

## Inside the United States—2

# Apartheid Colonialism in America

## Siginqi kaNelani

THE TERM FREEDOM, as all Marxists know, is a class term whose meaning can be understood only within the framework of a complexity of productive relations. 'Freedom' is thus a class question. In approaching the question of Negro Liberation in the United States this should not be lost sight of. Being a class question freedom means different things for different classes—in point of fact in capitalist society freedom for one class (the capitalists) implies bondage for all other classes.

### **AMERICA'S BLACK COLONY**

It is one of the oldest superstitions of the American scene that the Negro community is one non-differentiated mass—the myth of the abstract collective 'native' U.S. style. It will be part of our duty in this paper to destroy this myth. All the major class divisions found in the United States are found in the Negro community. These are briefly: bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, small farmers and working class.

### **THE BLACK BOURGEOISIE**

This is a very small group numbering about five thousand families (as against over 408 thousand among whites). They are variously occupied in banking, financing and as large entrepreneurs. The smaller bourgeoisie numbering around thirty-four thousand families (2,601 thousand among whites) are variously engaged in manufacturing, transport, service industry such as catering, etc. The Negro bourgeois class is confined to the ghetto as a general rule. (In certain cities such as New York they have managed to break out and may be found in areas such as Queens and certain parts of Long Island.) It is the poorest sector of the U.S. capitalist class both because it came on to the scene late and because of discriminatory practices that stunted its growth. As a class they are dependent on the ghetto both as a market for their products and as a source of labour.

### **THE PETTY BOURGEOISIE**

A much larger class than the bourgeois class proper. Its numbers run well into hundreds of thousands. The largest single occupation group in the class are teachers followed by small shopkeepers, preachers and

artists. There is also a miscellaneous group of skilled technicians, social workers etc. Like the bourgeois class they are ghetto-confined. Negro doctors treat Negro patients, Negro teachers teach Negro students and of course Negro preachers have all black parishes.

Because of their confinement to the ghetto, both the bourgeois class and the petty bourgeoisie have to live off the crumbs left over after the dominant white controlled capitalist establishment has despoiled the Negro masses. This makes them dependent upon the white establishment but on the other hand is also the basic cause of conflict between the two groups. They are dependent upon the white establishment first for the privilege to be exploiters in a field which the white capitalists could easily monopolise and furthermore are dependent upon it for the defence of their economic power by the capitalist state. On the other hand there is a constant fear on the part of the black bourgeois class, a fear of being displaced by white capital. We shall discuss this more fully below. However, in spite of their conflicts with white capital, the Black bourgeois class shares common class interests with the white establishment, i.e. the exploitation of labour.

### **THE NEGRO MASSES**

Seventy per cent of the Negro population is working class—including proletarians (workers who produce surplus value), general wage earners and tenant farmers and sharecroppers. This is the most exploited section of the American working class, suffering the lowest paid jobs, the least security and the highest rate of unemployment. (*At present twice as high as whites.*) In spite of all the laws and constitutional guarantees the old adage 'last hired and first fired' still applies to Negroes. Few of us ever examine the meaning of the adage in reality. It means that the Negro working class serves as a buffer between the stability and collapse of U.S. capitalism. This we shall discuss at length in subsequent paragraphs. Both in industry and agriculture we can note the displacement of Negro labour. In the South, which has for years been dependent on cheap black labour the trend has been most vicious. Negro tenants and sharecroppers have been displaced by machinery and are reduced to seasonal workers or migrants. Since 1957 the demand for agricultural labour in the South dropped by 48 per cent. Many people displaced by this have moved to the cities.

### **THE NEGRO LIBERATION MOVEMENT**

Nationalism among the Negro people first appeared in religion. This took the form of the appearance of Negro separatist churches such as the A.M.E. This was primarily an effort on the part of Negroes to assert themselves and break away from white controlled churches in which



they were forced into an inferior status. The Muslims were the most extreme expression of this and carried it as far as the rejection of Christianity itself as a white man's religion. Harlem abounds with other examples of such rejection of white control and Christianity. There has been a Negro Jewish community in that ghetto since the turn of the century. It identifies strongly with Ethiopian Jews and many of its leading members have Falasha names.

There are two major currents in the Negro liberation movement. One for complete intergration into the fabric of American life and the opposite tendency for separation and Negro independence. There are other less important tendencies in between these which we shall touch on.

