a crisis for Marxists: "the greater the Negro movement becomes as an independent force . . . the deeper does the crisis become for the Marxist movement itself. For the 'alliance' it attempts to forge with the Negro must be one where the Marxists dominate."

But facts are stubborn things, and the record bulges with facts refuting Cruse's claim that the SWP is opposed to the independence of the Negro movement from the labor movement, or from anything else, including the SWP itself. Throughout its entire existence the SWP has thought, said and argued just the opposite. It was the first radical organization in this country to assert the correctness and necessity of Negro

independence.

As long ago as 1939, when the SWP was only a year old, it declared in a unanimously adopted convention resolution: ". . . the awakening political consciousness of the Negro not unnaturally takes the form of a desire for independent action uncontrolled by whites. The Negroes have long felt and more than ever feel today the urge to create their own organizations under their own leaders and thus assert, not only in theory but in action, their claim to complete equality with other American citizens. Such a desire is legitimate and must be vigorously supported . . ." (In *Documents on the Negro Struggle*, Pioneer Publishers.)

The SWP has never wavered in this position in the 25 years since then, as an examination of its latest (1963) convention resolution will prove. It states that "the liberation of the Negro people requires that the Negroes organize themselves independently, and control their own struggle, and not permit it to be subordinated to any other consideration or interest." (*Freedom Now: The New Stage in the Struggle for Negro*

Emancipation.)

Why do genuine Marxists take this position? Why do we advocate that the Negro movement must be independent, *even of the SWP*? Because the history of Negro oppression in this country has been such that the more independent the Negro movement becomes, the more revolutionary it becomes. And the more revolutionary the Negro movement becomes, the better it is for *all* revolutionists, white and black. The radicalization of the Negroes cannot help stimulating radicalization among whites too.

Contrary to J. Edgar Hoover — or to Harold Cruse — we Marxists have no interest whatever in “dominating” the Negro movement. Our aim is to influence the Negro movement, as it is to influence the labor and any other progressive movement, and we make no secret of that. We do so by offering it our revolutionary ideas, which the participants in the Negro movement of course can freely accept or reject in accord with their own estimate of what they need and want.

We believe that the sooner the Negro movement becomes completely “undominated” (that is, the sooner it becomes completely independent and revolutionary), the sooner it will approach and accept the ideas and policies that the Marxists have reached; and that the process of ever-growing independence will in the end inevitably lead it, as the result of its own experiences, toward close collaboration with other revolutionary forces, including the SWP. That kind of fraternal relation, rather than domination, is the only one worth having, and it is the only one we seek.

One of the more astonishing statements in Cruse’s article is that “the Negro movement’s rise to the ascendancy as a radical force in America completely upsets Marxian theory” and therefore deepens the alleged crisis of Marxism.

We can only wonder what “Marxian theory” Cruse is talking about. Since he insists, wrongly, on identifying the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party as “twin branches of the same withering tree trunk of western Marxism,” despite the irreconcilable differences between them, maybe he is thinking about some kind of “Marxian theory” coming from the Communist Party. It certainly is not and never has been any theory of the SWP, which is the target of his present polemic.

Permanent Revolution

Our theory has been strikingly confirmed by “the Negro movement’s rise to the ascendancy as a radical force.” For Leon Trotsky, making use of the Marxist conception of the permanent revolution, predicted more than 30 years ago that the Negroes could become “the most advanced section” of the working class, that they could reach revolutionary consciousness ahead of the white workers, that they could become the revolutionary vanguard. Twenty-five years ago the SWP adopted a convention resolution declaring that the Negroes were destined to become “the very vanguard of the proletarian revolution.” (*Documents on the Negro Struggle.*)

So the Marxist theory which Cruse tries to discredit foresaw the radicalization of the Negro movement (not in all its detail,

but in its general sweep) long before it happened, when the empiricists of that day and others stupefied by the status quo could not even dream of such a development.

Moreover, the SWP not only predicted that the Negro movement would become the radical vanguard, but advocated it, and worked for it, and exults now that it is happening. Why in the world then should we feel that our theory has been upset? Why should the confirmation of our theory by real life throw us into a crisis? If only all our theories could be "upset" this way! The truth, once again, is the opposite of what Cruse says, and happens in this case to be an especially good reason for black radicals to become better acquainted with the Marxist method and program.

