

THE MARXIST-HUMANIST

A SPECIAL ISSUE

RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA ON RACIALISM.

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I
RACE AND THE
PROLETARIAT

This excellent contribution came to us in the form of a letter in which the author, rightly, said that a piece on "Powellism" which appeared in our June issue of the "Marxist-Humanist" was not adequate. We print what she says, and, in addition, we append some extracts from her work, "American Civilization On Trial." We add a few words of our own at the end.

By RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA.

Author of "Marxism And Freedom," and a number of other works.

Dear Harry:

The June issue of THE MARXIST-HUMANIST just arrived and, if I may, I would like to explain why I consider the article on Powellism quite inadequate. Naturally, Marxist-Humanists "must spread the revolutionary message" and thereby win over the workers, including those who showed their own racist prejudices by coming out in support of the Tory Enoch Powell. But that hardly packs the concrete punch that Marx taught us to deliver when trade unionists take a reactionary position as they took in his day both on the Irish question and on the Paris Commune. Every British trade unionist who left the Working Men's International Association because of its enthusiastic support of the Paris Commune Marx excoriated and, in his place, put the name of a Communard. As far as the "Irish Question" is concerned, and this, as I shall show later, is not as far removed from the race question today as might appear on the surface - here is what Marx wrote:

"The English working class...can never do anything decisive here in England until...it not only makes common cause with the Irish, but actually takes the initiative in dissolving the Union established in 1801, and replacing it by a free federal relationship. And, indeed, this must be done, not as a matter of sympathy for Ireland, but as a demand made in the interests of the English proletariat. If not, the English people will remain tied to the leading-strings of the ruling classes."

I should like to approach the question of race at the present moment by (1) showing the historic background of the National Question in general and the Negro question in particular during World War I, and during the Russian Revolution; (2) by comparing Churchill's and Labour's stand during World War II; and (3) by raising the question of the African

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Race And The Proletariat continued from page 1.

Revolutions as the only challenge to the decrepit "West" of the Suez War and the totalitarian Communism of the "east" which bloodily put down the Hungarian Freedom Fighters. It is time we faced the question that we are all products of the historic period in which we live, and that includes holding on to some of the ideas of the ruling class even when we fight exploitation.

You are well acquainted, I am sure, with the Marxist position on the National Question, that "in principle" most stood for the right of self-determination of nations, and yet once the Russian Revolution succeeded, some Bolsheviks opposed it as "a step backward." Lenin, on the other hand, even before the Russian Revolution, insisted that "the dialectic of history and the dialectic of revolution" was such that the Easter Rebellion of the Irish played the vanguard role of bringing the proletarian revolution forward front of the historic stage. That is when he was out of power, of course. He did not change when he was in power and Bucharin then opposed giving some of the national minorities in Russia their freedom. On the contrary he took issue with Bucharin both in content and even in matter of language. Thus, when his co-leader dared bring in the question of the Hottentots, Lenin replied:

"Then Bucharin said, 'We can recognise this right in some cases' I even wrote down that he had included in the list the Hottentots, the Bushmen and the Indians. Hearing this enumeration, I thought, how is it that Comrade Bucharin has forgotten a small trifle, the Bashkirs?"

There are no Bushmen in Russia, nor have I heard that the Hottentots have laid claim to an autonomous republic, but we have Bashkirs, Kirghiz and a number of other peoples, and to these we cannot deny recognition. We cannot deny it to a single one of the peoples living within the boundaries of the former Russian Empire... Scratch some Communists and you will find Great-Russian chauvinists... The Bashkirs distrust the Great-Russians because the Great-Russians are more cultured and used their culture to rob the Bashkirs. That is why in these remote places the name Great-Russian for the Bashkir is tantamount to oppressor, swindler... The past holds fast to us, grasps us with a thousand tentacles, and does not allow us to make a single step forward, or compels us to make these steps as badly as we are making them."

Now, in contrast to Churchill who had answered India's demand for independence by the arrogant "I didn't become the King's Prime Minister to preside over the dismemberment of the Empire", British Labour correctly branded him for the imperialist and their own oppressor that he was. India gained its independence, as did the African colonies, during Labour's reign. What has happened since then?

You, of course, know the answer better than I do: the Labour Government has made such a mess of the situation since their return to power, - the unemployment, the wage freeze, the travelling in company with American imperialism on the barbarous Vietnam war. All this, and more, has brought out the very worst features of racism, not only in the ruling

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Race And The Proletariat continued from page 2.

class, but also in parts of the working class as if the West Indian immigrant, the British citizen of Indian or Pakistani descent, or the African student had brought these misfortunes on the British working class.