### **THE SEPARATIST NATIONALISTS**

Separatism has been a major force in Negro politics since the Garvey movement swept the country in the twenties. On the whole it is fragmented, and was until the rise of the Muslims a small insignificant tendency centred in the northern ghettos, especially Harlem. In Harlem alone there are at present some twenty odd Nationalist-separatist factions ranging from outright back-to-Africa to protagonists of a southern Black state south of the Mason-Dixon line. Their failure was the result of the utopian dreams of a return to Africa and the futile rivalry that divides them. It was not until Elijah Muhamad's Black Muslim movement appeared that a viable Separatist movement became conceivable.

The meteoric rise of the Muslims from a small cult in Chicago to a national movement was indicative of two major features of the post-Korean War period. First, the cause of Negro nationalism in general—the profound alienation of the Negro from the mainstream of American life, secondly the mounting antagonism between the white establishment and the ghetto-bound Negro bourgeoisie. For as Lightfoot so aptly put it:

the bourgeoisie in an oppressed nation teaches nationalism in order to create a condition where it can have complete control over its own national market. (*Political Affairs*, July 1962.)

The Muslim movement was heralded by numerous nationalistic tendencies in the ghetto capitalists. The fear of displacement produced the 'buy black' movements in the north. The Negro capitalists were, through these, demanding the sole right to exploit Negro labour. Besides this the Negro teacher, doctor, insurance company etc. plagued by poor training in segregated schools, the lack of capital and more powerful white competitors all had a stake in the maintenance of a separate Negro community. If the Negro would just buy black, bank

black etc. this would keep 'whitey' out. Freedom from 'whitey' in their case meant freedom from 'whitey' to exploit Negroes. The ghetto had thus long been prepared for a dynamic leadership to move in. The Muslims drew all the threads of Black separatism together into one movement, the religious and the political. Their programme at the height of their influence was for an independent black state with complete independence from the U.S. except for an indemnity to the tune of five billion dollars for the unrequited labour of the Negroes during slavery.

The Muslims have since declined in influence. This can be accounted for in two ways. First, the extreme chauvinism of the Muslims, while a strong emotional appeal, was no substitute for a programme of action. The Muslim platform was unrealistic enough but they projected no means even to achieve it. There is still a millennialist ring in all the preachings and writings of the Muslims. Negroes have had too many sharp historical lessons to be taken in by such mysticism. Secondly, the internal structure of the movement itself hampered rather than fostered growth. The splits and rivalries that now abound in it and the loss of that most dynamic spokesman Malcolm X have taken their toll.

Other nationalist-separatist groups are more political. The Garveyist group is now not very effective and its activity is confined to circulation of books and occasional street corner meetings. The separatist groups can in general be criticized in the same terms as the Muslims.

### **THE INTEGRATIONIST MOVEMENT**

In this category we may include the N.A.A.C.P., C.O.R.E., S.C.L.C. and the Urban League. The leadership of these groups is, almost to a man, drawn from the black bourgeoisie. This has coloured the N.A.A.C.P. and the Urban League with a conservatism that matches that of their white counterparts. In response to the restrictions of Jim Crow, which stunt the full blossoming of the black capitalist class, a strong current for lebensraum in the green pastures of the imperialist heartland has long been in existence. Recognizing their dependence upon the white establishment on the one hand, and the enormous wealth of the U.S. on the other, the elements that lead these groups demand slices of the pie instead of the crumbs they have had to subsist on to date. As a weapon to win these demands they use the Negro masses. They demand the plums of state office, the right to compete with whites in their own fields etc. (While it is true that many whites hold posts in Negro colleges, predominantly Negro hospitals and institutions; very few Negroes hold posts in predominantly white institutions.) The ideology of this group is also interesting to note—it differs from that of the



white establishment only in that it rejects Jim Crow. A national nihilism characterizes most of their attitudes. This denial of the Negro as a national group in fact is grist for the mills of white chauvinism and racialism and is in large degree accounted for by the 'would-be-white' values of the black bourgeoisie.

Within C.O.R.E. and S.C.L.C. we can note healthy tendencies toward a reappraisal of Negro nationalism and a reorientation towards issues affecting the ghetto directly. This is a progressive step forward from the tactics based mainly on courtroom actions that have been the practice of the N.A.A.C.P., and the Urban League. Both groups, however, are seeking for solutions within the ambit of U.S. monopoly capitalism. They see Negro freedom strictly in bourgeois terms.

