

Black and Red

Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom

Spartacist League (U.S.)

1966-09-04

Forward (WV No. 1084, 26 February 2016)

Expressing our understanding that the struggle of black people for their freedom is a motive force for socialist revolution in the United States, the First National Conference of the Spartacist League adopted the document reprinted below. Held almost 50 years ago, in September 1966, the conference approved two documents—the “Declaration of Principles of the Spartacist League” as well as “Black and Red” in draft form—as our founding documents. After a process of further amendment, the final version of “Black and Red” was published in 1967. While it should be read critically, in its essentials it has stood the test of time.

The document grew out of the experience of our founding cadres in struggle—not least, political struggle inside the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The SWP had been for decades the organization upholding the revolutionary program of Trotskyism in this country. But by the early 1960s it had abandoned the struggle to build a proletarian party to lead a fight for socialist revolution, preferring to tail non-working-class forces. Having become uncritical followers of Fidel Castro in Cuba, the SWP abandoned the fight for Marxist leadership in the black struggle, the domestic reflection of the same abdication. The 1963 SWP convention codified the wholesale embrace of black nationalist ideology, accompanied by a policy of abstention from the Southern civil rights struggle. In the name of black “self-determination,” the SWP’s *Militant* soon became an unpaid public relations organ for all manner of black “leaders,” from Martin Luther King Jr. to the anti-Jewish Elijah Muhammad and “cultural nationalists,” who blamed the oppression of black people on everyone but the ruling class.

Our political forebears, the Revolutionary Tendency (RT), opposed this opportunist course inside the SWP until their expulsions, which began in 1963. The RT argued that the party had to intervene in the South, participating in organizations of militant youth, taking part in the arguments over strategy and program. An emerging left wing was disenchanted with the leadership of the preachers, opening up a crucial opportunity for the crystallization of a black Trotskyist cadre. This opportunity was squandered, deliberately, by the SWP.

When “Black and Red” was written in 1966, our comrades—not only veterans of the RT struggle but also comrades recruited out of the New Left—had gained considerable experience in civil rights organizations and protests. We had organized pickets in solidarity with youth integrating Southern lunch counters, as well as rent strikes, rallies protesting police brutality, united-front defense campaigns for arrested militants, etc. These experiences informed the document in addressing the debates animating black activists, including importantly non-violence as a principle vs. the right of organized self-defense.

In the SWP, our founding comrades had been won to the viewpoint developed in the 1950s by veteran Trotskyist Richard S. Fraser. Comrade Fraser’s program of *revolutionary integrationism*—the fight for the liberation of black people in an egalitarian socialist society—was based on scrupulous study of the black struggle throughout this country’s history. From the time of slavery, black people have been an integral part of American society. Now long after slavery was abolished in blood and fire by the Civil War, black people in their mass remain forcibly segregated at the bottom of society. Historically, black people’s struggles have been directed at winning equality in America rather than aspiring to separation. Recognizing the revolutionary challenge posed by the black struggle, comrade Fraser argued that the SWP had to make special efforts to recruit black working people, including by forming transitional organizations, a concept that goes back to the revolutionary Communist International.

The 1960s were shaped not only by the mass civil rights protests but also by the growing protests against the imperialist Vietnam War, which was escalated by both Democratic and Republican administrations in Washington. The ghetto upheavals were elemental explosions against cop terror that also expressed massive anger at intractable poverty and devastation in the inner cities. At the same time, many youth being drawn into struggle were inspired more by Malcolm X, sharing his enthusiasm for anti-colonial revolutions abroad and admiring his savage indictment of Democratic Party politicians, than by King’s program of reliance on the federal government.

The demands we put forward in “Black and Red” center on a fight for political independence of the workers and oppressed from the capitalist government. They hammer on the need to overcome the division between the organized working class and the black struggle. A labor leadership that does not actively combat racial oppression is toothless in the face of the bosses’ divide-and-rule schemes, which hold down the wages and conditions of all workers. The union misleaders of the 1960s, mostly open reactionaries, were a big reason black (and other) radicals of the time saw no future in a fight for proletarian revolution. But a movement based on marginal social layers and not linked to the power of labor proved to be tragically vulnerable to the state’s campaign of violence and murder targeting those J. Edgar Hoover labeled “black revolutionaries.”

The SL at the time of our founding conference numbered only a few dozen members. We were confident in the appeal of our program, but within a few years the black separatist mood the document discusses had hardened to the

point of sealing off our integrated organization from all but the most exceptional individuals. In time, the ruling class was able to re-establish social peace through a combination of means: cop terror and state repression aimed at beheading black organizations like the Panthers and funding for government poverty programs. The latter mostly lasted only as long as a threat to the stability of the capitalist order was perceived, while creating a layer of petty administrators directly dependent on the government. Black nationalist ideology was unable to generate a program for struggle. Hence the “black power” slogan would translate into the emergence of a layer of black mayors and other Democratic Party politicians, as we anticipated (a course also followed later by many Panthers).

