

Toward a Communist Analysis of Black Oppression and Black Liberation

Part III: Strategy

by Linda Burnham and Bob Wing

The Dialectics of the Struggle for Black Liberation

A. Introduction

We have now presented the basic theoretical framework for a historical materialist understanding of Black oppression. We have analyzed the internal laws of racial oppression and the white vs. Black contradiction that pervades U.S. life. We have analyzed Black oppression as a historical development, demonstrating the intersection of racism and capital accumulation as an indissoluble thread that runs through U.S. history and is a central feature of the whole U.S. social formation.

With this theoretical foundation we can now turn to the ultimate purpose of our investigation: The struggle for Black liberation.

What are the strategic political implications of this analysis for the struggle against racism? And what is the significance of the struggle against racism for the proletarian revolution?

Linda Burnham and Bob Wing are members of the *Line of March* Editorial Board and the Racism/National Question Study Project, a nationwide grouping of trend comrades engaged in theoretical work on the oppression of minority peoples in the U.S. The present article grew out of the Project's work over the past year and a half. Michael Downing, Phil Gardiner, Phil Hutchings, and Trinity Ordoña—all members of the Project—helped in the preparation of it.

*Throughout, the formulations "Black liberation struggle" and the "struggle against racism" are used interchangeably because the liberation of Black people as *Black* people precisely requires smashing the oppression particular to their

Central to our analysis is the particular nature of the Black liberation struggle. The distinction between the struggle against racism and the struggle for the proletarian revolution is especially important, yet the two are often merged together. Inevitably these two questions *are* connected, since the elimination of racism requires in the final analysis, the destruction of capitalism, which can only be accomplished through proletarian revolution. At the same time, proletarian revolution in the U.S. is inconceivable without the struggle against racism being a central feature of it since the U.S. proletariat cannot become a revolutionary class unless it becomes thoroughly and consistently anti-racist. Nonetheless, the two questions are distinct and collapsing them together distorts and belittles both.

And yet the communist movement's penchant for liquidating the struggle against racism into the struggle for the proletarian revolution is notorious, usually accompanied by sterile and rhetorical calls for "working class unity." But such pragmatic theoretical shortcuts have accomplished nothing for either struggle except to add to the already prevailing confusion! Unless the specific phenomena of U.S. racism and the struggle against it are analyzed in their own right, particularity will continue to be sacrificed, the struggle against racism trivialized, its full scope and complexity obscured, and the path toward qualitative advances in the U.S. proletarian revolution blocked.

The thrust of our analysis is to avoid this common pitfall; to grasp the complex particularity of the anti-racist struggle in its own right without in the slightest losing sight of the fact that the proletarian revolution is and must be the starting and end point of our analysis of racism. Consequently, we will attempt to focus on the particular laws of motion of the anti-racist struggle. Inevitably such a focus must take up a discussion of the struggle against capital in general. But our vantage point in doing so will be the anti-racist struggle itself. In other words, how is the goal of the anti-racist struggle—the elimination of racism—affected by the proletariat's struggle against capital? (The only exception to this will be a brief comment at the end of this section on the proletarian revolution in its own right and the importance of the anti-racist struggle to it.) We take this approach because only when the distinct logic and laws of motion of the anti-racist struggle are firmly grasped can its relationship to the

condition—*racism*. But the struggle against racism also has a somewhat broader meaning, as ending the racial oppression of other racially oppressed minorities in addition to Black people. This article does not delve into the particularities of the other racial or historical questions in the U.S., nor does it discuss the interconnections of these different questions with the Black question. We realize that at a concrete level it is untenable to overlook the particularities of each group. But for purposes of this article we must ask the reader to read "and other minorities" each time the term "Black" is used in this strategy.

proletarian revolution be precisely illuminated and correctly guided to realize the goals of both.

B. The Particularity of the Struggle Against Racism

The struggle against racism poses an apparent paradox, a seemingly unresolvable tangle of racial struggle and class struggle.

While a daily conflict between the two racial groups actually rages on a thousand different fronts, much of the communist movement has nevertheless been officially oblivious to racial conflict. Some communists deny its existence altogether. Others ascribe it solely to "false consciousness" and direct their efforts to imploring whites, clearly to little avail, to abandon their prejudices.

To the extent that the contradiction is acknowledged, many hold that the struggle between racial groups and the struggle between classes are fundamentally irreconcilable, usually concluding that the attention of the communists must be directed to the "real class struggle," rather than to the objective contradiction between the white and Black racial groups. But since this is precisely the contradiction that constitutes the specific nature of racism, the development of an anti-racist strategy conforming to the actual laws of motion of the Black liberation struggle requires that it be addressed squarely and scientifically. Rather than ignoring the objective conflict between the white and Black racial groups, we must bring dialectical materialism to bear on it precisely in order to grasp and untangle its intersection with the class struggle. Only on this basis can we elaborate an anti-racist strategy that takes into account the complexities of both the anti-racist struggle and the class struggle.

1. The Antagonistic Conflict Between the Racial Groups

Since the objective interest of the white racial group is in the maintenance of racism, and the objective interest of the Black racial group is for an end to racism, the struggle between the white and Black racial groups is antagonistic in nature. Once again, let us emphasize that we are speaking here not of individuals but of racial groups whose very existence as operative social categories has meaning only as the embodiment of the opposite poles of an unequal social relationship between white supremacy and black oppression.

This can only be grasped when we understand that racism is not prejudice or backward ideology. It is a system into which every individual in the U.S. is organized from birth by a definite social process over which they exercise no control. Racism is a social relation that forcibly and systematically deprives Blacks of political, economic, social and cultural opportunities. To the extent that these opportunities are denied Blacks, they are claimed as the "birthright" of whites. (Although the claim by many working class whites on this "birthright" is often frustrated, the illusions it breeds operate as a material force to reproduce

racism. At the same time, this frustration frequently fuels some of the most virulent racism.)

Consequently, white privilege and Black oppression are inextricably connected. So powerful is this social relation that the whole of U.S. society is divided into hostile racial camps, with diametrically opposed racial interests.

The final and complete elimination of Black oppression must entail the resolution of this antagonistic contradiction between the white and Black racial groups. However, this is precisely where the intersection with the broader class struggle becomes inextricably linked and absolutely integral to accomplishing the strategic goals of the Black liberation struggle.

2. Racial Interest and Class Interest

As we have shown, racism is a capitalist form of oppression, the essence of which is the creation of a racially oppressed section of the labor force that can be, and has been, forced to fulfill various crucial historical functions for capital. In fact, racial oppression in the U.S. has been a major force shaping the form, scope and pace of capital accumulation. It has also been key to the establishment and maintenance of bourgeois political rule, serving as the material basis for the forging of a politically powerful "white united front" under the leadership of the U.S. bourgeoisie. Consequently, the capitalist class has an all-sided, abiding interest in the perpetuation of racism.

On the other hand, racism serves only to deepen the exploitation and subjugation of the working class by capital and to divide, disorient, and thereby weaken its ability to resist, let alone destroy, capital. Consequently, the class interest of the whole U.S. proletariat is objectively anti-racist. This is the contradiction that holds the key to the ultimate destruction of the system of racial oppression.

The pervasiveness of the race relation in U.S. society is demonstrated by the fact that all individuals, independently of their will in the matter, belong to some particular racial group. At the same time, all individuals, again independently of their will, belong to a particular class. In regard to racism, therefore, all individuals have both a class interest and a racial interest which may coincide or conflict. The question that then poses itself—and this is a crucial point for the development of any political strategy—is when these interests clash, which will prevail? Here is where consciousness and correct political line become a material force in history.

