

# ***SOCIALISM: World Without Race-Prejudice***

***By Eric Hass***



**Published Online by  
Socialist Labor Party of America  
[www.slp.org](http://www.slp.org)**

**July 2006**

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## **PUBLISHING HISTORY**

PRINTED EDITION ..... May 1949

ONLINE EDITION ..... July 2006

NEW YORK LABOR NEWS  
P.O. BOX 218  
MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA 94042-0218  
<http://www.slp.org/nyln.htm>

## ***I. Racism and the Social Question***

It is not possible to exaggerate the importance to the workers of understanding the cause and cure of race prejudice. The reason is obvious. If the workers can be kept divided against themselves in the crucial juncture of history which lies ahead, the system of class rule will ride out the storm and condemn another generation or generations to the miseries and degradation of war and poverty. It is true that the capitalist class faces seemingly insoluble economic problems. But the experience of the totalitarian nations has shown that, despite the insoluble nature of these problems, class rule can be prolonged indefinitely, if only the working class can be prevented from organizing its immense potential power. Nazi capitalism demonstrated race prejudice to be one of the most effective means for keeping the workers divided and impotent.

In the final analysis, the workers represent the only force in society which can or will destroy the capitalist monopoly over the means of life. The workers alone possess the energy and, potentially, the will, to release the forces of progress from the shackles private property puts upon them. Therefore, *if the workers are not organized to act* to make the means of wealth-production their collective property when the tide of historic opportunity is at its crest, the beneficiaries of capitalism will prolong their system — this time in the despotic form pioneered by the capitalist totalitarian nations.

### **THE MEANING OF PREJUDICE**

Before we can understand “race prejudice,” we must first understand the meaning of “prejudice.”

Literally “prejudice” means preconceived opinion. It is the opposite of reason; it is unreason. A person who is prejudiced against Negroes, for example, believes what he wants to believe. He accepts the evidence of his senses uncritically as long as it seems to justify his prejudice. The prejudiced person reasons thus:

The Negro is unemployed — therefore he is indolent.

The Negro is forced into arduous, menial jobs — therefore, he hasn’t the capacity to

## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

perform operations requiring intelligence and skill.

The Negro is compelled to live in black ghettos — therefore he brings down property values.

The Negro's life is shortened by malnutrition and extreme poverty — therefore he succumbs more readily to disease and is dangerous to be around.

And so on.

The prejudiced person who accepts this *prima facie* evidence more often than not resents being shown that his senses deceive him. He believes that the Negro is more lawless than the white man. If you try to disabuse him of this prejudice and show him that the Negro only *seems* to be more lawless because he is more often arrested, convicted and mobbed, he is apt rather to be angry than chastened. The reason for this irrational reaction is not ignorance alone. For, while it is true, as John Bright put it, that “Ignorance is the mother of prejudice,” it is also true, nine times out of ten, that *material interest*, or what the prejudiced person conceives to be his material interest, is its father.

For example, the white worker who is not classconscious, who is stuffed with economic superstitions and capitalist habits of thought, who, in short, accepts the capitalist system as a going concern, believes it to be in his interest to keep Negroes from competing for his job. He will support the “lily white” policy of his union. And he will repeat all the myths and legends about the Negroes to justify this policy. Nor will he welcome a refutation of them. Experience has shown that it is not enough to disprove the fiction of “race inferiority.” Prejudice persists in spite of scientific demonstrations that there are no hierarchies of physical, mental or cultural ability in so-called races.

### EDUCATION IN RACE NOT ENOUGH

This is not to say that education in the fallacy of racist theories is unimportant. Such education knocks the pseudo-scientific props out from under the arguments of the race mongers. It holds them up to ridicule and exposes them as purveyors of hateful and malignant lies. But it does not destroy the *incentive* to prejudice. It does

## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

not supply the *kind* of enlightenment that erases prejudice from the minds of workers. For that kind of enlightenment we must turn from biology to economics, from ethnological research to a study of the social forces at work in our society. We must demonstrate that what the nonclassconscious white worker conceives to be his material interest is at war with his real, his class, interest. We must show that, in excluding the Negro worker from competition, he is helping to weld more securely the shackles on his own limbs, that he is exchanging real freedom for a little temporary, and illusory, safety.

“ . . . to understand race conflict,” wrote Professor Ruth Benedict in her book *Race: Science and Politics*, “we need fundamentally to understand *conflict* and not *race*.” In other words, while conflict remains, education concerning “race” cannot put an end to race conflict. The validity of this view was evident in the wartime discussions in several C.I.O. unions over the policies to be adopted to handle postwar lay-offs.