Today, there is much less class and social struggle than at the time we wrote “Black and Red.” The unions have continually lost members in the face of relentless attacks; real wages and working conditions have declined; industry has increasingly fled from traditional industrial centers to the South and overseas; multi-tier contracts have become the norm. The present wave of liberal activism against cops killing black people underscores how little life has changed for most of black America. As a result of the civil rights movement, the legal and political structure of the South was brought into alignment with the bourgeois-democratic norms prevailing in the rest of the country. But by every measure—from income and family assets to education and life expectancy to police violence and incarceration—black people remain profoundly oppressed in capitalist society. The fight to win black workers and youth to the program of revolutionary Marxism remains at the center of our perspective today.

Introduction

The struggle of the Negro people for freedom and equality has been the most dynamic struggle going on in the United States in the past ten years. It has taken place in the context of, and has been conditioned by, the general passivity of the organized labor movement. The militancy of the Negro people and the tempo of their struggle increased enormously in the fifties and early sixties, but the achievements have been minimal—limited entirely to token advancement of democratic rights. In fact, the fundamental conditions of life for the vast majority of Black people, particularly in the key areas of employment, wages, housing and education, have *worsened*. The Civil Rights movement, geared to the aspirations of the small Negro middle class, though professing to speak for all Negroes, has been stopped dead in its tracks in dealing with these fundamental needs, and in fact has functioned partly as a brake on the unorganized and leaderless pressures from below. In the absence of an alternative, revolutionary, leadership these pressures and frustrations explode from time to time in undirected, non-political outbursts that change nothing. Thus in the midst of dissipating militancy, disillusionment in struggle and seemingly vain aspirations among the black masses, the movement is at an impasse. A crisis of

leadership is the essence of this impasse.

Economic Prospects

At present U.S. capitalism is attempting to maintain and increase its profits by placing the cost of the Viet Nam war on the working class.

The prolonged and extensive expansion of the productive capacity of the U.S. following upon the Second World War was conditioned by the massive destruction engendered by the imperialist slaughter, and by the world-wide demand for goods which resulted. The period of rapid capitalist development since the war has been marked by periodic mild recessions and interspersed by long periods of boom. Recently the curve of world capitalist development has begun to point downward. The rise in inventories, the drop in investments in capital goods production, and in industrial production, indicate that a world-wide economic downturn is at hand.

While economic indicators pointed to a downturn in 1966, the boom was prolonged another year by the political decision to escalate the aggressive war against Viet Nam. A decision by the U.S. ruling class for another massive escalation could again serve to postpone the downturn.

The upsurge of militant strike action testifies to the growing refusal of workers to submit to further erosion of their living standards by the inflationary pressures generated by the war on a booming economy, and to their readiness to fight for real gains. Black workers, bearing an even greater disproportionate share of the burden of the war, would be the most militant and ready for greater struggle.

On the other hand, if the war is ended or even continued at the present level of war spending, the economic downturn would prevail. While the black workers would be hit hardest by the ensuing unemployment, lay-offs would also rapidly accelerate among white workers. Again, this poses the perspective of a unity in struggle of black and white workers, and a leap in the level of consciousness of basic sectors of the working class.

Black Workers and Imperialism

Thus the struggle for Negro freedom takes place not only within the national arena, but within an international context. U.S. capitalism, which doubly exploits black workers, is the cornerstone of world imperialism. The abandonment of a perspective which looks to the *working class* to lead the struggle for the liberation of mankind from oppression is the hallmark of all revisionism. The Pabloist concept that the epicenter of world revolution has shifted to the colonial countries, the Maoist concept that backward countries will encircle and conquer the industrial countries, and the black nationalist concept that the Negro people are essentially part of the movement of African nationalism and will be liberated by the industrially backward countries are all revisionist concepts.

The bankruptcy of revisionism has become apparent with the smashing of the so-called “Third World,” “Socialist” regimes and the tragic massacres of the masses in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The definitive victory of the world revolution will only be secured by a victory of the workers in the advanced capitalist countries. The U.S. working class now has “the most revolutionary of all revolutionary tasks,” the destruction of the bastion of world imperialism, the U.S. capitalist system. To the extent that the black workers, the most militant in the U.S. working class, become infused with a revolutionary socialist perspective, and thereby become able to provide leadership to the class as a whole, they play a vital role in the success of the world revolution.

Integration or Separation?