Concretely, the white *racial* interest runs directly contrary to the *class* interests of the majority of whites, since they are part of the working class.

In fact, only for white capitalists (and, by and large, for the white petit bourgeoisie as well) does white racial interest and class interest completely coincide.

By contrast, the class and racial interests of the vast majority of Blacks, 90% of whom are part of the working class, coincide fully. In addition, the class and racial interests of the Black petit bourgeoisie coincide insofar as they are engaged in a continual rearguard struggle to keep from being driven back into the proletariat or discriminated against within the petit bourgeoisie, but vacillation typical of the petit bourgeoisie sets in as the question of proletarian revolution comes onto the agenda. Only a handful of Black capitalists have racial and class interests that completely conflict.

The inverse, mirror-image relationship of racial and class interests internal to the white and Black racial groups offers a useful insight into the process of determining scientifically the forces objectively available for the struggle against racism and what it will take to prepare the varied forces for battle.

C. Strategy for Black Liberation

1. The Strategic Goal and Assessment of Forces

Having recapped the highlights of our analysis of racism, we turn now to the question of strategy. The first question in formulating a strategy for Black liberation is: What is the ultimate goal of the struggle against Black oppression? Or put another way: What does Black liberation consist of? All other questions of strategy are ultimately conditioned by the answer to this fundamental question.

The logic of the analysis we have advanced is that Black oppression can be eliminated only by smashing the system of racial oppression and its white vs. Black polarization. The ultimate goal of Black liberation, therefore, can only be the elimination of that system in which certain human physical features are fetishized into "races" and used to determine the life destinies of people along the color line. Racial groups must be abolished, not simply as an idea, but as an operative social relation. Of course, physical (and cultural) differences between people will continue to exist. But the social relation by which these differences are hardened into racially defined social groups and used to structure a system of unequal social, political, and economic life opportunities must be destroyed. In the course of abolishing the system of white supremacy, the racial categories (i.e. fetishized racial groups) codifying and reproducing that system will wither away for lack of a material basis in social practice. In this sense, the dialectics of the anti-racist struggle bear some resemblance to the dialectics of the anti-capitalist struggle: just as the latter ultimately requires the abolition of classes, the former must eventually bring about the abolition of racial groups.

The revolutionary solution to Black oppression, therefore, is not racial separation (or what some choose to call national liberation). This strategy is based on the view that racism is inherent in humankind. Based

on this, it proposes a shortsighted and doomed attempt to escape the system of racial oppression, not to eliminate it. In this sense, such efforts are analogous to early utopian socialist attempts to set up workers' communes separate from the capitalist system rather than trying to overthrow such a powerful enemy.

Neither is the revolutionary solution to Black oppression the winning of "racial equality." This demand is central to the day-to-day struggle against racism but is fundamentally flawed as a revolutionary solution. It is premised on the view that racial groups are a permanent feature of human society. Based on this, it proposes to create a more "equitable" racial system, rather than abolish the inherently unequal racial system altogether. It is, therefore, a reformist program, not a revolutionary one.

How will the abolition of the system of racial oppression actually be brought about? What is the political strategy for overthrowing racism?

The centerpiece of this strategy is the break-up and elimination of the social group that stands at the oppressor pole of the white supremacy/Black oppression contradiction. Just as smashing the oppressor bourgeois class is the concrete revolutionary task in the destruction of capitalism, the elimination of the oppressor white racial group is the strategic task of the struggle to end racial oppression. The system of white supremacy can only be destroyed by eliminating the oppressor social group that is produced by it, benefits from it, and therefore "personifies" and promotes it. By breaking up the white racial group as a social category, then, the white interest and its dialectical opposite—Black oppression—will be ended as a material force in society.

What are the actual forces in U.S. society whose interests lie in defending white supremacy and the white racial group? Which forces will inevitably collide with the Black liberation struggle? Who are the concrete enemies of the anti-racist struggle?

On one level, the whole white racial group objectively stands in opposition to Black liberation and the struggle against racism. However, this is where the intersection with class becomes key. The white racial group is not homogeneous. It is rife with antagonistic class contradictions. Over the long run, it is inherently unstable although it may be quite formidable in an immediate sense.

In other words, since the majority of white people are part of the working class, their objective *class* interests are opposed to the perpetuation of the white *racial* interest and the system of white supremacy. They therefore have the objective potential, if they act on their class interest, to oppose the white racial interest. In fact, only the white bourgeoisie has the economic and political muscle to cement and perpetuate the system of racial oppression. In that sense, the white bourgeoisie constitutes the most basic enemy of the Black liberation struggle.

Politically speaking, much of the left would agree with this conclusion. The enemy of Black liberation is (white) capital. But this is precisely the

point at which the left historically has most often made a mechanical reduction, obscuring the particularity of racism and thereby liquidating the struggle against it.

Simply because the line declaring that "all whites are the enemy" is incorrect, it does not follow that the enemy can be simply reduced to the white bourgeoisie. The problem—and no amount of wishful thinking will make it disappear—is that the *class* interests of the bourgeoisie coincide with the *racial* interests of the entire white racial group. So although not all whites share an equal basis for the perpetuation of racism, there is an objective material basis upon which the bourgeoisie can forge a "white united front" across class lines of all who are prepared to defend their white interests.

Historically such a white united front has in fact been forged with a deadly degree of success and durability. Much of the actual politics of the class struggle in the U.S. today cannot be explained without taking into account the functioning of this white consensus across class lines. *It is this white united front—not all white people but also not just the white capitalists—that constitutes the enemy of the Black liberation movement and the anti-racist struggle.**

Of course, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the white bourgeoisie constitutes the core of this front. Without that core, the front could not sustain and reproduce an all embracing system of racial oppression generation after generation. Nevertheless, the white supremacy/Black oppression dialectic is a *racial* contradiction and cannot be mechanically reduced to class terms.

The strategic political task therefore of the Black liberation struggle is to thoroughly break up and eliminate the white united front. This strategy must entail the recognition that only the elimination of the political and economic power of the white capitalists can bring about the qualitative demise of the system of white supremacy, including the white united front which defends and promotes it and the white racial group which is produced by and benefits from it. In this sense the Black liberation struggle is in its very nature thoroughly revolutionary and directly anti-capitalist.**

*Politically and ideologically there are bourgeois sections of the Black and other minority groups who ally themselves with the white united front (witness Reagan's Black "conservative" cheerleaders). This reactionary Black formation is composed almost exclusively of Black bourgeois and prominent petit bourgeois forces.

** This conclusion is drawn from an examination of the *particular* laws of motion of the struggle against Black oppression in the U.S.; it is not the starting point of such an analysis. The tendency to make it such reflects the pragmatism and theoretical laziness of our movement and is an example of substituting dogma for the concrete study of particular contradictions.

How can the white united front be broken up? Who are the forces that can be rallied? Who are the strategic anti-racist forces?

The working class sector of the Black racial group is the core of the anti-racist united front, the central force of the Black liberation struggle. Black workers have the most all-sided basis to grasp the revolutionary class and racial nature of the struggle against the white united front. They are also favorably placed both to expose the reactionary Black bourgeois forces who seek to tie the Black movement to the apron strings of the U.S. bourgeoisie, and to establish a powerful anti-racist pole within the working class.