### A QUESTION OF BREAD AND BUTTER

Most unions have aggressively combated race prejudice within their ranks. Some have even circulated literature, such as the famous Public Affairs pamphlet by Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish on *The Races of Mankind*, to disprove and discredit racist theories. Notwithstanding this, prejudice persists. It manifested itself in wartime by strikes of white workers in protest against the hiring and upgrading of Negro workers. And it manifested itself also in the shaping of union plans for postwar lay-offs.

Under prevailing seniority rules, the workers hired last are “bumped” first. As a very high percentage of Negro workers were hired last, they were anxious to have the seniority rules adjusted so as to maintain the wartime proportion of Negro to white workers. But the white majority resisted the proposal, for the obvious reason that its adoption would have lessened their own chances of keeping a job. At a national convention of one C.I.O. union<sup>1</sup> where the proposition came up and was rejected for a pious, but meaningless resolution “in favor of maintaining employment gains made by Negro workers,” a defender of seniority rules exclaimed: “This is a matter of bread and butter, not prejudice!”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The United Federal Workers of America, New York City, October 24, 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Pointing up the C.I.O.’s attitude toward proposals to relax seniority rules in favor of “proportional” lay-offs should not be construed as an expression of preference for the latter plan.

## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

The point is, however, that it is a matter that provokes prejudice. The competition for jobs — the conflict — has not been lessened by the C.I.O.'s attempts to educate its members in the fallacy of racism. On the contrary, the C.I.O. more than nullifies its efforts in this direction by accepting capitalism as the permanent basis of society. Thereby it accepts the conflicts engendered by capitalism, including that of job-rivalry between Negroes and whites, males and females, veterans and non-veterans, etc. In disclaiming racial prejudices, on the one hand, and in insisting on the class-sundering seniority principle, on the other, the C.I.O. leaders convict themselves of hypocrisy.

### A PART OF THE SOCIAL QUESTION

Our premise, and a premise we intend to prove to the hilt in this essay, is that Socialism alone can effectively banish race prejudice from the minds of men and convert them into rational social beings. We shall demonstrate that race prejudice grew out of certain historic developments in the evolution of society and that in its modern manifestations it is a reflex of capitalist conditions. For the so-called race question is an integral part of the Social Question. It *will* be solved when prejudice-breeding competition and conflict give way to the higher principle of cooperation, and not until then.

Socialism will free the productive forces from the restrictions of a capricious capitalist market and bring to rich fulfillment the promise of abundance for all and human happiness. Because a sane and rational society suffers if it restricts the social and economic opportunities of any of its members, Socialism will accomplish what capitalist legislation cannot — the abolition of every form of discrimination. Socialism, by rewarding society with greater well-being and abundance through the fullest cultural and productive development of its members, places a premium on cooperation.

The task devolves upon the workers of our generation to bring to birth a new world, a world in which the color of one's skin will mean as little as whether one is tall or

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Both methods favor one group of workers as against another. Both nourish the illusion among the favored workers that they have some sort of proprietary interest in their jobs. Both are premised on acceptance of the capitalist system. But it is the capitalist system that is responsible for involuntary idleness. A real solution for the problem of jobs, therefore, presupposes the abolition of capitalism. Seniority and "proportional" lay-offs both tend to divide the workers and obscure this goal.

## ***Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice***

short, or fat or thin. But, to accomplish this mighty task, the workers of all races must immunize themselves against the racist and nationalist poison. They must resist every incitement to racial animosity. They must understand that the race concept itself is the product of capitalist-engendered strife, and that their overriding interest is to consolidate their economic and political might for the conquest of power.

In understanding this, the moral and cultural stature of the workers will grow. For they will have freed themselves from the most degrading bondage of all, the enslavement of the human mind. As Maxim Gorky once expressed it:

“History demands the coming of a new man, freed from racial, national and class prejudices. Is such a man possible? The working class is about to create him. Apply your efforts, employ all your days to the creation of that ardently expected man, and you yourself will become that man.”

## ***II. Origin of Racist Doctrines***

Racism — the evil theory that some so-called races are inherently “superior” and others inherently “inferior,” together with the implications of this theory — is of relatively recent origin. Indeed, “the fateful word *race* itself is actually not yet two hundred years old.”<sup>3</sup> And race prejudice began to make itself felt as a social force only a little more than a century ago.<sup>4</sup> People have, of course, persecuted and enslaved other people for thousands of years. But it was not until modern times that the attempt was made to justify persecution and slavery on racial or biological grounds.