From their arrival in this country, the Negro people have been *an integral part* of American class society while at the same time *forcibly segregated* at the bottom of this society. As chattel slaves they were the labor force on which the Southern planter aristocracy maintained its economic and political dominance until the Civil War. Various factors—the variety of African origins, the deliberate dispersal of slaves with common tribal backgrounds, the fact that most slaves brought from Africa were male—facilitated the total destruction of African languages, social institutions and cultural memories among the slaves and allowed the imposition of a new language and new habits to fit the needs of the economic system into which they were being integrated. In particular, an eclectic Christianity was early instilled to teach the slave to meekly accept his position.

Escape from slavery, not return to Africa, was the goal of Negro efforts toward freedom during the pre-Civil War period. In the Civil War itself, when the political needs of the vigorous and growing capitalist class in the North came into fundamental conflict with the continued political dominance of the Southern planters, freed slaves played an important part in the victory of the progressive forces and destruction of the slave system.

Capitalist and slave alike stood to gain from the suppression of the planter aristocracy but beyond that had no further common interests. In fact, it was the Negroes themselves who, within the protective framework provided by the Reconstruction Acts and the military dictatorship of the occupying Union army, carried through the social revolution and destruction of the old planter class. However, the Compromise of 1877 and the formation of a powerful new bloc of Northern industrial capital and subordinate Southern Bourbons allowed the majority of ex-slaves to be forced back onto the land as tenant farmers or share-croppers.

Southern Populism

Nevertheless, nearly a quarter of the ex-slaves were able to acquire their own small farms. The white small farmers, who had also been “freed” by the destruction of the slave system, were driven in some cases to join hands with their black counterparts in the defense of their common interests against the new plantation masters. Yet this tentative union—the Southern Populist Movement—was doomed to failure. The small-farmer class itself could not be a real contender for political power in a capitalist society, while the dynamics of private farming inevitably brought about sharp competition among the farmers. This competition was exploited by the new political alliance of big planters, Southern capitalists and certain Northern financial interests, in particular, investors in Southern railroads, land, mining and timber. This bloc initiated a campaign of violent race hatred among their political opponents which succeeded in destroying the developing black-white unity. In the context of the new racism the Black people were disenfranchised, stripped of all legal rights, and permanently denied access to adequate education. Those setbacks were codified into a series of laws institutionalizing the rigid segregation which has been the dominant feature of the South ever since. It was the racism launched during this period which has since kept wages in the South at approximately half those of the rest of the country (and the wages of Negroes at half those of whites in the country as a whole), prevented effective union organization and perpetuated a crushing poverty on the land for black and white alike, though today the Southern economy has come entirely under the control of Northern capital.

By the First World War 90 per cent of all Negroes still lived in the South, though by this time nearly one million had made their way from the land into hundreds of Southern towns. Then, with the great expansion of demand for unskilled labor unleashed by the War, a vast migration of black workers into the North took place, and for the first time a sizeable portion of Black people became integrated into the mainstream of American capitalist society. This integration did not last. With the 1921 recession the new workers found themselves forced out of their jobs. This, along with the extremely harsh conditions of Northern ghetto life—instead of the “Promised Land” which many had expected—caused thousands in despair and frustration to turn to the “Garvey Movement” built on the thesis that the Negro would never receive justice in the white man’s land and calling for a separatist solution. This first important mass movement with nationalist aims folded later in the ’20’s due to internal contradictions, the imprisonment of its leader and the recovery in Negro employment in the boom years following the post-war depression. Far more significant during this decade in terms of American social reality was the successful organization of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

During the ’30’s once again black workers were forced out of the economy in large numbers—but this time not alone. Radical ideologies and the gains of mass struggle made a deep impact among workers of both races. The organization of the CIO—the culmination of the upsurge in labor struggle—was a joint venture

and bound large numbers of the less skilled and unprotected black workers to the most advanced section of the proletariat. Yet the betrayals of the Communist Party during the war years helped wipe out Negro gains and served to discredit **all** radical movements, even though a significant number of Negro workers came into the Socialist Workers Party at this time. The subordination of the CIO to the bourgeois Democratic Party and Cold War ideology, its affiliation with the conservative AFL and its failure in the context of unexampled prosperity and labor passivity to come to the defense of the Negro freedom struggle have caused black militants to lose confidence in the organized labor movement or in the perspective of common struggle in the future. The SWP's failure to take a clear position on integration *vs.* separation contributed to its loss of hundreds of black workers and of the opportunity to forge a significant black Trotskyist cadre.

But the objective basis for future common struggle of black and white **workers** not only exists but, unlike the Populist Movement of black and white farmers, holds the promise of success, while struggle along nationalist lines is a delusion and an impossibility. The vast majority of Black people—both North and South—are today workers who, along with the rest of the American working class, must sell their labor power in order to secure the necessities of life to those who buy labor power in order to make profit. The buyers of labor power, the capitalists, are a small minority whose rule is maintained only by keeping the majority who labor for them divided and misled. The fundamental division created deliberately along racial lines has kept the Negro workers, who entered American capitalism at the bottom, still at the bottom. Ultimately their road to freedom lies only through struggle with the rest of the working class to abolish capitalism and establish in its place an egalitarian, socialist society.