The Black petit bourgeoisie plays a contradictory role. In an immediate sense they occupy an important and prominent position in the struggle against racism. However, to the extent the Black liberation struggle merges with the proletarian struggle for socialism, their role will inevitably recede. They are bound to vacillate on the recognition that Black liberation in the U.S. and proletarian revolution are inextricably tied together.

The working class sector of the white racial group is also marked by contradiction, yet it has a pivotal and strategic role in the anti-racist struggle. The Black masses, no matter how determined, have neither the political nor economic basis to qualitatively break up the white united front by sheer frontal assault on their own. (Hundreds of years of heroic struggle have illustrated this point time and again.) Consequently, it is key that class conscious elements of the white section of the working class decisively reject their racial interests in favor of their class interests; take up the Black liberation struggle to smash the system of white supremacy—not only in its blatant, fascist forms but also in its more subtle and sophisticated forms—as a struggle of their class.

Theoretical precision on this point is crucial. It does not follow that white workers, simply by dint of their objective class position, will constitute part of the anti-racist front. Rather, it is the thoroughly class conscious sector of white workers who can see beyond the ultimately petty benefits of racism to grasp that their own liberation as part of the U.S. working class is linked to the advancement of the Black liberation struggle. It is this section of working class whites who will play a pivotal and integral part in the anti-racist united front.

What makes their role *pivotal* is that these class conscious workers constitute the proletarian pole to counterbalance the powerful bourgeois pole within the white racial group. As such they work with other forces in the anti-racist united front to expose, break up, destabilize and neutralize the white united front. To the extent that such a class conscious, consistently anti-racist pole is consolidated among the white sector of the working class—in real life, not merely as a logical but nonetheless largely impotent theoretical extrapolation—it in turn becomes an *integral* part of the anti-racist united front, playing a role far more decisive in the long

term struggle for Black liberation than even non-working class Blacks. (The awesome task facing the communists, of course, is to lead in making this logically sound formulation into a concrete, historical reality.)

Therefore, the core of the Black liberation struggle consists of the militant and advanced section of the Black workers who have the most favorable class and racial basis to carry the struggle against racism through to the end. In addition, the truly class conscious (i.e. thoroughly and consistently anti-racist) sector of the white workers can (and indeed must eventually) constitute an integral part of the anti-racist united front. Together, these two elements will be the strategic forces in the struggle to eliminate racial oppression and white supremacy. They are the only forces objectively capable of breaking the back of the bourgeoisie which sustains the white united front and overthrowing capitalism which regenerates racism.*

The *vanguard* in this complex struggle requires a firm and scientific grasp of the fundamental class and power relations in U.S. society and their numerous intersections with the racial contradiction and polarization. Consequently, the vanguard cannot be racially defined without taking a costly detour into the realm of metaphysics. The vanguard in the strategic struggle for Black liberation can only be a genuine communist party guided by the science of Marxism-Leninism.

2. Reform and Revolution

How can the anti-racist front be built, trained, and mobilized into a force capable of completely overthrowing the system of racial oppression? What is the content of the day-to-day struggle against racism, short of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie?

The main thrust of the day-to-day struggle is the fight against all forms of racial discrimination. This requires targeting the white interest in all the different forms it takes, and demanding full political, economic, and social equality for Black (and other minority) people. These demands constitute the cutting edge of the reform struggle because they directly challenge and undermine the white united front and white privilege. As a battle against capitalist racial oppression and for consistent democracy, the fight against discrimination and for equality is fully in the interests of the working class as a class and runs counter to the interests of capital.

Inevitably, these concrete struggles bring the movement head-to-head with the white united front and polarize the struggle against the white

*Undoubtedly in the course of the struggle, *individual* Black capitalists and white petit bourgeois forces will make (and possibly sustain) substantial contributions to the struggle against racism. This is even more true of the many Black petit bourgeois who will stand fast in the struggle. Yet in attempting a *class analysis* of the forces available for the long term struggle against racial oppression in the U.S., it is inappropriate to speculate on the role of individuals.

interest within the society at large and within the working class in particular. It is precisely in the course of these immediate struggles that the white united front can begin to be broken up and the workers, Black and white alike, forged together around their class interests to oppose racism. However, as we have stressed before, such a process does not occur spontaneously. It requires conscious and persistent struggle.

In particular the intertwined influence of bourgeois individualism and racism among white workers poses a formidable ideological and political obstacle. "Me first, the devil take the hindmost" attitudes and ingrained notions about certain white "birthrights" can blind people to the full extent of the assault upon the Black and minority sections of their class and find them quite unwilling to take up the immediate struggles for equality of opportunity and conditions. Consequently, it is no exaggeration to say that racism constitutes one of the major opportunist currents within the U.S. working class.

Among Black workers, on the other hand, the struggle against opportunism requires a forthright challenge against the bourgeois tendency to reduce the political struggle for Black liberation to tokenism, "race pride" or "cultural nationalism" and other superficial demands. Black workers must hold all political forces accountable to their interests in the most consistent democracy, racial justice, social and economic issues such as unemployment and housing, opposition to the use of Black "cannon fodder" in imperialist wars—in short, the very questions which serve to bring to the fore the class question. In addition there is a substantial ideological battle to be waged to check the spread of petit bourgeois illusions that equate Black liberation with individual escape out of the working class, implicitly reducing the vast mass of Blacks to the role of cheerleaders for the "talented tenth." These are the main currents of opportunism within the Black racial group. All of these obstacles are thrown up and must be overcome in the course of day-to-day struggle against racism.

Can the immediate demands for equality be won in the course of this struggle? Yes, partially. But of greater significance in the long run is the fact that the struggle for equality is the concrete form in which the more basic dialectic of reform vs. revolution presents itself in the anti-racist struggle. For example, the struggle for equal political rights achieved its main immediate goals as a result of the powerful civil rights movement of the 1960s. And certain demands for equality in fact, or what some authors call "social rights" as opposed to "political rights,"¹ were also partially won, e.g. affirmative action. However, inequality is inherent in the nature of capital and racism themselves. Thus the struggle for equality as well as the struggle against discrimination inherently impel the anti-racist movement to confront the capitalist class directly, thus providing the context to expose vividly the link between U.S. capitalism and the system of racial oppression.

Concretely, then, the struggle against racial discrimination and for equality is the axis around which the day-to-day struggle against racism and the white united front turns. As such it is the lever to break up the white united front and forge multi-racial unity against racism led by the working class.* As this unity is forged and tested in the course of struggle,

*The demand for full economic, political, and social equality, that is, for an end to racial discrimination, is in many ways the most advanced expression of the spontaneous anti-racist movement. It is a far-reaching demand whose fulfillment ultimately requires nothing less than the overthrow of capitalism. For these reasons, it is a key day-to-day demand of the anti-racist struggle and the link between the reform and revolutionary struggle. Nonetheless, this demand in and of itself is not, as many groups on the left assert, the full expression of the long range goal of the anti-racist struggle.

In what ways is it limited? In the first place, this demand fails to target the root of the problem of racism. Inequality is only a *manifestation* of racism, one of its inherent phenomena, and not its essence. The demand for social and economic equality falls short of targeting the capitalist nature of racism and its fundamental role within capitalism. The struggle against racism is not a struggle to fully incorporate an oppressed people into U.S. society on the basis of equality, but a struggle of a racially oppressed section of labor against capital. Consequently it is not only a democratic struggle against inequality, it is more fundamentally an anti-capitalist struggle central to the emancipation of the U.S. proletariat. The demand for social, economic, and political equality is an extremely important demand, but it is inadequate when advanced as a strategy to eliminate racism.