Among warring primitive peoples, even those of different ethnic stocks, racial differences, such as color of skin, eyes, etc., played little or no part. Male captives were usually slain, while females and children were frequently adopted by the tribes of the captors. As members of the tribe the adopted aliens were regarded as equals in every respect even if, ethnically, they were of another “race.”

Later, when primitive communism was superseded by a society resting on chattel slavery, a variety of arguments was advanced to rationalize the institution — but alleged *racial* inferiority of the slaves was not among them. Indeed, the ancient Greek poets “insist on the fundamental equality of the slave,”<sup>5</sup> and some of the philosophers held that it was not nature, but fortune, that makes a slave. It is true that the majority of slaves were captives taken in war, but rationalization on racial grounds (even if it could have occurred to the Greeks) was barred by the fact that many of the slaves of Greeks were *Greeks* — freemen who were reduced to indigence through usury and sold themselves or their children into slavery to satisfy their creditors.

### **STRANGER — FEAR IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

In the Middle Ages religious differences provoked the persecution of minorities, such as the Jews, and throughout the era a ferocious xenophobia (fear of strangers) made all communities inhospitable to “foreigners,” whether of the same or a

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<sup>3</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *The American Dilemma*, page 89.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish, *The Races of Mankind*, page 25.

<sup>5</sup> John Kells Ingram, LL.D., *Encyclopedia Britannica*.



## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

different “race.” Even today in provincial communities in the United States strangers are looked upon with suspicion, and in England there are places where, until a short time ago at least, visitors from the next parish were regarded as “foreigners,” and treated accordingly. One of Mr. Punch’s famous drawings depicts two workmen, — one of whom observes, “Look, Bill! Furriner!” “Eave ’arf a brick at ’im!” the other exclaims without looking up.

But the xenophobia of the Middle Ages did not distinguish between “races.” A stranger was a stranger regardless of the color of his skin. Practically all minorities were religious minorities and were persecuted as such. The French Huguenot refugees, for example, who came to England after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV, were objects of prejudice both because they were strangers and Nonconformists. But the religious barrier was not insurmountable and, after a time, they were assimilated into the English population. It is one of the little ironies of history that, whereas two hundred years ago the Huguenots in England were victims of familiar prejudices — they were accused of being dirty, overcrowding, bringing down living standards, etc. — those who can trace their Huguenot ancestry today frequently pride themselves on their “romantic” origin!

### **RACISM VS. “INALIENABLE RIGHTS”**

The more one studies the dogma of racial inequality, the more significant it becomes that its origin and development coincide with the arrival of *capitalism* on the historic scene, with the growth of *capitalist colonial imperialism*, and the intensification of *capitalist national antagonisms*.

At first blush, it may seem a paradox that the age which brought “enlightenment,” and equalitarian ideals concerning the “inalienable rights of men” and “freedom,” should also have produced racial concepts so much at war with these. The paradox, however, is easily resolved when it is recalled that capitalist “enlightenment,” the “rights of man,” etc., were weapons forged by the bourgeoisie in its struggle to free itself from feudal bonds, and that, once triumphant, its enthusiasm for equalitarian ideals waned as it faced the task of defending its rule against the upsurging workers. But the struggle against the workers did not, in most countries, develop immediately. In the United States decades elapsed before the capitalist and working classes acquired permanent character, and, in the meantime, the high

ideals of the Revolutionary epoch became too solidly fixed in tradition to be shaken off without inviting major social upheaval.

Indeed, it was largely because of these ideals that a new moral apology had to be invented for the slave system of the South. The old one was based on religion. The African was a heathen, a descendant of Noah's son, Ham, cursed by God himself and doomed to be a slave forever because of an ancient sin. Also, it was argued that to enslave the African was to elevate him, save his soul, and expose him to civilizing influences.

### THE DOCTRINE OF BIOLOGICAL INEQUALITY

While this rationalization was never abandoned and is invoked to this day,<sup>6</sup> it was far from satisfying an age that proclaimed the rights of man as "inalienable." Moreover, the institution of chattel slavery was weakened as soil fertility was exhausted, and many Southerners, finding their Negroes less profitable, wrote and spoke for manumission. Then came the invention of the cotton gin, and, with it, a strong stimulus for retaining slavery. Its apologists, therefore, sought to fortify their "peculiar institution" by invoking a new science — biology.