Yet the struggle of the Black people of this country for freedom, while part of the struggle of the working class as a whole, is more than that struggle. The Negro people are an oppressed race-color caste, in the main comprising the most exploited layer of the American working class. Because of the generations of exceptional oppression, degradation and humiliation, Black people as a group have special needs and problems necessitating additional and special forms of struggle. It is this part of the struggle which has begun today, and from which the most active and militant sections of Black people will gain a deep education and experience in the lessons of struggle. Because of their position as both the most oppressed and also the most conscious and experienced section, revolutionary black workers are slated to play an exceptional role in the coming American revolution.

“Pseudo-Nationalism”

Black nationalism accepts present American class society and working-class divisions as unchanging and unchangeable, and from this static vantage point separation is seen as the only solution. Yet this solution is unrealizable in terms of the realities of American class society. True nationalism is, in essence, the

struggle to establish an independent area for the development of a *separate political economy*. Historically it has come at those times and in those places, usually within a common geographical area among those with a common language and cultural heritage, when an emerging capitalist class must free itself from the shackles of a decayed feudal economy or from external imperialism in order to develop freely, i.e., in order to exploit its “own” working class. But there is practically no black capitalist class in America. Instead, the so-called “Black Bourgeoisie” consists in reality of a small, weak, petty-bourgeoisie catering to service needs arising out of segregation, and of white collar workers—which latter are rapidly achieving a remarkable degree of integration into the white middle class, and thus have an identity of interests and outlook far removed from those of the majority of working-class Negroes.

The present mood among black ghetto youth, “nationalism,” could more correctly be termed “pseudo-nationalism” since the conditions fostering genuine nationalist sentiment do not exist. This mood arises from growing racial self-confidence and pride—a positive development as it is a precondition for real combativeness—coupled with bitterness at the failure of the struggle to gain significant results without support from the rest of the working class. It develops in the context of a generally correct criticism of the middle-class-oriented Civil Rights leadership while an alternate, proletarian leadership has not yet been created. The dominant feature of this pseudo-nationalism, like all variants of black nationalism, is its inability to generate a program of struggle—a further proof of its spurious nature. Such “nationalism” is divisive and interferes with the development of class consciousness and a program to sharpen class struggle.

Thus the Negro struggle in America is more directly related to the class struggle than any essentially national question could be. The falling rate of profit makes it impossible for the ruling class, even during a spurt of unequalled prosperity, to meet the demands of this super-exploited layer for improvements in the basic conditions of their lives. Hence *any* steps forward in this struggle immediately pose the class question and the need for class struggle in its sharpest form.

Broad Tasks

Transitional Organization

The necessity for mass organizations of strata of working people with special needs and problems was recognized by the Leninist Comintern [Communist International], which worked out the tactics of the relationship of such transitional organizations to the revolutionary party and to the class struggle as a whole. These organizations are a *part* of the revolutionary movement, and their struggles advance the overall class struggle. They are neither *substitutes for* nor *opponents of* the vanguard party of the entire class, but are *linked to* the vanguard party through their most conscious cadres. Examples of transitional organizations are militant women’s organizations, revolutionary youth leagues,

and radical trade-union caucuses. Such a transitional organization is necessary for Negro workers at a time when large sections of the working class are saturated with race hatred.

With its program of transitional struggle around the felt needs of a section of the class, the organization mobilizes serious struggle by the largest possible number. Such an organization, while not itself “socialist,” leads those participating in its struggles to the realization that a fundamental overturn of the existing society is necessary.

In the Northern ghettos a great organizational vacuum exists. The objective basis of the traditional middle-class organizations such as CORE and the NAACP is growing ever narrower as more and more of the Negro middle class is able to flee the ghetto. (For example, over the past decade, 40,000 employed Negroes moved from Harlem into other, more “desirable” parts of the city or suburbs, where their incomes were sufficient to break some of the barriers of segregation. The Harlem CORE chapter recently has had only a few active members who actually reside in Harlem!) As the objective basis of these groups narrows, they grow subjectively ever less related to the needs and interests of the black masses. This is reflected in the move towards an increasingly consistent position by the middle-class groups that since the basic problems are economic, government intervention—secured by pressures on or within the Democratic Party—must be the primary aim of the Civil Rights movement. In 1964-65 this took the guise of “Liberal Coalition” politics as expounded most articulately by Bayard Rustin, and the delivery of the black vote to Johnson. This year’s guise are the more militant-sounding slogans of “Black Power” and “independent political action” as interpreted by certain Northern Civil Rights leaders to mean black judges, black cops and black Democrats or, as regards “independent” political action, to mean a black voting bloc which will supposedly “swing” its vote to whichever capitalist party promises the most to Negroes. The ultimate meaning of the latter is to build support for Bobby Kennedy’s projected presidential candidacy. As the old Civil Rights movement becomes more and more subordinated to the political arm of the very forces responsible for the oppression of the Negro people, it will serve increasingly to function *solely* as a brake on real struggle and a diversion from revolutionary alternatives.

