

Inside the United States—1

Negro Oppression and U.S. Foreign Policy

Claude Lightfoot

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, after several months of intensive preparation, have opened up headquarters in Chicago. The historic nature of this move can be appreciated fully only as time goes by. It may well mark the end of an era and herald the beginning of a new one.

As is always true in social phenomena, it is possible to see in broad outline the nature of things to come. However, the forms events take must await the actions of the masses and the judgment of history. We shall, therefore, concern ourselves in this discussion with what is new and aborning.

In recent years there have been many significant phases of civil rights struggles. Each time they have brought to the surface new problems and new challenges and successfully coping with them has advanced the movement to higher levels of development. Taken in their totality, they have represented a historic leap in revolutionizing everything on the American scene.

The present phase is pregnant with many new problems as well as opportunities. It calls for a review of every aspect of the struggle. But for the purposes of this article we shall confine ourselves to what is new in respect to the relationship of the fight for peace to civil rights.

Profound changes are in the offing in this regard.

The decision of the King-led Southern Movement to come north accelerates afresh the necessity for civil rights forces to understand what is required to break out of the stage of 'tokenism' and to make substantial advances against the whole system of jim-crow and segregation.

The explosion in Watts last year, earlier in Harlem and a few smaller ghettos provides the backdrop of Dr. King's decision to extend his activities into the North with Chicago as the main focal point.

What is prevalent in the conditions in Watts reflects every Negro ghetto in America. There is a time bomb ticking away in every one of them and unless measures are forthcoming to relieve the problems, violence is going to erupt all over America. It is to be hoped that a situation like Watts, which has happened twice, will not be required again to warn those in control of the power structure that the preva-

lence of such conditions is not in the national interest, to put it mildly. The movement in Chicago points up all the things that are required to meet these problems substantially. Let us discuss them.

INHUMAN GHETTOES FOR NEGROES

These civil rights forces have placed on the agenda a long range goal of eliminating 'slums and slumism'. Slumism is meant to sloganize all the problems of inadequate housing, low income, higher rates of unemployment, inferior education and a host of other dehumanizing features which characterize ghetto life. The foregoing would indicate that ghetto life places on the agenda, not only problems there but in all areas of our national life. The solution to the kind of problems posed within them will require far reaching changes in every area of national life. Thus these problems cannot be approached with just a pure humanitarian approach by some 'do-gooders'. All pro-democratic forces within the country will have to realize that their own self-interest is intertwined in many ways with the outcome of the King effort to organize the Chicago ghetto, to advance a programme to effect solutions of them.

One of the basic features of this new phase of the struggle is the shifting of the centre of gravity to the economic aspects of jim-crow. Space does not permit a detailed evaluation of gains by the civil rights movement in the last eleven years. Suffice it to say that the gains have been substantial in some aspects of social discrimination, namely, desegregation of hotels, restaurants and other public places. However, the presidential decisions on desegregating schools 'with all deliberate speed', outlawing restrictive covenants, which were rendered eleven to fifteen years ago, have not been complied with, as only 7 or 8 per cent of Negro students have been integrated in the South and the most stubborn resistance is found in every Northern city. And court decisions on restrictive covenants fall flat as Negro ghettoes have expanded in every major city in the country. These observations notwithstanding, there have been some areas in which the breakthrough has been substantial beyond social matters such as the large entry of Negroes in sports. But the chief characteristic of our gains is still 'tokenism' or none at all. Using as a yardstick of measurement issue by issue, in terms of time required to effect changes, my people—the Negro people—are still a hundred years away from freedom.

In respect to the economic problems, the gains have not only been token or minimal but we have lost ground. And it is this aspect of the problem which now arises to challenge the nation to find solutions and quickly.

The economic condition of the Negro masses has worsened in a

period that witnessed an enlargement of Negro employment in some higher paying jobs, especially in Government service. But this window dressing is exposed to the light of day as situations develop, as in Watts last year.