Unlike the Separatist-Nationalists the integrationist leaders do organize and mobilize masses for action. This is a virtue that should not be minimized—this is an area in which the Negro masses can achieve some changes. There is a common meeting ground for all-class unity among Negroes—the common oppression of Jim Crow. This community of suffering should, however, not be over-emphasized to cloud genuine class antagonisms among Negroes. While there are advantages to be had by the black bourgeoisie in the system of segregation, there are none at all for the Negro working class.

### **INTEGRATION v. NATIONALISM**

While it may be said that the relationship between the dominant white American establishment and the Negro is a colonial one, we have to recognize that this is not a 'pure' colonialism. In point of fact there are no 'pure' phenomena in general and no 'pure' social movements in particular. The colonialism of the U.S. has been conditioned and determined by the actual socio-economic realities of this country. There are three basically colonial features in the Negro condition: the super-exploitation of Negroes as a national group, the relegation of Negro culture, history to second class status if not total denial, and the imposition of the values and standards of the dominant group upon the oppressed group. Because of this the response to Jim Crow is at times typical of a colonial situation.

The gap between black nationalism and integration when seen in the light of the colonial features of Negro oppression is not merely a tactical one. The difference springs from a conception of American society and the Negro people within that society. To the national nihilist leaders the term integration implies assimilation and a general dispersal of the Negro within the general U.S. society. The implied inequality in the term 'assimilation' does not strike them. The nationalist by his insistence upon equality and integration by choice (which also implies



separation by choice) goes to the root of the problem—that Jim Crow has in fact sought to destroy the Negro personality (for lack of a better term). One nationalist expressed this mood well by declaring ‘Brother (James) Farmer, we’ve gotta dig being black’. This alone causes the nationalist to seek beyond the facade and rhetoric of liberal America for a solution to the problem.

### **RADICAL NATIONALISM AND ‘NEW LEFTISM’**

As in all colonial movements the Negro liberation movement has its radical wing. This consists of the nationalist groups (N.B. differentiate from separatist-nationalist) among whom can be counted R.A.M., the Organization of Afro-American Unity, the Advanced Leadership conference and various literary groups such as Black Arts. Besides the nationalist groups there are the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee and smaller student groups which constitute what has become known as the ‘new left’. (It is neither new nor very left.) Judging from the membership of these groups, they have drawn in the most creative and visionary sections of American youth. The youth who march on the picket line, are jailed and beaten are the ones who will be tomorrow’s writers, musicians and painters. These are the youth who question and are seeking a re-evaluation of the values of their society. They see the necessity for a thorough going social revolution to put an end to the system of cant and hypocrisy that the U.S. is today. The ‘new leftist’ and the nationalist both see the root of Negro servitude as economic exploitation and hence direct their efforts at this. To this end S.N.C.C. organized a Summer project in the South in order to create trade unions where there were none, set up popular political parties to challenge the farce of a Democratic Tweedledum and a Republican Tweedledee. Other groups have set about organizing the poor, the unemployed and unemployable youth.

However, the ‘new left’ and the nationalist suffer from a bad case of petty-bourgeois revolutionism. The membership of both groups are either students or recent college graduates. There are few or no workers involved in either group. The ultra-left antics and romantic ‘cult of the sharecropper’ are manifestations of this. These will, however, disappear with contact between themselves and Marxist-Leninists. The most healthy attitude at present would be to work together and to be open-minded and non-sectarian.

### **WHERE FROM JIM CROW ?**

The system of discrimination and segregation against Negro Americans is imbedded in the very fabric of U.S. capitalism. It has been and is the policy of every major corporation in America. Jim Crow is the creation of big business. (Gus Hall, *Negro Liberation*, 1964.)



The Negro has been the greatest victim of capitalist despoliation in America. Brought originally as a chattel slave to America for the purpose of capital accumulation in both north and south, he has since been dogged and hounded by exploitation. From the slave trade massive fortunes were accumulated in both Liverpool and the New England states. From the unremitted labour of the slaves 'king cotton' created the southern latifundi. The aberration of slavery was no accident. It grew out of the economic necessities of the early United States. The Civil War was merely intended to extend the laws and operation of the free market to the south without basically changing the productive relations. This was formalized in the infamous 1876 agreement in terms of which the south was to be allowed to go along its merry path while the north looked on. This was to continue only on condition that the south played ball according to northern rules, i.e. no return to slavery and one union of American states. Through discriminatory legislation and peonage of sharecropping the Negro in the south has been kept in a position of super-exploitation. In the northern cities he is reduced to the most menial and lowest paying jobs. Hence for black America a mere recession is a depression. All crises of American imperialism are met by using the black colony to absorb them.