Oppose Federal Infiltration

Furthermore, these reformist organizations have already become so exposed in their ineffectiveness, even in gaining token reforms, that the government has found it necessary to create its own reformist organizations in order that *some* alternative to proletarian organization and program will exist. The millions of dollars poured into HARYOU-ACT have succeeded in confusing or buying off a large number of potential youth leaders in Harlem through a combination of money and pseudo-radical nationalistic rhetoric. The so-called “anti-poverty” projects have also served to foster a certain amount of illusions among the ghetto masses. The witchhunt in Mobilization for Youth when some idealistic young

people tried to use it as a vehicle for support to rent strikes, school boycotts and community actions against police brutality shows clearly the outcome of attempting to use government fronts as instruments of real struggle.

The vast black ghettos of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit and numerous other cities are wide open for the formation of a proletarian mass organization of struggle. Only the smallness of the black revolutionary cadre, together with the temporary aftermath of police terror during the “riots,” and in some cases sectarianism, have kept such organizations small. The Spartacist League will do all in its power to encourage and aid such organizations, and favors the unity in action of all working-class-oriented organizations in the ghetto.

Ghetto Defense

For the last three summers ghettos across the country have been rocked by elemental, spontaneous, non-political upheavals against the prevailing property relations and against the forces of the state which protect these relations. In no case have they been genuine race riots. The risings have usually been provoked by the police, in the course of “normal” brutalities (Watts 1965) or in an effort to crush a movement which is exceeding the bounds set for it by bourgeois society (Harlem 1964). As the struggle against the police expands, the black street-fighters turn on the merchants and shopkeepers, the visible representatives of the oppressive class society, and smash whatever cannot be carried off. Yet despite the vast energies expended and the casualties suffered, these outbreaks have changed nothing. This is a reflection of the urgent need for organizations of real struggle, which can organize and direct these energies toward conscious political objectives. It is the duty of a revolutionary organization to intervene where possible to give these outbursts political direction.

The Northern ghettos will be organized only by revolutionary ghetto organizations. The beginning of such organization is possible now, while the form remains open. One form is the building of block and neighborhood councils based on tenants councils. Experience has shown that tenants councils must be introduced to the *whole* transitional program and tied to as broad an organizational base as possible if they are to achieve stability. Block and neighborhood councils of this sort would be able to speak for a whole area, put forward their demands, and call out the people in militant actions to back up those demands.

One of the most important functions of such representative popular organs would be the organization and direction of effective self-defense against police and racist violence. The potential for rapid growth by the American fascist movement adds to the seriousness of this task, given the sharp contradictions confronting U.S. capitalism in the next period. Ghetto action might take the form of block patrols of neighborhood men, preferably union members with past military training. The need for the immediate formation of such patrols is shown by the indiscriminate beatings and killings by police during the suppression of ghetto “riots.”

Such terror will be unleashed whenever the black people approach a breakthrough in changing the fundamental condition of their lives. Block patrols would also help prevent the day-to-day acts of terror against individual ghetto residents by racist cops and would serve to control the crime victimizing ghetto residents which the capitalist cops ignore or participate in. Such neighborhood patrols will become a part of that workers militia which will defend the future American proletarian revolution.

Independent Political Action

The struggle for black freedom demands the total break of the Negro people from the Democratic Party, the preferred political weapon of the forces which profit from the suppression and super-exploitation of the Negro people. The only alternative is a new party based on the needs of the poor and working people. The formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in the South, initially with a mass base, indicated the potential and feeling which exist for independent political action. However, the MFDP, as its name indicated, was not independent but was simply a means whereby certain Southern and Northern civil rights leaders hoped to pursue their ambitions within the national Democratic Party at the expense of the interests of the Negro people. This situation has since been recognized by the most militant sections of the Southern movement, and the party has now lost its mass support.

The formation of the Black Panther Party in Lowndes County, Alabama, was a step forward inasmuch as it was consciously organized *in opposition to* the Democratic Party. Based on the sharecroppers and farmers of a single rural blackbelt county, its program is by these very factors limited to reforms realizable within the system such as improved schools and roads, development of farmer cooperatives, and purchase of land for dispossessed sharecroppers. In order to go beyond these albeit needed reforms and pose a real challenge to the Southern system and the basic structure of society, the idea of independent political action must be extended to the cities and developed among workers. The perspective of the Black Panther Party for a federation of county-wide parties must be replaced by a perspective for a South-wide Freedom Labor Party.