When we say that Negroes will play a vanguard role, Cruse tries to confuse what we mean, and to imply a manipulative motive; by attributing to us the "belief that the 'historical laws' have pre-ordained the Negro movement in America to be used as a kind of transitional social phase leading to the 'Marxian revolution.'"

If he will be so kind, we would like to state our position ourselves, minus the slanted terms he prefers. We do not know of any "Marxian revolution," with or without quotation marks, and that is not what we advocate. The American revolution will be a social revolution — that is, it will remove the present ruling class from political power and reconstruct society on new, non-exploitative foundations.

Nor do we consider the Negro movement to be any kind of "phase," transitional or otherwise.

We expect it to be an integral part of the revolution, before, during and after the winning of power, until it, the Negro movement, is satisfied that racism is abolished beyond the possibility of return.

Vanguard Position

What we think is this: Historical conditions, yes "laws," have placed the Negro movement in a vanguard position — in the leadership of the mass struggle to change society socially, politically and economically. Its radicalization marks the opening stage of the revolution that will accomplish these changes. As this revolution continues and develops, the whole political structure will begin to come apart, and other forces will be drawn into the revolution, for and against. Which side wins will depend on which draws the strongest support from the as-yet uncommitted and inactive majority.

Cruse's snide implication that the Marxists plan to "use" the Negro movement and then cast it aside has no basis at all. We have said a thousand times what we said in our 1963 convention resolution: "The SWP believes and acts on the belief that the working class cannot achieve its aims without the Negro people achieving theirs. The American revolution for a socialist democracy cannot succeed unless it is based on an equal and mutually acceptable partnership between the working class and the Negro people."

This is our perspective, openly stated. It does not involve subordination of the Negro movement "to any other consideration or interest." It does not involve the slightest infringement on the independence of the Negro move-

ment, which at all times must be led by its own representatives and animated by its own goals. We do not believe that this perspective is inconsistent with what black radicals want, if what they want is revolution. If we're wrong, we'd like to be shown.

In the light of what has already been said, Cruse's distortions about the SWP's attitude to the Freedom Now Party can be handled rather briefly. His four charges, somewhat contradictory, are:

- 1) We don't believe in or want a truly independent black political party.
- 2) We engage in maneuvers against the Freedom Now Party.
- 3) We compete with the FNP, even before it is established, by running a Negro candidate for president in 1964 (Clifton DeBerry).
- 4) We disrupt the FNP's development.

The SWP's well-known position in favor of Negro independence of course applies with full force to black political action. For many years we have endorsed and supported independent Negro candidates running against the capitalist party candidates. To support such candidates when they band together in a party of their own, and to defend their right to do so in their own way, is only an extension of our long-held position, and comes almost automatically for us.

Every politically informed person in the country knows this. The anti-Marxist writers, Tom Kahn and August Meier (in *New Politics*, Spring, 1964), have even said that the all-Negro Freedom Now Party idea "was originally projected by the predominantly white Trotskyites and for some months received its chief organizational support from them."

This is untrue. The SWP's 1963 convention resolution endorsing "the idea of a Negro party, a civil-rights party or an equal-rights party" specifically noted that the idea had been raised in previous years by Adam Clayton Powell and *Liberator*, and early in 1963 by Elijah Muhammad and William Worthy. We would be glad to claim credit for conceiving the idea, but it would be dishonest to do so. What we can claim credit for is having publicly supported the idea of an independent black party *before* anyone had taken organizational steps to create one.

But if we did that, then why, even before the new party has been established nationally and on a stable basis, would we rush to "compete" with it? Cruse calls us "astute." But what's astute about encouraging the formation of another party if your first response, before it has even been assembled, is to compete with it? The charge is ridiculous on the face of it.

There isn't the faintest trace of "competition with the FNP" in Clifton DeBerry's presidential candidacy, except inside Cruse's head. When DeBerry was nominated by the SWP, it was perfectly plain that the FNP would not be able to run a presidential campaign in this, its first year of existence. Moreover, DeBerry, every chance he gets, expresses his and the SWP's complete support for the effort to create a mass, independent FNP. (And gets criticized by Cruse for doing so. What is DeBerry supposed to do: keep silent — or oppose it?)