The main significance of this new phase of the struggle and the signal importance of the King drive in Chicago is that the solution to economic problems comes to the forefront and impinges on the solution of a lot of other problems.

What then is the relationship of these to the fight for peace?

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The proper evaluation of this point requires some examination of our foreign policy. And while this treatment of the problem does not pretend to be an exhaustive analysis, it is presented as a skeleton, a framework of reference to show how the present phase of the civil rights struggle requires a change in foreign policy.

American foreign policy ever since the inauguration of the cold war by the late Winston Churchill at Fulton, Missouri, in 1946 has been on a collision course. The seeds for this policy were sown before World War II had ended. At that time two theories were advanced as to the character of the post-war world. On the one hand, there were those who summed up the world to come as the 'American Century'. This concept foresaw the possibility of the big monopolies and corporations of our country establishing their economic and political hegemony on every continent of the earth. It was a policy which called for America to replace the old colonialist power in Asia, Africa, Central and South America by their direct control. It was a policy designed to put the other capitalist powers under the control of American capitalism. It was a policy to prevent the extension of socialism in the world.

These threefold objectives have failed and the other concept advanced during the period has come to the forefront. Henry Agard Wallace, then Vice-President of the United States, foresaw the future as 'the century of the common man'. The major events and developments of the last twenty years show beyond the shadow of a doubt that Mr. Wallace was correct and Mr. Luce, the chief advocate of the American Century, was wrong.

American policy twenty years later is in shambles. Its hegemony of the capitalist world was temporary. Most capitalist nations are beginning to pursue independent policies. In this regard France is the outstanding example. Today American imperialist policy in Europe rests largely on its relationship with West Germany in which former Nazis saturate the political scene.

The Truman doctrine did not contain Communism. During this period the socialist sector of the world became the stronger and the major force determining the character of tomorrow's world. It embraces one-third of all mankind and in the foreseeable future will represent the majority of the earth's people. This latter point is primarily reinforced by the emergence of most of the former colonial peoples who have wrested independence from the former colonial overlords in France, Britain, Belgium, etc. This sector of the world contains the objective existence of seeds which will enlarge the socialist sector as against the capitalist, military coups, such as in Indonesia and Ghana, notwithstanding. World reaction against U.S. policy in South Vietnam is a symbol of the bankruptcy of the 'American century'.

Our country in pursuing the policies of the advocates of the American century has earned for us the hatred of the majority of mankind. 'Yankee Go Home' and 'the Ugly American' greets Americans no matter where they go on this globe. The foregoing should suffice to show that new directional signals are needed in Washington in both foreign and domestic policy.

The pursuit of imperialist goals, the price America is paying for playing the role of policeman, has already cost us staggering sums of money. The future of generations of Americans unborn has been pawned as the national debt has reached astronomical figures of over 300 billion dollars, and will continue to mount unless there is a change in policy.

THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

In this regard American policy makers obsessed and possessed by some theory of their superiority have learned nothing from the lessons of history. Nations have risen or fallen as a result of their position towards the revolutions and wars of their time. The latest and most classic example is the position of Great Britain in today's world. At the beginning of the century it was the greatest power on earth. School children were awed by its power as they learned that 'the sun never sets on the British Empire'. Largely as the result of having to carry the brunt of two world wars, as a result of revolutions these wars helped to unleash, Great Britain is now a fourth or fifth rate power with as yet no capacity for independence, and it becomes more and more a vassal of the United States.

American pre-eminence in the world is due largely to its favoured geographical position during these wars and revolutions as well as its capacity through tremendous resources, skilled workers, etc., to become the workshop which fed the wars and supplied the markets of others which had been cut off as a result of being totally involved in war.

The irony of history is that at one point Great Britain had grown, prospered, become the leading world power as a result of wars on the European continent.

In the seventeenth century, Holland was the leading capitalist power. A century later its position was taken over by Great Britain mainly for the same reasons that Britain in this first half of the century was superseded by the United States.

To feed the needs of the cold war, to play the role of policeman all over the globe is rapidly putting the United States in the same position that has caused the downfall of empires in all ages.