Scholars were enlisted to "prove" the Negro biologically inferior, and, therefore, the *natural* ward of the white man. An elaborate doctrine of biological inequality was built up as "scientists" casually drew wholly unwarranted conclusions from inadequate data of skull measurements, cranial capacity, etc. This doctrine, with its pseudo-scientific coloration, was widely disseminated, not only in the South, but throughout the nation. As the Civil War drew near, white writers and "intellectuals" were increasingly mobilized to spread the rationalization which tended, more and more, to supplant theology and history as justification for slavery. So effective was the biological theory, with its emphasis of racial "differences" that even the white friends of the Negro assumed them to be true.<sup>7</sup> It was not until much later that improved techniques in scientific research began to disprove the

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<sup>6</sup> "Mr. Speaker, we never reduced the Negro to slavery. We elevated him from the position of savage to that of servant . . . we brought him to this country, taught him the rudiments of civilization, and showed him the light of Christianity through the unfortunate instrumentality of slavery — unfortunate for the white man, but fortunate for the Negro." — Representative John E. Rankin of Mississippi, *Congressional Record*, December 15, 1943, page 10838.

<sup>7</sup> "Even the friends of the Negroes assumed great racial differences, even if, out of charity, they avoided elaborating on them." — *An American Dilemma*, by Gunnar Myrdal, page 90.

dogmatic conclusions of the biological pro-slavery apologists. By that time, however, those conclusions had pervaded the thinking of a majority of the whites. After the emancipation of the Negro from chattel slavery, the racial doctrine of biological inferiority persisted. The caste system inherited the defense ideology of slavery.

### **RACISM AND COLONIAL IMPERIALISM**

The theory of racial inferiority, invented as a moral apology for Negro slavery, and retained to justify the Negro's treatment as a pariah and sub-human in a nation proclaiming "inalienable" human rights, was not the work of pro-slavery "scientists" alone. In Great Britain, Belgium, France, Holland, Italy, and other colonial powers, the anatomists and anthropologists were busily engaged in fortifying the theory of the "white man's burden." Especially where equalitarian ideals were preached at home, the contrasting slavery and absolutist rule imposed on colonial subjects clearly called for an "explanation." While the statesmen hypocritically deplored the self-assumed obligation to "uplift" the so-called backward races and school them in the art of self-government — via the machine gun, whipping post and artificial famine, and while poets sang of the "fuzzy-wuzzies" barbarous ways, the "scientists" solemnly provided the alleged biological reasons for the "white man's burden."

Thus it was sought to justify the naked exploitation of peoples unequipped to withstand the ravages of capitalist colonial imperialism. Always and everywhere despotism sought to mask its purpose by alleging benefits to its victims. But "turn it whatever way you will," as Abraham Lincoln observed, "whether it comes from the mouth of a king, or from the mouth of one race as a reason for their enslaving the men of some other race, it is the same old serpent. They all say that they bestride the necks of the people, not because they want to do this, but because the people are so much better off for being ridden. You work and I eat. You toil and I will enjoy the fruit of your toil. The argument is the same and the bondage is the same."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "What are these arguments? They are the arguments that kings have made for enslaving the people in all ages of the world. You will find that all the arguments in favor of king-craft were of this class; they always bestrode the necks of the people, not that they wanted to do it, but because the people were better off for being ridden. That is their argument, and this argument of the Judge [Stephen Douglas] is the same old serpent that says you work and I eat, you toil and I will enjoy the fruits of it. Turn in whatever way you will — whether it come from the mouth of a King, an excuse for enslaving the people of his country, or from the mouth of men of one race as a reason for enslaving the men of another race, it is all the same old serpent, and I hold if that course of argumentation that is made for the purpose of convincing the public mind that we should not care

### CAPITALISM VS. SCIENCE

Science, bona fide science, has disproved the superstitions of the racial doctrine. It has shown that adaptations to the conditions of environment alone explain the visible differences in the three major human stocks — Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid, corresponding roughly to the popular division of mankind into White, Yellow and Brown.<sup>9</sup> But science has also revealed that migration and hybridization across the ages have diluted the original stocks, and that, today, the “pure” race is non-existent. Most important of all, science has exposed as utterly without foundation the racist theory of inherent “superiority” and “inferiority” of racial stocks, and it has assembled impressive evidence which points clearly to the conclusion that, given equal social, educational and economic opportunity, no single “race” of men will excel another in intelligence, ability, genius, or moral character.