Michigan Ballot

The FNP has won a state-wide place on the ballot only in Michigan. There, the day after the FNP filed its petitions last spring, the

SWP, which had filed its own petitions and won ballot rights in 1963, publicly stated that it was in the campaign to fight the Democrats and Republicans: "We are not campaigning against the Freedom Now Party, which in our view has valuable contributions to make to the electoral struggle for a world free of oppression and exploitation. We welcome its entry into the election campaign, and hope it will get a fair hearing from whites as well as Negroes." As proof that this is not just talk, the Michigan SWP is not running against, and is endorsing, the FNP candidates in every Michigan district where they have the slightest chance of being elected.

Clifton DeBerry has already refuted the "maneuver" charge. The claim that he "linked himself with the Freedom Now Party without the party's permission to do so" rests in its entirety on the fact that DeBerry, without ever pretending to be a spokesman of the FNP, expresses support for the FNP and urges black militants to help build it. Any expectation or demand that DeBerry has to get permission from the FNP, or the Democratic Party, or the Republican Party, before he expresses his political views about them, is — what shall we say? — slightly fantastic.

The "disruption" charge is equally baseless. DeBerry and the SWP are said to be "disrupting" the development of the FNP because when they discuss the FNP's meaning and effects, "they must attempt to project the idea of the Freedom Now Party in their own Marxian image, with the old worn-out, discredited theme of Negro-Labor unity."

What this means is that DeBerry and the SWP discuss the

significance of the FNP as Marxists. But what's wrong with that? Does it stop other people from discussing it from whatever angle they wish? Does it interfere with Cruse's right to discuss it as an anti-Marxist? Or the right of any FNP member to discuss it as he pleases? How is DeBerry's exercise of his right to express his opinion, whether the opinion is right or wrong, "disruptive" to the FNP's development?

The whole charge is further exploded when we observe that Cruse bases it exclusively on a *New York Times* report that had DeBerry saying he supports the FNP as "a step toward independent political action by labor and Negroes." Twisting this a little, Cruse paints this as opposition to the FNP: "The Trotskyist theoreticians realize very well that a truly independent black political party which functions irrespective of what white labor does and does not do will further deepen the already serious crisis of Marxist creed in the West. It could show that Marxian ideas about capitalism in advanced countries are not to be taken seriously."

Even if DeBerry said it the way the *Times* reported (a "step to independent political action by labor and Negroes") rather than the other way around ("by Negroes and labor"), Cruse knows very well what is meant: That DeBerry and the SWP believe that a mass black party, by upsetting and then destroying the Democratic-labor-Negro coalition, will give impetus to the formation of an independent labor party too.

And what's so terrible, worn-out or discredited about such a prediction? Does Cruse think that

the stimulation of an independent labor party by the growth of a mass FNP would be bad? Then let him argue that. Does he think it impossible? Then let him argue that. And let him not substitute for such arguments, which would be fruitful, his unfounded claim that we cannot be for a truly independent black party because it would deepen "the crisis of Marxism."

The only crisis it would deepen would be the crisis of capitalist politics, the crisis of the Democrats, the labor bureaucrats, the liberals, the Negro gradualists — which is precisely one of the reasons we are so strongly for it. And by the way, aren't the break-up of the two-party system and the radicalization of American politics high on the list of "Marxian ideas about capitalism"?

Relations Between White and Black Radicals

Marxism so far has done more than any other theory to shed light on the nature of the Negro struggle and the direction in which it is moving. Since Marx, it has illuminated the economic roots of racism, and the workings of the capitalist power structure which oppresses the Negro people and must be toppled if their oppression is to end. Since Lenin and Trotsky, it has clarified and shown the progressiveness of the nationalist and racial aspects of the Negro movement. And in our time the Socialist Workers Party is working hard to understand and explain current trends and to combine them into a realistic program for emancipation.

Harold Cruse (in *Liberator*, May and June) accuses us of harboring a "white labor mystique," which it was not hard for us to disprove because we are against mystiques of any kind or color. In the same breath he creates a mystique of his own when he speaks of the "unknown qualities" of the Negro movement, as though they somehow defy rational and scientific analysis.

In our 1963 convention resolu-

tion, which Cruse persistently refuses to confront, we have made an analysis of the very qualities he calls unknown (separatism, assimilationism, nationalism, self-determination, independence, etc.). Our analysis may not be perfect or complete, but it has already proved fruitful. Further progress can be made by testing, deepening and extending this analysis, not by labeling the conditions it studies unknown and implying they are unknowable.