It goes without saying that the exploitative classes love it when the working people of the world fight among themselves and so make the rule of their tormentors easier. My point, however, is that it is not enough to show that the capitalists have always lived by the principle "divide and rule." We must tell the proletariat of the technologically developed world they lived largely on the crumbs from the imperialist table which was so well set because imperialism lived off the fat of the land from the technologically under-developed countries. Marx showed the relationship between Labour's struggle for freedom and the fact that slavery was still in existence in Africa, in Asia, and the oppressed minorities within the developed country. This is why Marx hailed the British proletariat when they said that they would rather starve than perpetuate slavery on the other side of the Atlantic, i.e., in South U.S.A., and this is why he called them a "bourgeoisified proletariat" when they moved away from that principle when it came to the establishment of a totally new form of society; the Paris Commune. He then moved away from the skilled workers to the unskilled, from the institutionalized workers to the unorganised, from what Lenin called the "aristocracy of labour" to what Marx called "deeper and lower into the masses" to find the true revolutionary core who would stand, not just for reforms, but for revolution.

What has happened since the end of the 1950's when Great Britain embarked on its imperialist adventure in Suez, and Russia (with the help of China) on its destruction of the Hungarian Revolution, is the defeatism that always follows lost revolutions. Instead of looking down upon the "immigrants", the British, the American, and the East European, ought to hail the birth of the new Third World, especially, the African Revolutions. We should hail them for once again showing us the power of the ideas of freedom, and that the will to freedom, even when unarmed and facing the mightiest empires, can win.

The struggle for the minds of men is still the mightiest weapon of all. And now that the French proletariat and the French students have shown that these forces of freedom have not been destroyed in technologically advanced lands, it is all the more quintessential that the British proletariat rise up to its full height and, as their ancestors showed the way to the first Working Men's International, so they should now pave a new road of world solidarity between themselves and all the "immigrants" of the world. The first step in that direction is the recognition of the fact that many of them have been repeating the reactionary ideas of their own exploiters.

Comradely yours,
Raya.

NOTE: On the next page we make some extracts from the work by Raya Dunayevskaya, "American Civilization on Trial." They deal full with the Negro question and expounds the Marxist-Humanist approach.

"AMERICAN CIVILIZATION ON TRIAL" was issued in 1963, by the American paper, "News & Letters." That was the centenary year of the "Emancipation Proclamation." The work carried the sub-title "The Negro as Touchstone of History." Serious-minded readers are certain to be impressed by the extracts we take from this work. In the course of reading the extracts they will be put in touch with the philosophy of Marxism.

Page 17. Racism, in the United States and/or abroad helped pave the way for totalitarianism with its cult of "Aryanism" and its bestial destruction of an entire white race in the very heart of Europe. Those who wish to forget that the root of present-day apartheid South Africa was the "civilizing mission" of the white race which meant, in fact, such horrors as the extermination of the Hottentot tribes of the Boers, of Leopold II's of 20 to 40 million peaceful Congolese to 8 million - are the ones who took the extermination of the Jews in Nazi Germany "in stride" until the Nazi search for "Lebensraum" meant a challenge to their own area of exploitation.

Surely, on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation when the holocaust of World War II is still fresh within the memory of living men, it is high time to stop playing psychological games with racism. It is precisely such playing with the question as to whether the Civil War was to be limited only to the question of Union, and not extended to the abolition of slavery, which both prolonged the war and left the revolution in human relations in so unfinished a state that to this day we suffer from its state of incompleteness. In 1905 labour made one more try for a fundamental change."

Page 23. "The dream part of American civilization, with its mass production, "non-entanglement in Europe," and jazz era ballyhoo about the "new capitalism" whose prosperity would be endless because its "exceptionalism" made it immune to economic crisis, came crashing down on everyone's head with the economic collapse in 1929.

No one any longer believed what the rulers told them - whether that concerned "peace, prosperity or progress," or the speed of the production line or racism. Along with the rest of white America, Labour may have been blind to the Negro as the touchstone of American Civilization. But with the Depression in the early 1930's Labour experienced so profound with capitalist society, that it included the craft unions which along with colour bar, used their skilled classifications to keep themselves isolated from the overwhelming majority of the Labour-force - the semi-skilled and the unskilled. Along with the despotism of capital, craft unionism had to go.