Notwithstanding this, the cankerous growth of race prejudice remains to plague mankind. The reason is, of course, that the class and material interests which are served by race prejudice remain. And they will continue to be with us, together with their evil brood of racial and national arrogance and prejudice, as long as capitalism remains the ruling principle of society. For equality of social, educational and economic opportunity between races — the condition under which the equality of man will finally be proved conclusively — cannot exist until capitalist rule is overthrown, and society is reconstructed along Socialist lines.

Like a dreadful epidemic that follows in the wake of war, and vanishes with the restoration of peace, modern “race” concepts which grew out of capitalist and feudo-capitalist conditions will vanish from the minds of men when class rule is extirpated.

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about this, should be granted, it does not stop with the negro....” — Speech at Chicago, Ill., July 10, 1858. (*Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume 2)

<sup>9</sup> The three groups “. . . represent some considerable degree of adaptation to the conditions of environment. The dark skin, which characterizes most of the people living near the tropics, is almost certainly the result of elimination by natural selection of the fairer types of pigmentation less fitted to afford protection from the actinic rays of the sun. The greater number of sweat glands in the Negro and the reduction of their number among the yellow-skinned people are probably adaptations to hot and dry conditions respectively. Similarly the striking variations in the breadth of the nose according to latitude may be adaptively perpetuated through natural selection. A white skin is a disadvantage in the Tropics and a wide nostril in the Arctic.” — Julian S. Huxley and A. C. Haddon, *We Europeans*, page 58.

### ***III. Racism Bolsters Class Rule***

The presence of a racial minority in the working class population is advantageous to the capitalist class for a variety of reasons. The first and most obvious of these is the opportunity it affords for utilizing race vanity and race prejudice in keeping the workers divided against themselves.

Capitalism, by its very nature, engenders competition for jobs among the workers. The greater the number of workers without jobs, the sharper is the competition; the sharper the competition, all the more fertile is the soil for the seed of race prejudice. The fact that one group of workers is marked off from another by color and tradition causes the competition frequently to take on the aspects of a group struggle wherein the dominant “racial” group (such as the white Gentiles in America), however divided within itself, acts as a unit to exclude from the available jobs all other “racial” groups (Negroes, Jews, Americans of Mexican descent, et al.).

Indeed, in the absence of *classconsciousness*, no amount of legislation against job bias or preaching of “fair play” can prevent the numerically dominant groups from struggling to preserve group job-monopoly. Moreover, the more intense the struggle becomes, all the more receptive will the unclassconscious members of the predominant group be to race-mongering. And all the more embittered the workers discriminated against. There is a Swedish proverb: “When the feedbox is empty, the horses will bite each other.”

The question that suggests itself here is: Will the competition for jobs become less, or more, intense?

We disregard the pollyanna promises and promissory notes of the Henry Kaisers — and Harry Trumans. For the answer cannot be found in wishful prophecies. It must be sought for in the economic laws inherent in, and inseparable from, the capitalist system.

#### **CAPITALISM’S INDUSTRIAL RESERVE ARMY**

A surplus of workers is regarded by the capitalist class, even by those capitalists who promise “full employment,” as desirable and necessary.<sup>10</sup> Capitalism has

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<sup>10</sup> “I am perfectly willing to envisage a ‘full-employment’ economy in which there are frequently five million people unemployed.” — Seymour E. Harris, associate professor of economics at Harvard

## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

recruited its industrial reserve army largely through displacement of workers by machines and improved technique. The industrial reserve army, wrote Marx, “belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase in population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation.”

Capitalism requires an army of unemployed of sufficient size to provide for capital expansion. Capitalism creates such an army. Moreover, the economic laws operating within the system decree that an ever larger proportion of the capital outlay be *constant* capital (machines, raw material, etc.), and an ever smaller proportion *variable* capital (wages). The effect of this is to increase worker-productivity. But this increase in output per worker, unless matched by a corresponding expansion of the market, results in a decrease in the demand for labor. Indeed, except when capitalism is feverishly preparing for war, fighting a war, or rebuilding the ravages of war, it cannot prevent its unemployed army from reaching Frankenstein proportions. It numbered nine million when World War II began. Few doubt that it will be even larger once the postwar boom ends.

Mass unemployment, the tacit admission by capital that it cannot provide jobs for its slaves, aggravates worker job-competition, hence race prejudice. But it also stimulates social unrest and increases the demand among the workers that the wage-capital relationship be ended once and for all. This spread of classconsciousness tends to counterbalance the forces aggravating race prejudice among the workers by opening their eyes to the common class interests of all workers, and by teaching them. that the exploiting employers alone profit from their division.