Taken by itself this demand does not go beyond the limits of the reform struggle. It proposes a concerted struggle for a series of social and economic reforms that, added up, are supposed to constitute revolutionary change and the elimination of racism. In fact, the CPUSA advances the realization of this goal as a possibility under capitalism, arguing that an "anti-monopoly government" can fully implement it.

Even further, the demand for racial equality subtly conciliates the racist view that racial groups are somehow inherent in biology or genealogy, and that they therefore cannot be eliminated. Posing "racial equality" as the ultimate goal of the anti-racist struggle implies that racial groups will always exist and be in competition with one another. "Racial equality" then is the program for guaranteeing that this contention proceed fairly. Consequently, the demand seeks not to end racial antagonism but to ameliorate it, to lessen racial oppression rather than to eliminate it.

For these reasons, the demand for full racial equality must be treated with some care even as a reform demand. Insofar as it is advanced to challenge the white racial interest and its system of racial discrimination and inequality, it is the central demand of the day-to-day struggle against racism, helping to link that struggle to its ultimate goal of abolishing the racial system altogether. But insofar as it is posed as a "positive vision" of what a society with "healthy race relations" would look like, it constitutes a negative concession to racism and the white racial interest which will even have a detrimental effect on the reform struggle itself.

the working class will become ideologically and politically more capable of fulfilling its potential leading role in the struggle against racism and carrying it through to its logical conclusion of smashing the white bourgeoisie and seizing power. Clearly the qualitative break up of the white united front cannot be accomplished without smashing the power of the bourgeoisie. This is where the revolutionary interests of the oppressed Black racial group and the revolutionary interests of the working class ultimately and completely coincide. The overthrow of racism and the overthrow of capitalism are thus integrally tied together in the proletarian seizure of state power and the forging of the proletarian dictatorship.

3. The Struggle Against Racism Under Socialism

The overthrow of capitalism and the consequent fundamental altering of class relations qualitatively transforms all other social contradictions and the means by which they are handled and solved. This includes the contradiction of racism. However, by no means does the struggle against racism end with the seizure of power by the proletariat. Nor is it accurate that the only remaining struggle is against the remnants of racist ideology. The widespread tendency to liquidate the particularity of the struggle against racism in the struggle against capitalism has obscured what is involved in the struggle against racism under socialism.

Clearly the overthrow of capitalism and the bourgeoisie qualitatively undermines racial oppression. The expropriation of capitalist private property removes the principal driving force behind the production of a system of white supremacy that reduces Black people to a racially oppressed section of the laboring masses. And the overthrow of the white bourgeoisie means the destruction of the principal source of white supremacy as well as the main bulwark and organizer of the white united front. In short, the proletarian revolution destroys white supremacy as a *systematic* social relation embedded in the very political and economic foundations of the society. Most important, it represents the transfer of state power from a class for whom racial oppression was a matter of vital interest to a class whose interests are anathema to racism, a class, in fact, that is only able to seize power through the most ruthless struggle against racism and the white united front.

However, while the proletarian revolution cuts the core from white supremacy, it does not totally destroy it. Indeed, it would be thoroughly idealist not to recognize that the remnants of white supremacy under socialism are bound to be quite powerful. The reason for this is that the material basis of the system of racial oppression and the composition of the white racial group in whose interests it functions is not limited to capital or the white bourgeoisie. The racial contradiction is a contradiction between the Black and white racial groups and it functions to the racial benefit of all white people (though unequally along the class line).

Specifically, a material basis, however undercut, for white supremacy will still exist in the early stages of socialist society in at least two forms. First, the level of the productive forces will not for quite some time be developed to the point where the principle of "to each according to need" can become a reality. Until that is the case, socialism will be unable to completely transform all of the ancillary social relations by which society has been organized in the past. Competition within the working class will continue to exist as will a petit bourgeoisie. Political power will have to be used to handle the consequent social contradictions from a fully proletarian and anti-racist standpoint.

Secondly, very real material distinctions between whites and Blacks will be bequeathed to socialism by the system of white supremacy under capitalism. These distinctions are pervasive—occupation, education, pay, housing, training, skill, etc.—and inertia alone would tend to reproduce them.

However, there should be no illusions about the fact that racist elements will step forward to consciously and actively defend the white interest under socialism. Even after the proletarian revolution qualitatively destroys the white bourgeoisie, there will be thousands of Allen Bakkes (racist white petit bourgeois) and Brian Webers (racist white workers) who, together with the remnants of the vanquished white bourgeoisie, will dedicate themselves to rebuilding the white united front and attempting to maintain and even reinstitutionalize the system of white supremacy. They can be expected to demand that the competition within the working class be organized along racial lines, to fight for maintaining the white privilege within the working class and the petit bourgeoisie, and to shout "reverse discrimination" at every attempt by the proletarian state to eliminate the material expression of the race relation. This is no small matter in a country such as this one. Furthermore, we can expect some to unite with the bourgeoisie in order to attempt the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat itself.

What this means is that the dictatorship of the proletariat in the U.S. must not only be a working class dictatorship over the bourgeoisie, it must also be a working class dictatorship over the white united front and white supremacy. The political power of the proletariat must be brought to bear on any and all manifestations of the white united front until that front is eliminated from the historical stage altogether, until it is no longer a material force in U.S. society. Quite literally, racism under socialism is counter-revolution and must be dealt with as such.

However, the complete elimination of the white united front and white supremacy cannot and should not be accomplished through political suppression of the white united front alone. It must involve an extensive ideological campaign to win white people, especially white workers, away from the white united front and over to the side of the working class. This ideological work, however, is a key component of a program to

systematically mobilize the masses to consciously dismantle every economic, social, and political remnant and/or manifestation of white supremacy.

Concretely the proletarian state must take on the task of establishing real equality among the laboring masses of whites and non-whites in all areas of work and life. This struggle for equality will have a thoroughly revolutionary character and go far beyond the narrow legalities to which it is restricted under capitalism. Decisive measures must be taken in terms of training, education, housing, job allocation, active encouragement of cultural expression, etc. to compensate for the legacy of a racist society.

Such measures must be seen as part and parcel of the socialist training of the proletariat to exercise its class power in all spheres of life. The Black racial group must be transformed from an oppressed racial group and people into a liberated people whose rich historical experiences will infuse the proletarian culture and life as a whole, from top to bottom. The Black racial group must be liberated and take a central role in all aspects of the building of the new society.

These actions will dwarf all affirmative action attempts under capitalism. To the extent that backward elements like Brian Weber continue to function among the laboring masses (and they certainly will in significant numbers, especially in the early years after the seizure of power by the proletariat) the active and determined defense of these anti-racist measures will be an indispensable task of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Without such an anti-racist perspective, it will be impossible to break up the political and social base for the possible return of bourgeois rule, to proceed with the step by step elimination of the petit bourgeoisie, and most especially, to unify and strengthen the proletariat in defense of its new society.

In summation, the particularity of the struggle against racism is that its aim is to abolish the system of white supremacy and Black oppression as a whole. Under capitalism this is a revolutionary struggle aimed at qualitatively breaking up and defeating the white united front. This strategy requires a polarization within the working class over racism. This polarization sets the indispensable conditions for forging the broader anti-racist united front by strengthening the position of the Black workers and winning a substantial number of white workers to fight the white interest on the basis of their working class interest. Finally the struggle for Black liberation requires smashing the white bourgeoisie and the system of capitalism which also spells the qualitative defeat of the white united front.

