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From The Negro and the Communist Party by Wilson Record.
N. Carolina Pr., 1951

In U. S. radical movements, that is those with a socialistic slant, the Negro has always been an important factor for three basic reasons:

1. They seek a laboring class base and the Negro is a significant portion of the labor force.
2. Negroes suffer more than any other minority from economic exploitation and their plight is seen as a failure of capitalism.
3. They are numerically important and are seen as either an important resource or a distinct liability (as opposition).

In 1920, on orders from the Communist International, the United Communist party was formed in the U. S. with an underground apparatus. This organization stated that the Negro problem was one of "economic bondage" and this remained the major line until 1928.

The early Communists were impressed by the role that racial and national minorities had played in the Russian revolution, the ethnic minorities having given enthusiastic support. The Commintern believed that Negroes in the U. S. could be trained to assume an important role, not only in the proletarian revolution of the U. S. but in the national liberation struggles of the backward imperialist colonies as well.

In attempting to develop a revolutionary Negro leadership, the party undertook special studies of Negro problems; they supported a special Negro press, from which poured a constant stream of propaganda; they devoted a substantial portion of their time and resources to work among Negroes. However, they made surprisingly little progress among the race. By 1928 Negro membership by their own figures stood only at 150 to 200 out of a total of 14,000.

The Communists attributed their failure to a misunderstanding of the Negro social structure. They had attempted to deal with the race as a mass group with common social and economic outlook but it was in reality similar in many respects to the prevailing American culture; that is, there was an extremely small Negro upper class, a somewhat larger middle class composed of small businessmen, professionals and intellectuals, and a large working class made up of laborers and sharecroppers. And so, in the next assault upon the problem, they decided to concentrate on the lower class. In this period, they showed extreme hostility toward the Negro middle class and the moderate protest and betterment organizations which the "black bourgeoisie" supported. (It was only later when the Negro questio was approached as a "national problem,"that they conceded the bourgeoisie could make some contribution to Negro "liberation.")

The American Negro Labor Congress was formed under Communist sponsorship in 1925 and bitterly attacked by the Negro press and moderate Negro leaders. This organization was so poorly supported by Negro workers that it was little more than a paper organization and was "transformed" into the League of Struggle for Negro Rights in 1930 -- the fate of so many later similar organizations.

Failure to get the support of the worker and to induce him to support unions led to statements by Communist workers such as this: "The Negro is revolutionary enough in a racial sense, and it devolves upon the American Communist Party to manipulate this revolutionary sentiment to the advantage of the class struggle."(James Jackson, The Negro in America.)

Beginning in 1928, the Communist Party in the U. S. expressed deep disappointment at their failure to make headway under what appeared to be exceptionally favorable conditions and feared that unless something was done the Party was destined to play a minor and ineffectual role in the overthrow of the world's strongest capitalist power. A new line on Negroes saw them as an "oppressed nation". Negroes in the U. S. were a separate and distinct nation under the heel of an imperialist power. It was argued that Negroes had a right to secede and form their own republic. This play on Negro nationalism was not really taken seriously, however and no practical policy was devised. This new line was seen by many Negroes to be only an ideological red-winged Jim Crow.

Some organization of Negroes in the South was attempted mostly in the industrial and manufacturing cities and these were not directly Communist sponsored but of the "united front" type in which Communist members became highly active in organizations already established

Between 1928 and 1935 the Communists were fairly successful in building up Negro leadership. It was the aim to train Negroes in the North for subsequent leadership and expansion of groups below the Mason-Dixon line, although these leaders actually met with little success in the South, where they found Negroes little moved by the ideological line. There was also an attempt to attract Negro intellectuals which largely failed since they proved to be considerably more independent of mind than their white counterparts. Also, intellectuals of both colors were being attracted to Roosevelt and the New Deal. Negro intellectuals became keenly aware that the interests of the race could not be attained except in conjunction with the genuinely liberal white elements in American society and did not want to be separated from them -- by the Communist Party or any other radical spokesman.

From 1935 to 1939, the slogan became, "Build the Negro people's United Front. Brought about by the rise of Hitler and fascism which was seen as a threat to the Soviet Union, the entire emphasis changed. The Negro's main task was to fight fascism. There was a general effort to get along with other trade union and socialist groups as well as liberal organizations, and an infiltration process refined in an attempt to lead the policies of these groups. In its Negro program, the Party made some substantial gains in this period. Dropping much of its doctrinaire theory, immediate issues became important. While it failed to capture the NAACP Father Divine, or the Negro nationalist organizations, it did succeed in some instances in picking off some of their local branches. Negro membership in the party was more than doubled.