### **DIVIDE AND RULE!**

The crafty, classconscious capitalist perceives that, once the working class unites *as a class*, it will make short shrift of the system which consigns to the industrial scrap-heap millions of useful producers in their prime. He, therefore, strives to keep the workers divided, Gentile against Jew, white against Negro, craft against craft,

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and zealous supporter of Administration plans for “full employment,” in the *New Republic*, March 19, 1945.



## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

and even male against female. For example, he will encourage the “lily white” unions in excluding Negroes from membership. And he will blandly argue as justification for his own discriminatory employment practices, that his white employees “won’t work with Negroes.” This sort of appeasement of the dominant racial group is a potent factor in keeping the working class divided, for it focuses the attention of the “favored” ones on their immediate material interests while obscuring their larger and, in the long run, vastly more important class interests. As we have pointed out elsewhere”:

“Our modern exploiters, in inciting racial animosity, but emulate the debauched and surfeited rulers of another age. In ancient Rome, where slaves far outnumbered Roman freemen, the great secret of the latter’s dominance was summed up in the Latin motto: *Divide et impera* — divide your slaves and so rule them. At one time sixty million slaves of the Roman Empire were held in subjugation chiefly through this device. The skilled slaves were encouraged to look with contempt on the unskilled. The slaves from Greece were pitted against the slaves from Gaul, the slaves from Gaul against the slaves from Ethiopia, etc. In his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon describes how slaves were used to guard slaves, and oversee their labor, and how races were craftily set in competition with one another.”<sup>11</sup>

The disunity which prevails among the American workers today is dismal evidence that our modern rulers have learned this lesson well.

### COLOR CONSCIOUSNESS BLURS THE ISSUE

A second advantage accruing to the capitalist class from the presence of a racial minority in the population, and one which serves the same end of blocking working class unity, is the pernicious effect of race prejudice on the outlook of its immediate victims. Take, for example, the Negro in America. Humiliated by social segregation, limited in educational opportunity, the victim of a double standard of law administration, and restricted largely to low-pay menial jobs by economic discrimination, he is never permitted to forget his color from the day he makes the awful discovery that he is “different,” to the day he dies. He knows his status, *as a Negro*, is that of a pariah, that it is *because of the pigmentation of his skin* that he is degraded to second-class citizenship, discriminated against, segregated, and

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<sup>11</sup> *Socialism Answers Anti-Semitism*, New York Labor News Company pamphlet.

## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

otherwise subjected to indignities. Color-consciousness, therefore, becomes a part of him. Even if he knows that he is a wage slave (and ninety-nine per cent of American Negroes are), the implications of this class status are apt to be distorted by his consciousness of color *caste*. One consequence of this is a tendency to become preoccupied exclusively with a Sisyphean struggle for economic and social equality within the capitalist system. Color-consciousness tends to blur the evidence showing the basic cause of both his pariah and proletarian status to be class rule.

By reason of the history back of him and the race relations established under chattel slavery and carried over into the “free labor” era, the Negro worker constitutes, as De Leon put it, “a special division in the ranks of labor.”

“In no economic respect,” De Leon continued, “is he [the Negro worker] different from his fellow wage slaves of other races; yet by reason of his race, which long was identified with serfdom, the rays of the Social Question reached his mind through such broken prisms that they are refracted into all the colors of the rainbow, preventing him from appreciating the white light of the question.”<sup>12</sup>

Today, however, the Negro worker *is* beginning to appreciate the white light of the Social Question. Thanks largely to a long series of tragic disillusionments, and to the accelerated pace of history which has quickened his own mental processes, he is beginning to grasp the necessity for uniting all the workers along class lines. Whereas prejudice against him formerly tended to evoke something akin, to Negro nationalism, such nationalist movements are now in eclipse. It is safe to say that more Negro workers are studying seriously the Marxian program of the Socialist Labor Party than ever before.

### **RACE STRIFE PAYS DIVIDENDS**

In discussing the advantages accruing to the capitalist class from the presence of racial minorities, such as the Negroes in America, one that should not be overlooked is the direct economic advantage. Pitting race against race has paid the plunderbund real dividends. It has supplied, ready at hand, a large body of defenseless, destitute workers for low-pay seasonal jobs, arduous “stoop” labor in

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<sup>12</sup> “Good for the Negroes,” *Daily People*, Dec. 31, 1903.