New passions and new forces coalesced in the upheavals of the 1930's to give birth to the CIO. This was not simply a trade union organisation that finally established industrial unionism in the United States. The speed with which this was done - 1935-1937 - when in Europe it had taken decades - brought it up to the state of organization of Europe's socialist trade unions. And, though each had spontaneously, arrived at a new

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Extracts from AMERICA CIVILIZATION OF TRIAL. . . . continued

Method of struggle, the point is that the simultaneousness of the SIT DOWN electrified the world of labour and shook capitalism to its very foundations.

page 28. The most exciting chapter in human affairs since World War II was written by the African Revolutions. The first All-African People's Conference, in 1958 when Ghana was the only independent state, disclosed not just Pan-Africanism but the making of a Negro International.

Tiny Guinea's "No!" to France won her freedom and thereby re-affirmed that the greatest force for remaking the world remains the human being. In less than a decade no few than 22 African nations won their independence.

The banner under which this freedom from colonialism has been achieved - Pan-Africanism - is not a purely African phenomenon. It has had a multiple birth and development in which the American contribution is important. Where standard history texts, in their vulgar materialistic way, still dwell in detail on the long-dead triangular trade of rum, molasses, and slaves - between Africa, the West Indies and the United States - it is the over-live triangular development of internationalism, masses in action and ideas which is the dominant force today.

All the "utopian ideas that have since become facts of life, underlying philosophies of actual revolutions - from the theory of Negritude to the slogan of "Africa for the Africans"; and from freedom from colonialism to socialist Humanism - have had their origin in this vital traffic between Africa, the West Indies and the United States. With human relations spanning the continents, came also the true history of Africa. As the pioneer Negro historian, Carter G. Woodson, put it, "The race has a past and it did not begin on the cotton and sugar plantations of America." Greater than the intellectual interchange at the turn of the century was the history of Negro struggles in this country - from the time of the slave revolts to Populism - which inspired such revolts in Nyasaland as the Chilembwe Rising of 1915. As we saw, the greatest mass movement among Negroes in the United States was led by a West Indian, Marcus Garvey.

Whether many ideas came to Africa from actual slave revolts and continuous struggles since the end of slavery in this country, or was transmitted there through intellectual channels - and the Negro colleges played no small part in training many of the present leaders of the independent African states - it would be forcing the point beyond recognition to try to attribute to the Negro American the actual world-shaking events that the Africans themselves participated in during the 1950's. The absurdity of such a claim would be soon at once were we to move from what was British Africa to what was French Africa, and attempt to give France credit for the socialism of Sekou Touré in Guinea because he participated in Paris congresses.

No, in stressing the exchange of ideas we do not mean to impute a one-to-one relationship - that is, a direct, immediate, invariable, or automatic connection between ideas and revolution either in the past or

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Extracts from AMERICAN CIVILIZATION ON TRIAL continued.

presently, either in the United States, the West Indies or Africa.

The historic greatness of today's development, no matter what the roots are, flow from the spontaneity, the timing, the political maturity of our age and our world. It is not just black, or even coloured but white as well. Nor is it directed only against Western imperialism as the East German and Hungarian Revolutions for freedom from Russian Totalitarianism showed.

The shock of recognition comes from the Humanism underlying all revolts - in advanced as in technologically under-developed countries, the United States or Africa, Asia or Latin America, the Middle East or Western Europe. The inter-nationalization of such words as "Uhura," "Sit-In," "Independence," "Freedom Ride," "Freedom Fighter," have merged into the world-wide Freedom Now.

Pages 32-33. Because we did foresee the portents on the horizon of the Negro's national and international development, we foresaw the dynamism of ideas that would arise both from the American class struggles and from the African independence movements. Thus, in 1950, when once again the miners, a great proportion of whom are negroes, came out on general strike, this time against what was later popularised as Automation, we had our ears attuned to the new Humanism. It was in the great tradition of Marxism and Abolitionism, but on a much higher historical level since the participants of the struggles of our era have absorbed the rich experiences of the last century.

This time, the worker was out to abolish alienated labour under capitalism, and was searching for ways to unify within himself all his talents, manual and mental. As one Negro miner put it during the 1950 strike: "There is a time for praying. We do that on Sundays. There is a time for acting. We took matters in our hands during the Depression, building up our union and seeing that our families did not starve. There is a time for thinking. The time is now. What I want to know is: how and when will the working man - all working men - have such confidence in their own abilities to make a better world that they will not let others do their thinking for them."