Because the United States has occupied a position that is unique; because our standard of living is higher than anywhere else in the world, these facts have blinded many to the cancerous nature of many germs in our national body.

The outburst at Watts last year is but one of many germs, which, if not cured, will render the national body in a condition where even an operation will not save it.

The cold facts which stare us in the face are that the economy is not shock proof, that we cannot have guns and butter at the same time. The demagogic position of President Johnson which escalates the role of policeman in foreign affairs and the noise and fanfare about poverty, rebuilding our cities, etc., fool only the feeble-minded. We have reached a point where the conditions of life will not tolerate rhetoric and feeble gestures. Only substantial measures can meet them.

Therein lies one of the main significant features of this new phase of the civil rights struggle.

The coming of Dr. King to Chicago and the problems this movement has posed for solution are insoluble in the framework of the cold war. They require drastic changes in foreign policy. They call for a rejection of the concept of the so-called 'American Century'. They underscore the need for a policy which will recognize that this is the 'century of the common man' at home and abroad.

Heretofore many of the civil rights demands could be met without disturbing many elements of foreign policy. In fact, concessions granted in this direction could be and were used as a cover for expansionist policies abroad. But when problems are put which will require the outlay of tens of billions of dollars, such appropriations can come only at the expense of the huge cost of the war establishment.

A. Phillip Randolph, veteran Negro labour and civil rights leader, at a recent White House conference, called for a programme of a hundred billion dollars, spread out over a period of ten years, to meet the problems of poverty in the Negro community. This amount represents only a fraction of what has been spent for cold war purposes. This year it

cost sixty billion dollars. Proposals such as Randolph's are what is needed. But unless such proposals are accompanied by practical activity to promote a peace policy for an end to the cold war, they too become idle dreams and chatter for the 'learned'.

VIBRANT PEACE MOVEMENT

Dr. King's proposals in Chicago to eliminate slums and slumism also go to the very heart of the cold war. These objectives which will require huge expenditures by the Federal, State and local governments will not be forthcoming without a new foreign policy. Dr. King, his movement and many of his followers seem to understand this contradictory situation and are increasingly arraying their forces alongside the growing and vibrant peace movement in the United States. Thus, the civil rights movement is now raising demands which will help expand the forces for peace and thereby create the conditions for changing America away from the cold war. Historians may yet record that the civil rights forces were a major factor which saved America from extermination through a series of bloody wars and its demise as a nation of greatness.

The imperialist ruling circles of our country are aware of the potential of a link-up with the civil rights struggles and the fight for peace.

They, too, realize perhaps more than others that the programme they had going for them has come to an end. Token recognition to some Negroes as a weapon in the cold war, goes out of the window as situations like Watts continue to explode in their faces.

That is why they react with such violence to every utterance by a Negro leader on the war in South Vietnam. During the Korean War the Communists were the first target of the war hysteria. Smith Act persecutions and McCarthyite witchhunts all were designed to create conformity, to silence any and all opposition to the cold war and the hot war. Today Negro leaders have become the prime targets.

Several months ago, Dr. Martin Luther King began to speak out for peace. In so doing he changed the pattern where Negro leaders, while pursuing civil rights goals, refused to challenge American foreign policy. In fact, many of them sought to use the cold war as a bargaining point. They placed themselves as faithful lackeys, to the predatory whims of U.S. imperialism. And this for token recognition of individuals.

The new position of Dr. King evoked the wrath of the whole power structure, including some so-called Liberals, like Senator Javits, and phoney civil rights leaders like Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the N.A.A.C.P. In essence, Dr. King was told that to speak out on matters of foreign policy was harmful to civil rights. The attack against King

was followed by the removal of young Julian Bond from the Georgia Legislature and the most vicious attacks on Cassius Clay, world heavyweight boxing champion. All of these vicious assaults will come to nought because, as we have shown, the new demands of the civil rights movement are not realizable within the framework of the cold war.