## **Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice**

the fields, slavish tasks in industry, and menials for the homes of the rich or well-to-do. But workers of the dominant racial group are mistaken if they believe this has cost them nothing. The very presence of a body of slum-shocked workers, traditionally compelled to work for starvation wages, tends to depress the whole wage structure. The exclusive racial practices of unions, moreover, have virtually delivered over to the employing class an embittered element which, in the absence of classconsciousness, tends to be as little concerned for the welfare of the dominant racial group as the latter are for the minorities. If Negroes have been used as strikebreakers, it is because unclassconscious white workers have put this weapon in the employers' hands.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody good. The war, for all the havoc it has wrought and the nameless misery it has brought to the world's oppressed, gave millions of working-class victims of race prejudice the opportunity temporarily to escape from the strangle-hold of economic wretchedness, and to improve, in some degree at least, their economic position. Figures issued early in 1945 by the U.S. Department of Labor<sup>13</sup> reflected the grand migration of Negro men and women from their pellagra-ridden rural existence to the factories and shipyards, the upgrading of Negroes to skilled and semi-skilled jobs, and the eagerness with which Negro women seized the opportunity to escape from domestic servitude.

The whole working class benefited from the lift this new experience gave the Negro worker, from his demonstration of aptitude and industrial skill (which has taken the pins from under the myth of "race inferiority") and from his closer association with white workers. But, if the working class is to realize these benefits, both Negro and white workers must become conscious of their common class interests and of the imperious need to organize to abolish class rule. Otherwise, dire prophecies of "angry days" ahead, of intensified race friction and even riots, are very likely to materialize. And that will be a great tragedy. It might cause the American workers to miss the most propitious opportunity yet vouchsafed by history to strike the shackles of wage slavery from their limbs. It might enable prejudice-breeding capitalism to prolong its existence and visit new wars and tragedy on mankind.

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<sup>13</sup> *Monthly Labor Review*, January 1945.

#### ***IV. Socialism — A Prejudice-Free Society***

It is vital to the class interests of the rulers that all workers be kept politically impotent. In the case of white workers in America this is accomplished by numerous stratagems, the liberal use of reform bait, and through the employment of the labor fakers as political bell-wethers. For the colored minorities, however, special devices are employed either to exclude them from the hustings or to keep them safely herded in the political fold of one or the other of the capitalist parties.

Disfranchisement of the Negro in the South is the political counterpart of economic discrimination, social segregation, and “race etiquette” — the social technique so effective in the past in keeping Negroes in submissive patterns of behavior. Some forms of disfranchisement, such as the poll tax, reach impoverished whites as well as Negroes, but, even where these are abolished, the color line is held and “white supremacy” maintained either through the enactment of other voting qualifications which, practically, exclude Negroes, or through intimidation and violence.

In the North, on the other hand, the ballot is as accessible to Negroes and other racial minorities as to whites. Here, however, the Negro worker has long been the victim of visionary reformers and, particularly, of designing politicians who cynically exploit his segregated and caste status. This is so well known by Negroes that it is a frequent topic of comment in the Negro press. For decades after Emancipation, the Republican politicians and their Negro party hacks counted the Negro worker vote in the bag. It was taken for granted in each election, as a sort of installment on a perpetual debt which Negroes allegedly owed “the party of Abraham Lincoln.” A platitudinous plank calling for “uplift of the Negro” went quite automatically into each Republican platform — to be as automatically forgotten when the votes were counted. Negroes never had a voice in G.O.P. councils, nor a part in G.O.P. administration.

#### **FROM MUMBO-JUMBO TO JUMBO-MUMBO**

With a tradition vis-a-vis Negroes which is identified with slavery, the Democratic party was long handicapped in the North in snaring the Negro worker vote. It finally overcame that handicap, however, with the liberal use of reforms. Indeed, it came as something of a shock to G.O.P. bosses when Northern Negroes, repudiating

## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

their “debt,” swung their support to the New Deal. This switch has had one important result. It has deepened the disillusionment of Negro workers in capitalist politicians, whatever their party label. Increasing numbers of Negro workers now perceive that they have traded one rotten apple for another.

True, during the late war, the scope of economic opportunity has recently widened for colored minorities, particularly Negroes. And it is a tribute to the growing awareness of social and economic forces among the latter that they have not misunderstood the cause. Nearly all Negroes who are politically conscious understand that, at best, the Administration yielded trifles, and that it was the exigencies of war and the demand for high wartime production which were wholly responsible. This is evidenced by the fact that in no other group was apprehension over postwar prospects so acute.