From 1939 to 1941, the period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the united front was broken up, the entire program reversed including that on the Negro question. The fight was to have the U. S. stay out of the war. The Party insisted that the rights of racial minorities were not involved in the War. and that the Negroes best interest would be served by a "people's peace." During this period Communist membership declined significantly. Approximately half of the Negro members dropped out and it became difficult to recruit new ones. Communists made vicious attacks on Walter White, Lester Granger and Philip Randolph, all of whom were campaigning effectively for equality of job opportunity and equality for Negroes in the armed services.

1941-1945. In June of 1941, Hitler attacked Russia and the American Communist party executed a one-hundred-eighty degree turn. The war became one of "national liberation," for survival and for the "preservation of democratic institutions." The Communist Party officially pronounced itself

dissolved and became officially the Communist Political Association, though they continued to act in the same way without the stigma of Party membership and the implications associated with it. (Even the Communists wanted to get rid of the label.) The new position declared capitalism in the U. S. to be a progressive force; class antagonisms had not developed in the U. S.; workers enjoyed political rights and a standard of living unequalled in the world; liberalism would serve to steer social change in the right direction: consequently there was no need for class struggle or revolution. The goals the Party had fought for were now a fact or becoming a fact. After June 21, 1941 the Party became as patriotic as the Daughters of the American Revolution and denounced "subversive" elements such as the March on Washington Movement led by A. Philip Randolph although it was This movement that resulted in the formation of the FEPC and the end of discrimination in the armed services. Randolph stated:"...Negroes cannot logically,..tie up with a movement such as the Communist...The history and record of this political cult shows that it conforms with rigid fidelity to the rapidly changing, unpredictable climate of Soviet Russia, without regard to the national interests of any other group. When the war broke, the Communists who had posed as the savior of the Negro promptly dropped him like a hot potato. This was not the first time the Communists deserted the Negro." (What the Negro Wants, by Rayford W. Logan.)

After the war, this policy was reversed, and the U. S. became the tool of Wall Street imperialism, of which the Negro was again seen to be the victim. However, disillusioned Negroes were not converted and middle class groups such as the NAACP expanded significantly. There have been repeated and consistent attempts to infiltrate and dominate such groups with little success to the present time, but with unfortunate consequences to some local chapters.

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From Race and Radicalism, by Wilson Record

During the past dozen years there have been no abrupt shifts on the Negro question, but membership both black and white dwindles.

During this period the NAACP became a really mass Negro movement and has alternately been sniped at and wooed by the Communist Party, mostly the former. NAACP has adopted increasingly stringent methods to prevent Communist infiltration into its ranks and to combat Communist-controlled organizations among Negroes, fearing use of the Communist label by racists and bigots as well as distrusting Communist intentions. At Los Angeles in 1949, Communist members had attempted to capture the NAACP convention but failed. In their long legal struggle which resulted in the famous Supreme Court ruling on school segregation, the Communist Party sneered at their efforts and only grudgingly recognized their great victory.

In a 1954 House Un-American Activities Committee Report it was concluded that it was found after much invesitgation "... the vast majority of Americans of the Negro race have consistently resisted the blandishments ...offered by the Communists..."

The three major civil rights victories of our era have been won by independent Negro groups which had repudiated Communist support. 1. Establishment of the F.E.P.C.; 2. Desegregation of the armed services, both under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph and the March on Washington Movement; and 3. the Supreme Court ruling on the unconstitutionality of school segregation, under the direction of the NAACP.

(Randolph had refused to run again again for president of the National Negro Congress "on the ground that it was deliberately packed with Communists. This organization later became the Civil Rights Congress created by the Communist party to raise funds for legal expenses.)

The shifting Communist line

Before 1935: Not particularly anti-fascist, just anti-capitalist.

1935-1939: United front against fascism. (Rise of Hitler)

Aug. 1939-June 1941: Anti-Imperialist war. (Stalin-Hitler Pact).

June 1941-1944: Support of war against fascism.

1945- : International peace.

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