Only by the development of a working-class program and by explicitly opening the door to support by white workers can real political independence be maintained, real gains won and the basis laid for eventual working-class political unity. This unity will come about when the exploited section of the white South is driven into opposition and is compelled to forego color prejudice in order to struggle along class lines against its real enemies—the owners of land and industry.

The creation of a South-wide Freedom Labor Party would serve as a tremendous impetus for similar action by Northern workers. The struggle for such a party would necessitate a rank-and-file revolt within the organized labor movement to overthrow the present labor bureaucracy. In the absence of a labor party, the Spartacist League supports all independent candidates whose programs are

based on the needs of the ghettos.

Negroes as Workers

In this period when primary attention has been focused on the ghetto, the importance of Negro militants within the organized labor movement must not be overlooked; black unionists form an immediate, existing, organizational link with the white section of the working class. Militant Negro and other super-exploited minority workers together with their labor partisans must organize within and without the existing unions in order to fight for their urgent needs. Union bureaucrats, with their public lip service to the Civil Rights movement, will be hard put to suppress “Civil Rights” caucuses within their unions or condemn Labor Civil Rights Committees as “dual unions.” Yet under conditions in which struggle reaches revolutionary heights, such committees would be precursors to factory committees. Should dual power be posed, these in turn would be vital elements in workers councils and, in victory, of workers power.

In addition to anti-discrimination demands, the “CR” caucuses should raise the following demands:

1. ***Organization of the Unorganized.*** At the same time this demand is raised, the black worker militants should themselves begin this organization.
2. ***Organization by the Unions of the Unemployed.*** Again, this demand should be accompanied by the actual organization of unemployed workers by the black worker militants. The aim is to create links between the ghetto and the labor movement and to counteract the lumpenization process proceeding apace in the ghettos among the unemployed. Welfare recipients should be organized around a program calling for full employment and their organizations should be associated with welfare worker unions.
3. ***For a Sliding Scale of Wages Controlled by Labor.*** All workers are being hit hard by inflation caused by the war in Viet Nam. The bourgeoisie’s attempts to freeze wages to save profits must be countered by the demand that wages be scaled according to the purchasing power of the dollar, with the power of the sliding scale in the hands of workers’ committees, not bourgeois agencies.
4. ***Fight for the Shorter Work Week.*** The rate of Negro unemployment is twice that of white workers, and the gap is increasing. Yet white workers also face the threat of unemployment due to automation. The struggle for *more* jobs for *all*, rather than competition between black and white workers for a few jobs here or there, can unite workers. At the same time, the demand for a shorter work week poses racial equality in union hiring without making the white worker fear for his job.
5. ***Oppose Government Intervention.*** At all times we oppose using the Government to “integrate” unions, and rely solely on the working class

for this task. Such ruling-class tactics as decertification of discriminatory unions are intended to destroy union independence, foster division among union members and worsen the position of all workers.

For Negroes the fight for full employment at decent wages is not just the key to better housing, schools, etc., but a fundamental and necessary defense. If Black people are forced out of any economic role and become lumpenized as a group they will be in a position to be used as a scapegoat and could be totally wiped out during a future social crisis—just as the Jews in Germany were—without affecting the economy. The fight must be fought *now* to maintain Negroes as part of the working class.

The struggle for this program within the labor unions will entail a simultaneous fight for full union democracy and ultimately a struggle for leadership against the present labor lieutenants of capital. The most essential feature of this struggle will be the break of the labor movement from all its present ties to the capitalist state.

The South

The Southern economy is today controlled entirely by Northern capital and is an *integral* and *essential* part of American capitalism. The contradictions of capitalism culminating in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall necessitate the maintenance of this vast area of low wage, non-unionized labor as a source of superprofits, and prohibit either any fundamental improvement in living standards for Southern workers whatever their color or any real change in the Southern political system of terror against Negroes. The problem of the South is more than merely one problem among many in the capitalist system. U.S. capitalism can oftentimes remove some problems through reforms in the system, always of course at the expense of exacerbating problems elsewhere. ***But the Southern system lies at the very heart of American capitalism; its essentials cannot be removed without destroying capitalism itself.*** Yet capitalism in the course of its own development has now created in the South a Negro proletariat larger than the rural Negro population and brought together black and white workers in the social process of production. Thereby the objective basis is laid by capitalism itself for a future revolutionary struggle against the inhuman Southern system.

Because only a direct anti-capitalist struggle can eradicate the Southern system, any struggle short of that must soon either turn against capitalism or else fall into a swamp of hopeless reformism and soul searching. Perhaps the most critical problem of the Southern Negro struggle has been its lack of revolutionary theory. Much energy and much blood have been sacrificed, but the gains have been few. The struggle has gone slowly as the movement has painstakingly groped its way along, hammering out by trial-and-error a program and method of struggle which is still in flux.