The proletarian revolution thus marks a qualitative stage in smashing white supremacy, but does not completely finish off the task. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, all attempts to maintain the white united front to defend and reproduce white privilege under socialism—which

we would expect to be quite strong in the petit bourgeoisie as well as the working class despite the overthrow of the bourgeois core of the front—must be systematically identified and eliminated. The white united front must be completely eliminated through a combination of political and ideological struggle led by the proletarian dictatorship, and the effects of hundreds of years of Black oppression must be systematically wiped out through an extensive proletarian program of education, training, promotion, etc., at all levels of the society and government. By means of this revolutionary policy the remnants of white supremacy will be ended, the white united front will be abolished, and the Black racial group completely liberated. With that, the white and Black racial groups, as we know them today will wither away for lack of a material basis in reality.

D. The Problem of Working Class Unity Against Racism

1. The Division in the Working Class

The points elaborated in the previous section are an initial attempt to present before the communist movement the contours of a systematic and comprehensive strategy for the struggle against Black oppression and its links to the proletarian revolution. Key to the strategy we have elaborated is the forging of a multi-racial working class movement to break up and defeat the white united front. However, it must be frankly admitted that the working class has seldom waged a united fight against racism. For the most part, the masses of white workers have been either an active or passive part of the white united front, rather than part of a movement to defeat it. In order to begin to reverse this trend, we must first of all reach theoretical clarity on the nature and causes of the division in the working class.

From a purely economic viewpoint, the division in the working class is quantitative and inessential. Economic distinctions within the working class are endemic to capitalist society (e.g. skilled vs. unskilled, employed vs. unemployed, etc.) so the fact that there is such a distinction between Black and white workers does not obviate the fact that they are still qualitatively part of the same working class and therefore that they share a common class interest. Consequently, any attempt to theoretically assert a qualitative division between Black and white workers in economic terms alone will inevitably distort Marxist political economy and sunder the fundamentals of class analysis.

However, neither the white vs. Black division in the society at large nor the white worker vs. Black worker division within the working class can be comprehended from a strictly economic standpoint. *There is a qualitative racial polarization within the working class* of which the

economic distinctions between Black and white workers are an expression.*

The working class is not exempt from the polarization of U.S. society into hostile racial camps. White workers are part of the oppressor white racial group and Black workers are part of the oppressed Black racial group. In class terms, Black and white workers share an identity of interest, both in the struggle against capital directly and in the struggle against racism. But, as racial groups, their interests are qualitatively antagonistic. The system of white supremacy constantly impels Black and white workers into opposite racial camps on numerous political, economic, social and cultural questions of the day, the outcome of which affects them in different ways.

Racism not only divides workers into the larger white vs. Black contradiction, it also polarizes the working class itself into distinct Black and white sections with antagonistic racial interests. Therefore, to use the terms "Black workers" and "white workers" in a narrowly sociological, neutral, or descriptive sense—and this is the way most people use them—is to distort reality. These categories, however neutral sounding, are nothing but the concrete manifestation *within* the working class of the white supremacy/Black oppression dialectic in society at large. The terms "Black workers" and "white workers" have absolutely no meaning outside that context.

What is this group called "white workers"? Is it merely a section of the working class somewhat insensitive to racism because it does not feel its direct impact? Much of the communist movement uses the term that way, satisfied that it has taken due note of the extent to which racism penetrates the working class. But this is thoroughly inaccurate. The "white workers," as a *group*, are nothing but a detachment of the white racial group in the working class. As such, they constitute that section of the class which, as a white section, is produced by racism. Its privileges—and they can be characterized as nothing else even if some want to describe this reality by only acknowledging that the Black workers are locked into less favorable conditions—are the result of the

*The strictly economic standpoint is rooted in an economic determinist distortion of Marxism which mechanistically reduces all social questions to a matter of economic interest. Economic determinism ignores the particularity of different social contradictions and reduces them to mere quantitative appendages of the capital vs. labor contradiction or ideological diversions manufactured by the bourgeoisie to divert the workers from the "real class struggle." Thus, racism is seen as an ideological plot by the capitalists to divide the working class and thereby increase their profits. Also, Black workers are supposedly distinguished from their white counterparts simply by the fact that they are quantitatively more exploited and more oppressed (or "super-exploited"). As for the division in the working class, it is principally a result of racist ideology injected into the working class' heads.

system of racial oppression which pervades all of U.S. society. Consequently the interests of the white workers *as a special group* within the class can only lie with the perpetuation of racism and the reinforcement of the white racial group. This is the section of the U.S. working class defined by the illusion that their "birthright as white Americans" mitigates the instability inherent in their class position. If they receive such privileges it materially reinforces their sense of racial superiority; if they fail it increases their bitterness. This is the explicit or implicit assumption behind that section of the working class whose point of reference is first and foremost as "whites."

Of course, not all workers who are white take this stand. Rather from this grouping there arises a politically conscious corps that undertakes to defend the racial privileges of the group as a whole. These are the forces of the white united front in the working class.

What is this group called "Black workers"? This group too is nothing but the concrete manifestation within the working class of the Black oppression side of the white supremacy/Black oppression opposition. The "Black workers" are that section of the working class who objectively face the burden of racial oppression on top of class oppression. Their interest *as a special group* within the working class is thoroughly anti-racist. As such, they come into contradiction with the white racial group, including the "white workers" as a special interest group.

In short, the interest of white workers as a special group is thoroughly racist and, consequently, anti-working class. On the other hand, the interest of Black workers as a special group is profoundly anti-racist and objectively coincides with the interest of the working class as a whole, whether or not all Black workers are fully conscious of this fact. Therefore to equate "the white workers" and "the Black workers" as merely two different contingents of the class is to obscure the interrelationship of racial oppression and class oppression in the U.S. and sanitize the insidious anti-working class formation of those whites who identify first and foremost as whites.

The white worker vs. Black worker contradiction is no mere idle speculation, but a powerful historical reality that is played out daily. It manifests itself as part of the society-wide white vs. Black polarization around the general issues facing the country as well as in struggles specific to the working class itself. In particular, it polarizes the competition within the working class along racial lines. The struggle for jobs, training, promotions, education, housing, union posts, social services, higher pay, better working conditions, seniority, pensions, job stability, immigrant rights, etc. are wracked with racial overtones and consciously orchestrated as to their racial impact. The degree of operation of racial discrimination profoundly affects the way questions are resolved and resources are allocated. Even in those cases where all

workers benefit, the racial conflict rages over exactly how gains will be distributed.

The political center of the white united front in the working class is the aristocracy of labor. As we noted in discussing racism and monopoly capital above, the protected upper stratum of the U.S. working class that benefits from U.S. imperialist exploitation of the world's labor and resources is practically lily-white because of racism. The racist white interest within the working class has made the upper stratum of the class a white preserve. Consequently, the aristocracy of labor—those workers who consciously seek to defend their privileged position within the class—are not only pro-imperialist but racist. They consciously defend and promote the special interests and privileges of white workers against all attempts to undermine them in order to maintain their protected position in the working class. But it would be extremely short-sighted to conclude that the white united front in the working class is limited to this upper stratum. Although most of its leaders stem from the most privileged and secure sector of the class, historically the vast majority of white workers have actively or passively followed its lead. The many concrete expressions of the white united front in the working class are legion: formal and defacto lily-white unions, lily-white union leaderships, segregated working class neighborhoods and schools, opposition to affirmative action, defense of racist seniority practices, "good old boy" hiring and apprenticeship practices, opposition to immigrant workers' rights, support for cutbacks in social programs such as welfare, CETA, public housing, etc. This interest is consciously, systematically, and viciously promoted, not only by the capitalists and the state, but also by the racist class-collaborators who dominate the official trade union leadership of the workers' movement.