Historical Science

In another place, Cruse says that "if 'historical science' or 'dialectics' is to be considered really scientific it must be developed and verified in life by the inclusion of the social experiences, the history, the ideas and political philosophies, the points of view of the backward peoples" (among whom he includes the American Negroes). Well, that's what we've been saying too, before Cruse did. That's just what we've been trying to do when we undertake to Afro-Americanize Marxism. Robert Vernon's writings on the black ghetto in *The Militant* are a striking example of

the value of this approach.

But when we do it, Cruse refuses to even comment on the result. We hope that other black radicals, who don't have any anti-Marxist axes to grind, will become acquainted with our work in this field and join in on it.

While we recommend Marxism as the best theory now available and defend it against Cruse's type of attack, we know that no theory, not even the best, is perfect. That would mean knowing everything about a given situation, which is impossible. No theory automatically provides all the answers; that takes work. No one gains access to the answers merely by adopting a theory, or by saying I am a Marxist, or a black nationalist, or any other ist.

Even the best theory in the world does not safeguard anyone or any movement against making mistakes and lagging behind changes in reality. The question is whether their theory enables them to avoid fatal mistakes, whether it enables them to learn from mistakes, correct them and avoid repeating them. In this respect too, the Marxist record is superior to others.

Years of isolation and attack by backsliders and refugees from Marxism as well as by capitalist spokesmen, and the need to stand firm against them, have unfortunately tended to create the impression that Marxists are rigid people who think they know it all: "Here is a finished science with all the answers worked out, sit down and study it." But this is not the case, and mature Marxists do not think it is.

We don't have all the answers. We think we have the method for

finding them, and we have no patent on that. In seeking the answers and using the method to find them, we urgently need and want the active collaboration and aid of those who have most to gain from revolution, the people who are least privileged and least corrupted by this society — the black masses and the radical thinkers who most authentically represent them. We think Cruse's article does harm because it tries through misrepresentation of Marxism to discourage this collaboration.

"White" Theory?

Another impression which we hope to dispel is that Marxism is a "white" theory and philosophy. We know it isn't, but that's how it looks today to many black people, especially in this country, who are justifiably suspicious of white ideas and influences because they are usually oppressive to Negroes. Cruse tries to fan this suspicion against Marxists in order to prevent a fair examination of our ideas.

It is true that Marx was classified as a white, and that the early development of the Marxist movement occurred mainly among white people in the advanced capitalist countries. But Marxism is, and is meant to be, a tool and weapon for the revolutionists of all races, and should not be rejected out of hand any more than a gun should be rejected by black rebels in South Africa merely because it was manufactured by white workers.

In any case, things have changed since Marx's time, and in the world today *the millions of non-whites who consider themselves Marxists and supporters of Marx-*

ism outnumber their white co-thinkers. As Clifton DeBerry asked, in an article which *Liberator* asked him to write but has not printed, "if Marxism is white, western and obsolete as Cruse contends, how can he account for the fact that from China to Cuba, where capitalism has been abolished by mass revolution, this was done under the banner of Marxism? How does he explain the fact that socialism is becoming the most popular mass creed in almost all the countries and continents where colored peoples are fighting for freedom?"

Because Cruse considers the American Negro struggle a semi-colonial revolt, DeBerry asked further: "If Marxism has been so helpful and correct as a guide in the fight against imperialism and white supremacy in the colonial world, what prevents this method from being equally useful in the Freedom Now struggle here in the heartland of imperialism and white supremacy?"

Cruse says that "the real issue is: Who is destined to be the dominant and decisive radical force in America — Black Radicals or White Radicals?" We don't see that as the real issue at all. Far more important is the question of how black and white radicals can pool their forces to promote their common aims against their common enemies.

Black Leadership

Cruse's assumption here is that Marxists are opposed to black leadership, but it simply isn't so. We don't care what the color of the leadership of the coming American revolution may be — only that it be a leadership with a correct program and be capable

of guiding the masses to the abolition of capitalism.

We expect that such a leadership will include members of all races in this country, whether they are organized in a single revolutionary party, or an alliance of such parties; that Negroes will contribute more than their proportionate share to this leadership; and that they may well be a majority. In any case, it is absolutely certain that the struggle of the Negroes today, in the revolution that is coming, and afterward, will be led by Negroes.