Without any theoretical weapons, the movement first struck out blindly but boldly at the most immediate signs of oppression—segregation in public transportation, eating places, educational institutions, etc. The basic demand was equality *within the system*, while the method of struggle was dominated by non-violence. This struggle reached its height in the early 1960's with the sit-ins, Freedom rides, Old Miss confrontation [desegregation of the University of Mississippi], etc. A good deal of publicity was achieved, but the system was basically untouched. As if to indicate the reformist nature of the demands, the bourgeoisie adopted the entire Civil Rights program and called it the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

But the civil rights movement was beginning to learn several important lessons. It was learning that one cannot merely make demands—one must have *political* power. *What kind* of political power was still to be learned. The emphasis was on registration of Negroes for the vote. Once again, though, the bourgeoisie adopted this basically reformist demand, this time calling it the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

But the bourgeoisie in the era of imperialism is so decadent, so dependent upon reactionaries, that it can no longer extend even simple bourgeois democratic rights. At this point, then, the Southern civil rights movement was pushed outside the traditional two party system by the bourgeoisie itself. At the 1964 Democratic Party Convention where the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party tried to enter the regular Democratic Party, the bourgeoisie rejected this chance to absorb the Southern leadership and so pushed the leadership into its more militant phase.

Rise of the Black Power Movement

The Negro movement in the South has been confronted with two roads: reform vs. revolution, liberalism vs. communism. In recent years, through trial-and-error, the movement has seen the bankruptcy of traditional liberalism. The well-hated “white liberal” who dominated the earlier movement insisted on confining the movement within the system, for a real social overturn would threaten his class position. This attitude was held not only by the white liberals, but also by the petty-bourgeois Negro leaders like Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King.

The most militant section of the civil rights movement has sensed the inadequacy of traditional reformism, and its suspicions were empirically confirmed by the experience of the MFDP. This healthy though empirical reaction has its center in SNCC and the “black power” movement.

The adherents of “black power” are usually the most militant elements who have adopted the term partly because of its militant sound and partly because of its repugnance to white liberals. Thus the “black power” movement contains a number of radical points and methods which have caused the bourgeois press to shower vicious abuse on it. Some “black power” advocates profess to reject middle-class values and desire to serve “human” values; they generally favor independent political action such as the Black Panther Party in Lowndes County;

they see the connection between the Negro struggle at home and anti-imperialist struggles abroad, as in SNCC's recent statement on Viet Nam; and they discuss the use of armed self-defense against racist terror. In short, the "black power" movement is raising questions whose answers lie *outside* the framework set up by the capitalist class.

However, as yet the movement has not become consciously anti-capitalist. It has rejected what it knows as liberalism but is unsure of how to go further. Lacking a conscious orientation towards the working class, and constantly surrounded by bourgeois propaganda, the movement may yet fall prey to bourgeois politicians with radical phrases or else become hopelessly isolated and demoralized.

Another facet of the "black power" movement is the proposition that black militants should organize Black people and forget about whites for now, since most whites are racist, and that it's a white man's job to organize whites. But the achievement of Negro liberation *depends* on the radicalization of white workers, and every class-conscious white worker means a new ally for the Negro struggle. The lessons that black militants have gained through bitter struggle can best be transmitted to white workers by these militants making clear that their aim is to build an integrated anti-capitalist movement, North and South. This means that the slogan "black power" must be clearly defined in *class*, not racial terms, for otherwise the "black power" movement may become the black wing of the Democratic Party in the South. The possibility of this is indicated by Stokely Carmichael's endorsement of the so-called "National Conference for New Politics," a Social-Democratic front group which is leaning towards Robert Kennedy for "peace" candidate for President in 1968.

At this stage of the Southern struggle where the most militant elements are groping for new solutions to the problems reformism is demonstrably not able to overcome, the Spartacist League, as the only professed revolutionary organization with any sort of base in the South, is in a unique position to intervene in the movement to advance the development of consciously anti-capitalist struggle.

Advancing the Southern Struggle

In addition to the programmatic points discussed earlier under "Broad Tasks," additional demands are pertinent to the Southern struggle.