To belittle this reality or to conciliate it in the slightest degree is to liquidate the struggle against racism (and the aristocracy of labor) within the workers' movement. Unquestionably the principal aspect of the contradiction of racism is between the white bourgeoisie and the Black workers. But the special interest of white workers is part and parcel of the white racial group interest. As such it is an integral component of the system of white supremacy and Black oppression in the U.S. Because the section of the U.S. working class that identifies with the white interest is politically and ideologically tied to the bourgeoisie along the lines of race, its potential for class collaboration is profound. If this section is not confronted and isolated politically, no progress in forging the U.S. proletariat as a revolutionary class can be made.

2. The Politics of the Spontaneous Movement

A precise analysis of the racial contradiction in the working class and its interpenetration with the class contradiction also highlights certain salient features of the different spontaneous movements among Blacks

and whites, and the nature of the consciousness each produces. The Black movement and the "white movement" have different dynamics given their origin at opposite poles of the white vs. Black contradiction. Unfortunately the communist movement has rarely indicated an appreciation for the importance of this distinction, at times even denying, distorting, and inverting it.

The Black movement is, in essence, a spontaneous movement against racial oppression among those who bear the brunt of it. The white supremacy/Black oppression dynamic spontaneously throws Black people into struggle with the white racial interest at the workplace, in the community, the schools, the prisons, etc. For the most steadfast and perceptive fighters, especially among Black workers, the confrontation with the white racial interest sooner or later leads directly to the principal source and beneficiary of racism—the white bourgeoisie and the capitalist system. This is graphically reflected in the widespread connotation of the term "the Man." Perseverance in the struggle also tends to expose the betrayals and vacillations of bourgeois and petit bourgeois elements in the Black community in dealing with "the Man."

Of course, it by no means follows that politically conscious Blacks spontaneously decide that white workers are their "natural allies," let alone their class comrades.

The readily apparent racial privilege of white workers and their active defense of those interests are hardly obscured or mitigated by the recognition that not all whites have equal power and that there are greater enemies at hand than the white workers. In fact, in the absence of a powerful anti-racist workers' movement the class consciousness of Blacks is often intertwined with a generalized anti-white consciousness (i.e. "some white folks have power, others are just racist fools").

We would argue that this phenomenon constitutes a spontaneous but nevertheless genuine class consciousness produced by a racially polarized capitalist society. This consciousness can accurately be described as an "incomplete" form of class consciousness, rather than bourgeois false consciousness, since it tends to accurately distinguish and target the actual bourgeoisie as well as the objectively opportunist, anti-working class and racist current within the U.S. proletariat.

For this reason, most veterans of the Black movement, even hide-bound reformists and determined nationalists, tend to have a profound and real level of class consciousness, although still at a spontaneous level. In this sense, the tendency frequently encountered in the communist movement to think that the role of the communists is to point out to politically conscious Blacks who the "friends" and "enemies" of Black people really are—i.e., how to distinguish white capitalists from white workers—is as foolish as it is arrogant. Rather, our task is to systematically raise the existing spontaneous class consciousness to a more scientific level, something that the spontaneous Black struggle cannot

accomplish without the conscious element, without Marxism.

By contrast, the spontaneous influences determining the activity and consciousness of white workers are qualitatively different. As workers, they are pressed into struggle against capital and, to some degree, against racism as well. But as part of the oppressor pole in the racial contradiction, white workers are spontaneously thrown onto the side of racism under the leadership of the white bourgeoisie and white petit bourgeoisie. Consequently, the spontaneous class consciousness tends to be counteracted and distorted by their spontaneous racist consciousness, creating a consciousness as a distinct white workers' interest group within the working class movement.

True, there have been periods when large numbers of white workers have taken up the anti-racist fight, most notably in the 1930s and 1960s. To a large degree, however, this was not the result of purely spontaneous influences, but as the result of the efforts and influence of the Communist Party in the 30s and the Black movement and the Marxist forces in and around it in the 1960s. In general, the spontaneous trends among white workers are contradictory and inconsistent, reflecting their conflicting racial and class interests. Even at its best, the spontaneous anti-racism among white workers tends to be shallow and vacillating. For the most part, white workers have taken up the struggle against racism only when it directly benefited them, abandoning it the moment it began to erode their racial privilege within the working class. Consequently, racism is a powerful force fueling a qualitatively opportunist distortion of class consciousness among white workers.

To be blunt, the spontaneous movement does not tend to solidify either anti-racist consciousness or class consciousness (even of the lower spontaneous type) among white workers to any appreciable degree. The white racial interest is not only racist, it is thoroughly class collaborationist. While the class interests of the white workers repel them from the bourgeoisie, their white interest tends to reunite them with the class enemy on the basis of their common "race." This dichotomy produces a curious, but widespread, form of consciousness which on one hand recognizes the antagonism with the capitalists in a *particular* and *sporadic* fashion, while on the other tending to generalize the *racial* distinction and antagonism with Blacks. This false consciousness in turn impels them to sacrifice the interest of the working class as a whole, time and again abandoning the struggles of the most unstable sections of their class (Black and white alike).

One of the most prevalent and insidious forms of opportunism and racism within the communist movement has been the refusal to recognize and deal squarely with this phenomenon. Concretely this has been expressed in the tendency to conciliate racism among white workers by thoroughly exaggerating trade union level class consciousness, glossing over the fact that they are all too often inconsistent anti-racists and at

times out-and-out racists. This approach stems basically from an economist tendency to bow to spontaneity and glorify the militant striker or trade unionist. However, in a racially polarized society like the U.S., such economist errors are bound to result in racist errors.

In conclusion, the spontaneous consciousness among white workers (with the stress on "white") is not essentially an "incomplete" form of class consciousness (as is usually the case with politically active Blacks), but rather it is a form of bourgeois false consciousness. (It is false consciousness not because it recognizes the existence of an objective white racial interest, but because it subordinates *class* interest to that racial interest and thus unites with the bourgeoisie.) While many white workers have proven themselves militant fighters for their immediate economic interests and have developed substantial working class instincts, racism corrupts these instincts, preventing them from distinguishing friends from enemies and derailing the emergence of anything worthy of the name "class consciousness." In fact, white workers must achieve the relatively high level of class consciousness sufficient to become consistent anti-racists before they can make an all-sided break with the white bourgeoisie. In turn, without this anti-racist consciousness, the class consciousness of white workers will continue to be qualitatively compromised.

Given the contradiction between the class and racial interests of whites as a special group within the working class and their historic lack of anti-racist consciousness, what is the basis to think that they will take up the struggle against racism in systematic or consistent form?

Frankly, we have no illusion that all white workers will do so. As we have shown, it will not happen spontaneously. But we think it is both necessary and possible that many white workers be won to such a working class position.

The principal reason is because their class interests require them to take up this struggle if they are to defend themselves against the onslaught of capital and, ultimately, to destroy capital altogether. The division between whites and Blacks as particular interest groups in the working class is qualitative. However, that division does not alter the fact that Blacks and whites are part of the same working class with the same class interest. The benefits received by white workers from racism are, with certain notable exceptions, quite piddling. Even most of those who receive substantial white privilege are unable to qualitatively leave the ranks of the working class; they merely become somewhat better paid wage slaves for monopoly capital. This is all the more true for the middle and lower layers of white workers.