When we say black and white radicals have common aims and therefore should be able to work together, we do not mean to minimize the differences that do exist between many black radicals and the Socialist Workers Party. Besides our differences over the future role of the white workers, there are three others that should get mention here:

A weakness of some Negro intellectuals, like Cruse, is that they proceed with their analyses and arrive at their conclusions by assuming the indefinite perpetuation of the present conditions of the struggle and of the relations of social forces on a national and world scale. They do not see further than the initiating stages of the Third American Revolution.

They are empirical in their reasoning — a method consistent with liberalism and reformism, but inconsistent with a thoroughly revolutionary outlook. This method is faulty and can be fatal because it leaves its practitioners unprepared for sharp turns and liable to be caught by surprise. This is one reason for their rejection of Marxism, which views all

things in their contradictory development.

Basic Perspective

Another difference Marxists have with some black radicals concerns a basic perspective. As we have said, we believe that Negroes will not achieve equality or freedom in a capitalist America; they will get it through socialist revolution or through separation or migration. This flows from our analysis of American capitalism in its monopoly stage and from our analysis of the combined national-proletarian character of the Negro question.

What about those who see only one side of this dual character, only the national-racial side and not the proletarian? (Let us call them pure-and-simple nationalists, to distinguish them from black nationalists with a broader view, including socialist-nationalists.) Some of them think Negro equality can be won in this country without abolishing capitalist rule; others leave this open as a possibility. Neither, in our opinion, has thought the question through.

If the capitalists can give employment, education, housing and an end to police brutality, segregation and discrimination to 20 million Negroes, at the bottom of the social structure, then American capitalism would have succeeded in eliminating the most fundamental and urgent economic and social evils of our time. This would even enable it, some would even say entitle it, to endure indefinitely.

Reformist Line

Acceptance of such a possibility, or even a half-hope of it, implies the adoption of a non-revolution-

ary perspective and a reformist line of thought. It then would not be necessary to wage an uncompromising struggle for basic change in the power structure and in social relations. It would be enough for the crew to rock the boat so as to exert pressure on the captain — instead of organizing a mutiny to get rid of the captain and his slave ship.

A pure-and-simple nationalist outlook, which ignores the working-class element of the Negro struggle and its dynamics, that is, its implicitly anti-capitalist tendencies, runs the risk of being derailed at some point along the way because it fails to foresee the direction of the mass movement, both black and white, and the kind of resistance it must encounter from the capitalists. Negroes will play a leading role in any anti-capitalist revolution in this country, but it will not be successful if they are the only anti-capitalist force involved.

A third difference exists between us and those like Cruse who assume that not only the ideas and attitudes of white workers, but the ideas and attitudes of militant Negroes, will remain substantially unchanged. They underrate, even exclude, the influence of socialist ideas as formulated by Marxism in the coming stages of the fight for freedom.

There are actually three components, very unequally developed at this point, at work in the Negro movement: its proletarian composition, its nationalism and its socialism. The first two are already obvious; the third is still largely latent although distinctly implicit in its orientation in practice. The socialist element is small and embryonic at present, just

as the conscious and avowed socialists are few. Will it remain this way?

Those black nationalists who slight the socialist element inherent in their movement commit an error comparable to those who today slight black nationalism. Here the colonial revolution they feel kinship with has something to teach them. Cuba and Algeria have recently shown how a nationalist, democratic, revolutionary mass movement can, through conclusions derived from direct experience in struggle with imperialism and its agents, grow over into a consciously socialist movement, party and government.

We believe that this dynamic of the permanent revolution will be operative in the evolution of American black nationalism too. The further it goes in a revolutionary and anti-capitalist direction, the closer it comes to socialist, Marxist, policies, methods and outlook. We can be all the more confident of this because black nationalism in this country is far more urban and proletarian than rural and peasant.

A final point: despite differences and the critical exchange of views, black radicals and Marxists are both engaged in finding the solutions to the evils bred by capitalism. These specific answers are not given in any books. But Marxism is our method and it is too useful for us to surrender it until we can be shown a better one.

Let the non-Marxist black theoreticians try other methods and let's compare the results. Whatever they come up with that is good and useful we shall gladly adopt, as we have done in the past. There is plenty of room in Marxist theory to accommodate and incorporate everything progressive that develops out of the theory and practice of the Negro revolt. At the same time we believe the non-Marxist nationalists should try to think out their positions to the end and state them plainly, so that everybody can check and learn from the conclusions of both their tendency and ours as the struggle moves from one stage to the next.