With the contraction of the imperialist world the counterfeit note of bourgeois 'liberty and justice for all' is bouncing. American monopoly capitalism has no place for the Negro American—except 'in his place'.

### **THE ROLE OF MARXISTS IN THE NEGRO LIBERATION MOVEMENT**

Marxists have always played an important role in the Negro movement though this role will at times be denied or ignored. From the earliest days American radicals and revolutionaries have taken a keen interest in the cause of Negro freedom, both before and after the Civil War. We can name amongst these men like the abolitionist Garrison in the pre-Civil War days, and numerous labour militants such as William Z. Foster who was a founding member of the Communist Party U.S.A.

However, it would be ridiculous to suggest that American Marxists have a common programme for Negro freedom. Indeed many differences exist among them on both questions of tactics and strategy. We shall deal with the major Marxist tendencies in this paper and have for convenience divided these into Communist, Trotskyist and the neo-Marxian school typified by the journal *Studies on the Left*. We shall discuss them in reverse order.

It was not till the October Revolution and the rich experience of that revolution and the Bolshevik Party had become part of the ideo-



logical arsenal the international working class movement, that the American left gained any sort of revolutionary perspective on the Negro question. In pre-October days the general line of the American left was one that ignored the national aspects of the Negro question, treating it in very general terms as merely one of the products of capitalist exploitation. It was the work of Lenin and Stalin on the national and colonial question that showed the way to the American left on this matter.

### **THE NEO-MARXISTS**

This is a rather loose and as yet unorganized tendency on the left but has to date played a major role both as analysts and as participants in the Negro movement. We chose *Studies on the Left* as the best example of this tendency mainly because it is the most vocal representative of the tendency.

The neo-Marxists are by far the least consistent on any major question: Vacillating between ultra-leftism and downright liberalism (always disguised in left sounding rhetoric of course). The general analysis does, however, recognize the economic sources of racialism in the U.S. The problem is about programme. Here we have a hodge-podge ranging from such concepts as a Nationalism to the idealistic romanticism of 'participatory democracy'. (Another example of American gimmickery this. The term embraces a multitude of ideas. Basically it springs from the notion that the American system has reduced democracy to an empty meaningless term because it effectively denies the citizen any participation in shaping the decisions of the day. 'Participatory democracy' is the great panacea that will cure all this by bringing people back into politics. Typical of this group is an over-emphasis of the import of the revolutionary potential of the Negro working class. In fact many of them have abandoned the working class in general as reactionary and conservative. When not saying this they go as far as to deny its very existence using as evidence the apologist sociology of the prostitute academics.)

Due to his semi-dependent status the American Negro is *the only* potentially revolutionary force in the U.S. today. . . . If the white working class is ever to move in the direction of demanding structural changes in society, it will be the Negro who will furnish the initial force. (Harold Cruse, 'Revolutionary Nationalism', *Studies on the Left*, Vol. 2, No. 3.)

Like the 'new left', with which it identifies strongly, the neo-Marxist tendency is petty-bourgeois in composition and ideology. They see the Negro people as a monolithic classless mass whose members are all concerned with revolution and socialism. Coupled with this is the



typical petty bourgeois condescension that fears the people are always going to be betrayed by false leaders.

As could be expected, they share with many of their class a fear for the discipline of a party. One of the leading members of this tendency and incidentally one of the editors of *Studies* has created a whole mythology charging Leninist organizational concepts with guilt for every reverse the American left has suffered. (James Weinstein, *Monthly Review*, May 1963.) The neo-Marxists have no perspective for the Negro liberation movement other than local projects aimed at the unemployed, the poor and the disinherited. Not that there is anything wrong with this *per se* but to substitute this for the organization of a proletarian party is anything but Marxism. Having rejected the notion of a vanguard party (indeed *Studies* feels that this—a Marxist party—is not feasible or advisable in the American context) the neo-Marxist has to resort to spontaneity in areas of struggle.

### **THE TROTSKYISTS: 'PRINCIPLED OPPORTUNISM'**

The Trotskyist tendency is represented by a million of little factions. In fairness to them we shall confine our remarks to the Socialist Workers' Party which is the single largest group. Like the neo-Marxists they over-emphasize the potential of the Negro people:

What I am talking about is the capacity of the Negro people to lead the working class revolution to replace capitalism with socialism. (George Breitman, *International Socialist Review*, Spring 1964.)

and have in effect adopted a policy of bowing to spontaneity on the Negro question. This is evidenced by the lack of programme on the Negro question and their shift in the space of two years from support of the Black Muslims in 1963, support of the idea of a Freedom Now Party in the latter part of the same year and finally uncritical support of Malcolm X after his break with the Muslims. As is usual they disdain the other tendencies within the Negro liberation movement while they have no programme of action themselves.