1. ***For a Southern Organizing Drive Backed by Organized Labor.*** Organized labor is being hurt as many companies move South to tap the vast source of cheap, unorganized Southern labor. Black workers meanwhile suffer from low wages and little job security due to lack of unions. A labor-backed Southern organizing drive would thus help both black and white workers. The demand for a Southern drive is complementary to the demand for a Freedom Labor Party, and, if achieved, would lay the material basis for such a party by creating an organized Southern base.
2. ***Armed Self-Defense.*** While this slogan is also applicable in the North,

the demand has a more immediate urgency in the South and is already being acted upon. The Deacons for Defense and Justice is a tremendous step forward for the Negro struggle, not only because it saves lives, but because it raises the level of consciousness of the civil rights movement by discouraging reliance upon the institutions of the bourgeois state. However, the Deacons exhibit a curious duality: highly militant, paramilitary tactics are used to protect the struggle; however, their political perspectives are characterized by comparatively mild, anti-discrimination politics. This contradictory character will eventually result in a crisis which will reveal the urgent need for revolutionary theory and program along with self-defense if the social liberation of the Black people is to be achieved. The demand for organized self-defense must be counterposed to Federal intervention which preserves Southern “law and order” and the racial status quo.

3. ***For a Workers United Front Against Federal Intervention.*** As the bourgeoisie loses *political* control of the working class, it must rely more and more on direct Government controls, sometimes thinly disguised as “arbitration panels,” “wage guideposts,” etc. In the recent Machinists’ strike a naked anti-strike bill was almost passed. In 1963 Federal troops were deployed to prevent a threatened uprising by black workers in Birmingham during a campaign of racist bombings. All workers have a vital interest in opposing Federal intervention.

Black Workers and the Revolutionary Party

There is one state power in this country, and its destruction will be accomplished only by a united working class under the leadership of a single revolutionary vanguard party. The SWP’s [Socialist Workers Party] concept of the continued division of the working class along color lines with two separate vanguards which would coordinate their activities in a revolutionary period would be like having two command centers during a war, issuing separate orders and disorganization and confusion in the face of the wealthiest and most powerful ruling class in history. The struggle against this concept of a federated vanguard is similar to the struggle carried on by Lenin at the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party against the Jewish Bund’s demand for autonomy within the party and for their sole right to work among Jewish workers. Trotsky argued that to grant such autonomy to one group would in effect be granting autonomy to any particular section of the working class, i.e., would be the institution of a federated party and the destruction of a centralized organization, in addition to an explicit challenge to an internationalist outlook. As it is the goal of socialism to sweep away national and racial barriers, a socialist organization struggles to overcome such barriers. Furthermore, the perpetuation of a “dual vanguard” concept within the United States would actually prevent the struggle from reaching a revolutionary level. Only *common* struggle for *common* aims can unite the working class and overcome the lifelong racial prejudices of American

workers.

Our immediate goal is to develop a black Trotskyist cadre. We aim not only to recruit Negro members—a short-cut to the working class in this period—but to develop these black workers into Trotskyist cadres who will carry a leadership role in organizing the black masses, within the League itself, and elsewhere. As Trotsky said:

“We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class... If it happens that we...are not able to find the road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie.”

In recruiting and holding a Negro cadre there are several problems:

1. ***Color hostility.*** Only the demonstrated determination of the Spartacist League to carry through its revolutionary tasks will convince black militants to join and remain in our ranks. To avoid disappointment and demoralization, we must make clear to our black recruits that only the patient construction and theoretical preparation of a revolutionary vanguard party will produce significant results.
2. ***Class and educational differences.*** At present a predominant number of recruits to any radical organization are from the middle class. In addition whites in the U.S. as a whole have access to more and better formal education than Negroes. These factors, to the extent that they are reflected in our organization, may create a certain social gulf between black and white members. This gulf will only be overcome through conscious, common struggle, and the education of all our members in Marxist theory and practice.
3. ***Daily oppression and the problems of life.*** The struggle for livelihood and the immediate problems of daily life create additional pressures on our black members which draw them away from full participation in the revolutionary movement. Our black comrades should be aided in gaining job skills that will make the immediate day-to-day problems of living less pressing and free them for revolutionary activity and concentration.
4. ***Over-Activism.*** Because the Negro struggle has been the most active struggle in the country, our Negro members have been intensely active party members. The demands of the mass organizations in which they participate tend to occupy so much time that little is left for the study of Marxist theory and the lessons of past class struggle. Unless there is a balance between these two forms of activity our goal of creating a black Trotskyist cadre to intervene in the mass struggle and lift it to a higher consciousness of its anti-capitalist goals will not be realized. The Spartacist League is confident that it will be able to overcome these problems and create an integrated revolutionary vanguard capable of reaching and eventually

uniting in struggle the entire class.

Final Victory

The victory of the socialist revolution in this country will be achieved through the united struggle of black and white workers under the leadership of the revolutionary vanguard party. In the course of this struggle unbreakable bonds will be forged between the two sections of the working class. The success of the struggle will place the Negro people in a position to insure at last the end of slavery, racism and super-exploitation.

—General line unanimously adopted and Editorial Commission appointed by Founding Conference, 4 September 1966.

—Report of Negro Commission on revisions accepted by Political Bureau, 27 March 1967.