Moreover, the declining prospects of world imperialism in the face of the struggle of the international proletariat and oppressed peoples suggest that sharper class contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are in the offing. Undoubtedly many white workers will lose

their place in the protected strata of the working class, while others will feel the pinches of real emiseration.

But a decline in the U.S. economy will not eliminate the system of white supremacy or the racial polarization within the working class. *Indeed, that polarization will spontaneously sharpen as the competition in the working class gets more intense and desperate.*

Consequently, the struggle to defeat the white interest in the working class will not emerge spontaneously out of the deteriorating conditions which impact the class as a whole. It is true that the working class has no class interest in racism, and in fact must struggle against racism in order to defend itself and make headway against capital. It is also true that most white workers gain little more than the status of privileged wage slave from racism. And it is further true that U.S. imperialism is being weakened day-by-day by the international proletariat and oppressed peoples. But by themselves, none of these truths will lead to the elimination of the system of white supremacy in the U.S. Regardless of the specific ebbs and flows of the U.S. economy, the endemic social reality of this society's racism will continue to produce and reproduce racial oppression and the white vs. Black polarization.

Therefore the prospects for forging an anti-racist working class front rest, to a great extent, on the capacity of the communists to intervene in the working class movement and divert it from its spontaneous path. Without communist leadership the working class is doomed to bow to bourgeois and racist spontaneity. And without a scientific communist line guiding this work, the communists themselves will be unable to rise above the intuitive and contradictory strivings of the spontaneous movement.

3. The Communist Movement and the Struggle Against the White Interest in the U.S. Working Class

How prepared are communists to take up the crucial task of leading the anti-racist struggle in a revolutionary direction? Despite a certain amount of positive work in the day-to-day struggle against racism, the communist movement has been largely paralyzed by a backward line that conciliates the white interest in the working class. The developing Marxist-Leninist trend is no exception to this pattern.

The dominant line in the communist movement argues something like the following: White workers do not benefit from racism at all. If they support racism, it is because they have been duped by the racist propaganda of the bourgeoisie. True, white workers maintain a higher standard of living than Blacks and other minorities; but for the overwhelming majority of white workers this benefit is miniscule. Of greater significance is the fact that racism divides the working class, thus blunting the fight for better wages and working conditions for all. Therefore, the standard of living of the white workers would improve

even more if the working class were united. In short, the white workers lose much more than they gain from racism and thus have every interest in the struggle against it. Consequently racism is in the interest only of the bourgeoisie which reaps superprofits by super-exploiting Black workers as well as lowering the wages of white workers by dividing the working class. The solution to Black oppression is equality, which is in the immediate as well as long term interests of white workers.

Within the developing Marxist-Leninist trend, the Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee (PWOC) is the most outspoken representative of this "no benefits" line:

"The white worker, as we have seen, is not profiting from racism. On the contrary, he or she is threatened very directly by its effects.... The idea of white supremacy has been cultivated in the white worker by a capitalist-controlled culture, a culture that has developed to justify and smooth the way for the exploitation of labor and its division into antagonistic camps.... what most white workers do not see is that this struggle against racism is basic to *their* interests as well as those of Black workers. . . .

"In the stronghold of white supremacy, Mississippi, the average hourly wage of production workers is \$4.56 per hour, the lowest in the country. Compare this with Michigan, a state with a strong labor movement, where the average is \$8.13 per hour and the point is even clearer." ²(Emphasis in original.)

A more backward argument is hard to imagine. First, PWOC reduces racism to a manipulative propaganda scheme by the bourgeoisie, telling us that the "idea" of white supremacy has been implanted in the heads of white workers. But the real problem is that the *reality* of white supremacy envelops that world in which the entire working class lives. Black workers confront this reality every day and know very well that the qualitative differences between their social condition and that of their fellow white workers is not just an *idea* in the white workers' heads. Does PWOC imagine that white workers are not similarly perceptive of the world in which they live?

Then consider the example PWOC chooses to illustrate its point. We are told, in order to demonstrate that white workers have no interest in racism, that the average hourly wage of production workers in Michigan is almost double that in Mississippi. But considering that wage scales are determined by a variety of factors even within a single national economy, wouldn't it have been more appropriate for PWOC to have told us what the average wage scale of Black workers was in Michigan compared to that of white workers in Michigan (or Mississippi, too, for that matter)? Wouldn't it also have been appropriate for PWOC to have examined the general condition of the working class in Michigan, not only the *employed* sector? Wouldn't it have been appropriate to have examined the conditions of life in Detroit, a city of heavy Black concentration,

where poverty, crime, sub-standard housing, and the like have reached dimensions far worse than in almost every other major city in the country? And *if*, in fact, Michigan workers succeeded in lessening the gap between Black and white workers, is it not conceivable—indeed probable—that this was a result of white workers surrendering a degree of white privilege in favor of class solidarity rather than defending their special white interests to the hilt?

But PWOC is so fixated on the larger size of the average Michigan paycheck that it has completely forgotten about such things. In fact, its whole argument is designed not to fight racism in the working class but to conciliate it. For PWOC has made the fundamental error of equating the interests of the white workers with the interests of the entire working class.

In fact, the “no benefits” line encourages white workers to strategically think and act on the basis of the special white racial group interest within the working class, rather than as part of the working class as a whole. The “no benefits” line, by appealing to the interests of white workers as white workers, promises them that the struggle against racism won’t undermine their racial privileges, but will actually further enhance their economic and political position. The not-so-subtle implication of this promise is that should the white workers gauge otherwise—should the struggle against racism collide with the special interests of the white workers—they would be justified in opposing it. Here pragmatism and opportunism go hand in hand as the “no benefits” line encourages the white workers to place their own self-interest as white workers ahead of the interests of the working class as a whole. Of course, as we have seen, the “no benefits” line is replete with illustrations of how the special white worker interest may coincide with the overall working class interest and the struggle against racism. And undoubtedly there *are* instances when the struggle against racism benefits white workers immediately and directly. But the line is strangely silent about the many instances when it does not; affirmative action, for example, often means that Black workers rather than white workers will be hired, promoted, trained and kept on when layoffs hit. The “no benefits” line cannot see this reality because its basic viewpoint is to make the struggle against racism contingent upon the interests of white workers. This is not only strategically bankrupt, it is tactically compromising.

Overall, the “no benefits” line is qualitatively compromised by its failure to understand the dialectics of the white vs. Black contradiction and its inability to identify the depth and cause of the division in the working class. Consequently it equates the interests of the working class as a whole with the interests of that section of the class which, in relation to the other section, is relatively stable and privileged—and makes the defense of the white section’s privileged position its principal concern. Needless to say, it cannot simultaneously take up the demands of the

least stable, least protected, most oppressed sector of the class. Nonetheless it appeals to white workers as white workers to struggle against racism. When this appeal falls on deaf ears, as it invariably does, the conclusion is that the appeal has not been made loud enough or possibly appealingly enough. What is not considered is that the white workers *already* think and act as a special white worker interest group—this is the problem, not the solution to racism in the working class. By appealing to this special interest, the “no benefits” line actually solidifies the white worker interest rather than combatting it. At bottom, the “no benefits” line denies the existence of a racist white interest in the working class and therefore conciliates it. It fails to grasp that the white racial group is the racist pole in the system of white supremacy that must be smashed—not promoted or conciliated—in order to defeat racism. Such a line leads the communist movement to conciliate the racist aristocracy of labor, the white interest, and the white united front. Behind such a line, the communists can never play a vanguard role in the struggle against racism within the working class.