While awaiting such tests, we proceed in the conviction that Marxism is relevant to the Negro struggle; that Marxists have much to learn from the black working-class ghetto that can make their theory more effective and complete; that black radicals have much to learn from Marxism that can be used to formulate a program to win freedom for the Negro people; that non-Marxist black radicals and white and black Marxists have so many things in common that they can and should work together in as many areas as possible, despite their differences; and that their common needs and further experience will bring them closer together and into genuine collaboration before, during and after the coming American revolution.

A Reply to Harold Cruse

By CLIFTON DE BERRY

In a two-part series on Marxism and the Negro in LIBERATOR, Harold Cruse attacks Marxism as being obsolete, white and not applicable to the Negro struggle today. He views the Socialist Workers Party as an opponent of the Freedom Now Party, and considers me a "pawn" of the Socialist Workers Party in my role as the Party's presidential candidate.

It is my hope that an exchange of views between Cruse and myself will aid in clarifying misunderstandings and misrepresentations of what he terms "western Marxism." To begin with, I find myself more or less in agreement with three broad propositions stated by Cruse. I would sum these up as: 1) The principal revolutionary struggle in today's world is that of the colonial peoples, who are generally non-white, against the imperialists. 2) Black nationalism is an extension and embodiment of this worldwide struggle within the United States. 3) In both areas, the privileged white workers have tended to align themselves with the capitalist rulers against the freedom struggles.

Although concurring with these

propositions from a factual standpoint, I disagree with the conclusions Cruse draws from them. Particularly so when he contends, as I understand his views, that the reality of world revolutionary events contradicts and nullifies the teachings of Marxism, generates an insoluble crisis within it and counsels its abandonment or at least profound modification.

In dismissing "western Marxism" as a revolutionary factor, Cruse seems to substitute the idea of a non-white revolutionary struggle against whites for the Marxist concept of a class struggle of workers against capitalists. If that is his view, he would in fact leave the colonial peoples subject to an unending threat of imperialist attack.

History teaches that the victories and achievements of the colonial revolution, immense though they are, have not and cannot by themselves get rid of imperialism. That job has to be done within imperialism's home base. It calls for a revolutionary struggle by the workers, non-white and white combined, to abolish the capitalist system from which imperialism

springs. For that reason, among others, the Marxist program of revolutionary class struggle retains full validity everywhere, including the United States.

From another viewpoint, if Marxism is white, western, and obsolete as Cruse contends, how can he account for the fact that from China to Cuba, where capitalism has been abolished by mass revolution, this was done under the banner of Marxism? How does he explain the fact that socialism is becoming the most popular mass creed in almost all the countries and continents where colored peoples are fighting for freedom? At a public meeting in New York last month, a comment made by Malcolm X seemed to indicate the growing popularity of socialism abroad. He said that in his travels through Africa and Asia he talked to many people. He found their politics to be "socialism." How explain this if Marxism is obsolete?

Here is another question I believe Cruse should give some serious consideration: If Marxism has been so helpful and correct as a guide in the fight against imperialism and white supremacy in the colonial world, what prevents this method from being equally useful in the Freedom Now struggle here in the heartland of imperialism and white supremacy?

Perhaps his thinking on this subject suffers from a tendency to mistake the policies of the Communist Party for Marxism. The facts are, however, that the CP has supported the Democratic Party, a capitalist party, since the New Deal. In World War II it opposed Negro militancy as "unpatriotic." In the 1964 elections it is still supporting

the Democratic Party and its "liberal" leader, Lyndon Johnson. The CP has attacked the Black Muslim organization, and by inference the Freedom Now Party, as black fascism and segregation in reverse. This whole policy is Stalinism—the opposite of Marxism.

There is a very fundamental distinction between the SWP and the CP, and Cruse only confuses things when he presumes to link these two parties together in his attack on "western Marxists." The SWP views on the application of the Marxist program to the class struggle in the United States, with particular reference to the Freedom Now struggle, were set forth in a resolution published in the Fall 1963 issue of the International Socialist Review. The resolution takes up the new phenomena developing in the Freedom Now movement—black nationalism—and indicates how the logic of the struggle impels the Negro people toward independent black political action which the SWP supports.