This desire to break with those who want to do the thinking for the workers - the labour leaders made into labour bureaucrats - led to the break between the rank and file and John L. Lewis. When he asked them to return to work, they remained out, demanding answers to the now man-killer, the continuous miner. They didn't win, it is true, but the process of doing their own thinking on the question of Automation started something entirely new on the part of the workers in all other industries, and not only on the question of labour, but on civil rights and African revolutions, on war and peace, on new human relations

Unfortunatly, intellectuals seem unable to believe workers have thoughts of their own. Much less are the capable of listening to them.

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AMERICAN CIVILIZATION ON TRIAL CONTINUED.

This, of course, is not restricted to the United States. Until 1953, all one heard about totalitarian regimes, outside of the horror it is to live under them, concerned their invincibility and success in brain-washing the people, and particularly the workers. Suddenly, in one single day - June 17 The East German workers exploded against the work norms, raised the slogan of "Bread and Freedom". Thus they put an end to the myth of totalitarian invincibility and ability to brain-wash workers, but they opened an entirely new page in world history.

The very people who said it could never happen now began to play down what did happen. In contrast to those who were blind to the continuous daily revolts of workers against capitalism, private or state, our very analysis of how Russia, from a workers' state had been transformed into its opposite - a state capitalist society - led us to see the new form of workers' revolts, both as workers and as an oppressed nationality.

The very people who played down the East European Revolts, from the death of Stalin, in 1953, through the Hungarian Revolution, in 1956, also played down the Negro struggles from the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956, through the Freedom Rides, in 1961, to the struggles in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. We, on the other hand, do not divide the underlying philosophy from participation in all these struggles.

Above all, we hold fast to the one-worldedness and the new Humanist thinking of all oppressed from the East German worker to the West Virginia miner; from the Hungarian revolutionary to the Montgomery Bus Boycotter; as well as from the North Carolina Sit-Inner to the African Freedom Fighter. The elements of the new society submerged the world over by the might of capital, are emerging in all sorts of unexpected and unrelated places. What is missing is the unity of these movements from practice with the movement from theory into an overall philosophy that can form the foundation of a totally new social order.

Thus, in 1958, in "Marxism and Freedom": "The modern intellectuals will lose their sense of guilt and bondage when they will react to 'the compulsion of thought to proceed to these concrete truths' - the actions of the Negro school children in Little Rock, Arkansas, to break down segregation, the wildcats in Detroit for a different kind of labour than that under present-day automation, the struggles the world over for freedom. The alignment precisely with such struggles in the days of the abolitionists and of Marx is what gave these intellectuals that extra dimension as theoreticians and as human beings which enable them to become part of the new society. It will do so again.

"A new unity of theory and practice can evolve only when the movement from theory to practice meets the movement from practice to theory. The totality of the world crisis has a new form - fear at the 'beep-beep' from the new man-made moon. The American rush to 'catch up' with the Sputnik, like the Russian determination to be the first to launch the satellite, is not in the interest of 'pure science' but for the purpose

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Extracts from AMERICAN CIVILIZATION ON TRIAL (concluded)

of total war. Launching satellites into outer space cannot solve the problems of this earth. The challenge of our times is not to machines, but to men. Inter-continental missiles can destroy mankind, they cannot solve its human relations. The creation of a new society remains the human endeavour. The totality of the crisis demands, and will create, a total solution. It can be nothing short of a New Humanism.

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KEY REMARKS It is indisputable that, in Britain as a whole, the racial issue has received insufficient attention. The British working class movement has always looked upon racial discrimination with an easy-going abhorrence. Too often, the concern about the peoples of Asia and Africa has been of a patronising kind. The full significance of the Negro struggle in America has not been grasped here in Britain. We have yet to appreciate the fact that the struggles of the hitherto subject races are going a long way to change the world.

The oppression of the coloured people by the Smith regime in Rhodesia has been high-lighted by the vote in the House of Lords. The Tories have been exposed as under-the-skin imperialists. Their attitude is identical with that of Enoch Powell.

That brings us to the point made by Raya Dunayevskaya about our piece on "Powellism being inadequate. We should have been more outspoken in regard to the workers from a section of the London docks, and from one market, who demonstrated in support of Powell. Although, as yet, we see little of racial prejudice in Scotland, we should be alarmed when we hear of workers, under fascist influence, demonstrating in support of the racial utterances of Enoch Powell. In the June issue of the "Marxist-Humanist we attached great importance to the situation in France. We had Leslie Forster writing about the Scottish National Party following their victories in the Scottish municipal elections. We dealt with other topics - perhaps too many. It is undoubtedly true that we should have paid more attention to the question of "Powellism."

From the Scottish Marxist-Humanist Group