E. The Proletarian Revolution and the Struggle Against Racism

As we have noted throughout, the struggle against racism and the struggle against capitalism, while inextricably intertwined and historically inseparable, can and must be theoretically distinguished so that their particular dynamics can be understood.

So far we have focused on the dialectics of the struggle against racism. In this section we will consider the struggle against racism from the standpoint of the proletarian revolution. Of course, it is far beyond the scope of this article to elaborate a general line for proletarian revolution. Our aims are far more modest. We want to develop two interconnected points: first, that the struggle against racism cannot be fully developed nor anti-racist consciousness firmly cemented outside the context of the proletarian revolution; and second, that the proletarian revolution and the formation of the U.S. working class as a revolutionary force is inconceivable without the struggle against racism. We realize that these are not new ideas, but due to a lack of theoretical clarity about the particular nature of racism and the struggle against it they have become pedantic and rhetorical truisms. Our purpose is to breathe new life into these still valid concepts on the strength of the specific analysis of racism we have advanced.

Up to now we have emphasized the importance of a class approach to the struggle against racism in order to divert the spontaneous path of the white vs. Black contradiction from a purely racial conflict to a united, multi-racial class struggle against the white united front. Moreover, we have underscored the link between capitalism, the interests of the bourgeoisie, and racism, clarifying that the struggle against racism must ultimately confront the bourgeoisie and the capitalist system as a whole.

Consequently, proletarian class consciousness is an absolutely essential element in the anti-racist struggle, and socialist revolution is its goal.

But even this kind of class consciousness is *qualitatively insufficient* to strategically consolidate the anti-racist forces. The struggle against racism, however central, is nonetheless just one element of the overall class struggle in this country, let alone the international class struggle that shapes it. Consequently it would be inherently narrow, one-sided and ultimately distorted to view the class struggle solely from the standpoint of the anti-racist struggle. It is a part, but not the whole, of the historical revolutionary conflict at hand. Consequently, in order to qualitatively gain an all-sided revolutionary vantage point for the Black liberation struggle, anti-racist forces must consolidate a proletarian and socialist world view in the course of the struggle; without this they cannot see the struggle through to the end. No matter how militant or revolutionary, the anti-racist movement will spontaneously and inevitably fall prey to bourgeois ideology if it is not consciously transformed politically and ideologically by the communist forces.

On the other hand, the political and ideological transformation of the U.S. working class from a passive and divided objective class-in-itself to a conscious revolutionary and united class-for-itself will never occur without unity around a correct line on racism and a systematic, unrelenting struggle against it.

The antagonistic interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in this country will never be correctly identified, let alone polarized, without clarity on racism and the connection between the color line and the class line. The history and present motion of U.S. capitalism cannot be understood without it; nor can the concrete day-to-day issues of the class struggle. For class struggle rarely appears in "pure" form; inevitably it expresses itself through numerous mediations and interconnections with other social contradictions, racism being among the most important. Without such a vantage point, it is impossible to understand that what appears on the surface as a clearcut class issue is often only a bourgeois racist lure in populist guise: i.e., "taxpayers' revolt," "reverse discrimination," "seniority rights," etc.

In fact, the central question of every revolution, class political power, cannot be grasped without an analysis of racism. A cornerstone of bourgeois rule in the U.S. is the white united front. Unless a substantial sector of the proletariat becomes crystal clear on this point, it will be unable to sever its ideological and political bondage to the bourgeoisie.

At stake in this question is the proletarian revolution itself. For to the degree that a large section of the working class continues to think, act, and organize around the white interest, the working class will be divided and defeated by capital. To the degree that the white united front is broken up and the working class acts as a class, it will advance and forge itself into a force capable of challenging capitalist rule and ridding the

globe of the most powerful and rapacious ruling class in the history of humankind.

Conclusion

The principal aim of this article has been to chart a new direction for theoretical work on the question of Black oppression and to reopen debate over this vital question in the communist movement. Such a debate is sorely needed. The various lines now prevailing in the communist movement have proven thoroughly inadequate to enable communists to move to the center of the Black liberation struggle. Indeed, the communist movement remains peripheral to this most vital and significant focal point of class struggle.

Our first theoretical task was to critique the line which for the past 50 years has been dominant in the communist movement—the Black Nation thesis. That line seriously distorts historical reality and consistently departs from Marxist theory. As such, it is a qualitative fetter on the communist movement's capacity to develop a revolutionary theory and practice against racism.

While the CPUSA and many other forces in the communist movement have rejected the view that Blacks today constitute an oppressed nation in the Black Belt South, they have not rejected the notion that Black oppression is a national question. Wedded to this inappropriate theoretical framework, they have been unable to develop an alternative theoretical analysis of the question. Indeed, the dominant tendency in the movement today is to formally accept the idea of Black oppression as a "national question" and then quickly proceed to advance a "communist program" for immediate action. Such pragmatism chokes off the rigorous theoretical work that alone can unravel the complexities of racism and provide the communists with the political clarity necessary to lead a serious challenge to white supremacy and Black oppression.

The second part of this article is devoted to developing an all-sided theoretical and political analysis of Black oppression that is grounded in historical reality. Throughout we have stressed two crucial points. First, Black oppression must be analyzed as a *particular* social contradiction. It is not merely an ideological phenomenon (racial prejudice or white chauvinism) nor is it a matter of intensified working class economic exploitation (super-exploitation). Rather, racism is an all-sided *social* relation within U.S. society which, while ultimately having its source in the primitive and expanded accumulation of U.S. capital, exists as an independent social relation in its own right, with its own categories, contradictions and laws of development. Similarly, the anti-racist movement must not be collapsed into the class struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, but rather is a distinct struggle with its own laws of motion and development that must be understood in their own right.

Second, the particularity of racism can only be ascertained by examining the actual social categories created by the system of white supremacy/Black oppression and applying that categorical analysis to the actual historical development of racism in the U.S. So powerful is racism in U.S. life that even the communist movement tends to view the social categories produced by the racist system—Black and white—as neutral and permanent categories of the human condition rather than as the means by which the relation of racism is expressed and reproduced. So long as our world outlook is enslaved by the concepts and categories of racism, we can never scientifically understand it let alone develop a revolutionary practice to eliminate it.

We believe that the theoretical framework advanced in this article is a major step in the direction of developing a fully elaborated historical materialist theory of racism and a scientific strategy with which to combat it. But through the course of debate, implementation, and summation it will undoubtedly go through a process of refinement and deepening.

The challenge is now before the Marxist-Leninist trend as a whole. The debate which must unfold is a central part of the theoretical work itself, for this is the very process by which a line is not only developed and tested, but also transformed into a material force among communists and in the class struggle itself. In the course of this struggle we are confident that Marxist-Leninists will cement the anti-racist political and ideological foundation that is indispensable to a genuine communist vanguard of the U.S. proletariat.

Reference Notes:

- 1 See Barbara Wolovitz and Jules Lobel, *The Right to Equality: A Marxist Analysis*, in *Guild Notes*, January, 1979.
- 2 Jim Griffin, *Racism and the Workers' Movement* (Philadelphia: *The Organizer*, 1980), pp. 15-16.