Let me quote from the resolution itself: "The Socialist Workers Party contends that racism, like unemployment, exploitation and war, can be abolished in this country only by independent political action aimed at taking control of the government out of the hands of the capitalists and their parties. As a step in this direction, we have long advocated that the unions break from the Democratic Party and form an independent labor party that would seek to politically unite workers, farmers and Negroes and elect their representatives to office. In addition, and for the same reason, we have

endorsed and supported representatives of the Negro community whenever they have run for office independently of and in opposition to the old parties, even when they were not socialists.

"Extending this policy in the light of current developments, we publicly express our readiness to support and collaborate with any Negro party or Freedom Now party that runs candidates of its own in opposition to the capitalist parties and seeks to elect representatives whose primary allegiance will be to the Negro community. Our support of such a party in no way conflicts with our own independent socialist political campaigning or with our continued advocacy of a labor party. On the contrary, we believe that a Negro party, a socialist party, and a labor party would find much in common from the very beginning, would work together for common ends, and would tend in the course of common activity to establish close organizational ties or even merge into a single federated party."

Harold Cruse commented on the SWP resolution and in doing so complained that I have linked myself with the Freedom Now Party without that party's permission to do so. He accused me of "a well-known Marxist type of maneuver" in Negro affairs. Here are the facts:

I support independent black political action as does the organization I represent, the Socialist Workers Party. I repeatedly stressed this idea as a Councilmanic candidate in New York City last year, and do so now as my party's presidential candidate. I have told all who would listen to me that I favor

the formation and growth of the Freedom Now Party. I have defended it against its detractors and have urged black militants to help build it. But I have never pretended in any way to be a spokesman for the FNP.

I did not ask the Freedom Now Party's permission to express support of it, that is true. Neither did I ask the permission of Malcolm X to voice my support of his position on self defense against white-supremacist violence, or the permission of Jesse Gray and his associates to voice my support of the rent strike in New York City. Nor did I ask Fidel Castro's permission to voice support of the Cuban revolution. I did these things, and I will continue to do them as a spokesman for the SWP, without asking any special permission.

To voice open and honest support for any public position or action by others, with which I agree, is neither maneuveristic or unscrupulous. It is a principled political act.

Cruse may not agree with my party's position or program; that is his right. But I have not seen any basis for the contention he makes that our basic beliefs as Marxists in anyway contradict our firm support to all serious attempts to create an independent black party. The SWP recognizes the revolutionary character of black nationalism, defends and supports it. We recognize that the Freedom Now movement must develop its own program, go through its own experiences and develop its own leadership. We see this process as a necessary condition for the development within the Freedom Now movement of a vanguard force ready to join in the

struggle to abolish capitalism. Anyone who fails to recognize these political facts is neither a socialist nor a Marxist.

Harold Cruse claims to see an insoluble contradiction between white and black radicals. He makes his distinction based solely on color, the Black Nationalists at one pole and all whites, indiscriminately, at the other pole—capitalists, workers, Marxists, everybody white.

If Marxism can be associated with any color it would be red, not white. And to be thoroughly black in the United States is to be red—revolutionary and anti-capitalist.

It is the Marxists ("reds") who can help the Freedom Now movement resolve the contradiction Cruse finds insoluble. I believe the present election campaign of the Socialist Workers Party is a step in that direction. It is designed to point out to all sections of the American working class their own need for class solidarity with the dynamic struggles of the black workers throughout the world—here in the United States and abroad. The SWP undertakes to point out to those 70 million who live in poverty in this land of plenty what they have in common with Negro freedom fighters battling against injus-

tices, brutality and inequality. We seek to explain how their own interests in freedom and justice, the right to work, to live in peace, to be equal, are linked with the struggles of the Negro people.

In conclusion, let me say in reply to Harold Cruse's assertions that I am just a pawn of the Socialist Workers Party as follows: I am a black revolutionary socialist. Before adopting Marxism as my philosophy, I made an intensive study of all the methods of thought, the theoretical foundation of the various philosophies. I came to the conclusion that the most effective tools for understanding capitalism and how to set the process into motion for change were provided by Marxism. I examined the revolutions which have taken place throughout the world. These studies taught me that the concepts needed to liberate mankind through the necessary seizure of power from the capitalist class are those of scientific socialism.

Fidel Castro very accurately summed up my feelings in a statement he made not long ago: "I shall be a Marxist-Leninist for the rest of my life."

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