Perhaps the gravest error of the American Trotskyists is the parallel they draw between the Bolshevik Party in 1917 and the position of the Negro people in the United States.

To grasp this idea we must rid our minds of the conception that any social revolution in general or any working class revolution in particular has to be led by a majority. I will try to illustrate this by going back to the first victorious workers' revolution, the Russian revolution of 1917. It was victorious because it had the support of a majority of the Russian people. . . . It was a revolution supported by the majority, and it could not have succeeded without that majority support, but it was led by a party that represented a class that was a minority of the country. (George Breitman, *op cit.*, I.S.R., Spring 1964.)



This parallel loses sight of two important aspects of the Negro movement. First that it is not a homogeneous movement and does not represent a homogeneous group. There are as many class differences in the Negro population as there are in any other national group in the country. As such the Negro people cannot play the hegemonic role the Russian proletariat was able to play in the Revolution of 1917. Secondly, that the question of social revolution within the Negro liberation movement will not arise fully developed, like Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus, but has to be developed out of the struggles of the Negro people and above all, Marxists need a programme to achieve this intermediate goal first. The first need to be fulfilled is therefore an abandonment of sectarian criticism from the sidelines and active engagement in the struggles themselves.

### **THE COMMUNIST PARTY**

The role of the Communists in the struggle for Negro liberation is an old and glorious one, a role that Communists the world over can take fraternal pride in. However, because of the semi-legal status that the U.S. Communist Party has been forced into by the McCarran Act and other totalitarian laws, this role is not publicly known. The C.P. was the pioneer in developing a revolutionary perspective on the Negro question. This took the form of an abandonment of the Social Democratic rhetoric which had characterized even the most revolutionary pre-1917 groups and an examination of the particularities that made the Negro question unique. Many may today sneer at the position the Party adopted on Negro self-determination as having been infantile and dogmatic. Nonetheless this was a major shift from previous positions and laid the basis for subsequent analyses and a recognition of the national characteristics of the fight for Negro equality. The role the Communists played in the struggle is recognized by even the most conservative elements in the Negro community.

At mass meetings in Harlem, on the street corners of Chicago, San Francisco, Detroit and other urban centres all over the nation, spell-binders like Ford, Moore and Patterson loomed into prominence under the flying banners of the Negro Congress and the International Workers Alliance. (*Afro-American*, June 29th, 1957.)

When the history of the American working class movement is finally written the names of men like Ben Davis, Henry Winston and Perry will feature prominently for the role they played both as working class leaders and leaders of their people.

The C.P. revised its programme on the Negro question in 1954. As it now stands it is the most lucid and practical programme, for the times. We shall attempt to render its main thrust. The position of the C.P.



is informed by the recognition of the uniformity with which Jim Crow affects Negroes of all classes. Because of this the Negro liberation movement has an all-class character. This does cloud the basic class antagonisms that exist in the Negro community, but for the current struggle for equality such a tactical unity is imperative. Secondly it is informed by the context in which the movement exists—i.e. the imperialist United States. Objectively regarded the Negro liberation movement is therefore part of the proletarian revolutionary struggle.

While it is necessary to stress the maximum tactical unity of the Negro people against Jim Crow, the Party understands that such unity must ultimately be under the hegemony of the proletariat. To this end it is the duty of Marxists, Communists in particular, to strive for unity within the Negro movement and at the same time to hasten the day when the objective reality will become subjectively true—that is the recognition on the part of the Negro liberation movement of its role in the struggle for socialism. The most important aspect of this is the struggle for unity with the labour movement. Unlike the neo-Marxian school, the Party does not consider the working class to be a disappearing class. In fact all indications are that it is a growing class. Unity between labour and the Negro people is therefore not only necessary but essential for the final goal—a Socialist America.

The Afro-American people have a fine tradition of struggle for freedom. From the very first shipload of slaves that arrived on the American shores to the present, they have fought ceaselessly for freedom and equality. This is evidenced in their folklore, their music and their daily lives. We Africans can take pride in this struggle and have to give it all the aid we can. With courage and determination and the revolutionary solidarity of all freedom loving peoples we can look forward to that great day when true freedom and equality shall be the order from Maine to California.

We shall overcome.