Moreover, enlightened workers have not misunderstood President Truman’s “civil rights” proposals. Like the demand that the embarrassing segregation practices in the nation’s capital be corrected, the Truman “civil rights” program is dictated by the need to make American capitalism appear virtuous before the court of world opinion. Any improvements that may come will be, in a sense, by-products of the “cold war.”

Out-and-out capitalist politicians are not alone in seeking to exploit the Negro’s preoccupation with problems arising from racial discrimination. The so-called “Socialist” party politicians, and the American agents of Stalinism, have brazenly and cynically trafficked on his aspirations for racial equality. To wangle his vote and his support, they have held before him the prospect of race reforms within capitalist society. And they have done this even though they know that capitalism, by its very nature, fosters racism, and that cruel disillusionment must inevitably result. No blacker record of cold-blooded opportunism exists than that of the Communist party in its exploitation of the tragedies of the Negro workers.

### **NO SOLUTION THROUGH “GOOD LAWS”**

None denounces the evil of racism more than the bona fide Socialist. But the bona fide Socialist knows also that as long as capitalist conditions obtain, *as long as there are competition for jobs and economic insecurity, as long as the capitalist class*

## Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice

*stands to benefit from keeping the Negro in a pariah state and dividing the workers against themselves*, trying to abolish race prejudice is like shoveling sand with a pitchfork. As we have shown, instead of subsiding, racism tends to grow more malignant as the capitalist crisis deepens.

The capitalist class, in a thousand devious ways, through its press, over its radio, and by putting slummist elements on its payroll, seeks to parry the blow against itself and turn it against the vulnerable minorities in our midst. An unemployment crisis and the unrest pervading the ranks of the toilers, *in the absence of classconsciousness*, spell more racism, not less. And, although fair employment practices committees may succeed in breaking down some of the economic barriers to Negroes, it is a dead certainty that, under conditions of mass unemployment, they and all other victims of race prejudice will suffer disproportionately.

Race prejudice became a weapon in the arsenal of class rule when the owners of capital became the masters of society. It arose with capitalism; it will go down with capitalism. Full citizenship status for Negroes, and all other oppressed racial groups, is contingent on the destruction of this utterly outmoded, evil-breeding system. It is contingent on the establishment of a society in which the instruments of production are owned socially and managed democratically, and in which there are jobs for all. Only when one group *ceases to benefit materially* from the subjugation of another group and *opportunity is available for all* will the artificial barriers of race, raised by capitalism, fall away and the aspiration for human brotherhood be fulfilled.

### **SOCIALISM — A PREJUDICE-FREE SOCIETY**

Socialism, and Socialism alone, creates these conditions for equality and opportunity. As we have said elsewhere, we do not claim for Socialism the power of magic. We know that racial superstitions and prejudices are deep-rooted. They will not vanish from the minds poisoned by them the moment the revolution triumphs. But we know also that under a society where *everyone* who wants a job has job-opportunity, without fear of a jobless tomorrow, and where everyone shares abundance as well as security, race prejudice will cease to be virulent and, ultimately, will die of desuetude. Socialism creates this atmosphere for wholesome and cooperative relations between human beings. Socialism, and Socialism alone, is

## **Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice**

the Nemesis, of race prejudice.

The conclusions stated above carry with them implications of primary importance. One is that the Negro worker, and the worker of any other racial group that is discriminated against, has a special interest in fighting for Socialism. For him it means escape from caste, as well as from class, bondage. He ought, therefore, to school himself in the program for achieving Socialism, and to take a foremost role in propagating it among his fellow wage slaves. Briefly stated, that program requires:

1. The organization of the workers into a party of their class, and one which aims to destroy the rule of capital through the peaceful means afforded by the Constitution of the United States; and
2. The consolidation of the workers' might on the industrial field in a Socialist Industrial Union embracing all the workers, and prepared to act at a moment's notice to back up the Socialist ballot by taking and holding all the instruments of wealth-production.

The Socialist Industrial Union is the workers' power. But it is more than that. It is also the administrative organization of future society. "Industrial Unionism is the Socialist Republic in the making," wrote the great American Marxist, Daniel De Leon, "and the goal once reached, the Industrial Union is the Socialist Republic in operation. Accordingly, the Industrial Union is, at once, the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of capitalism, and the successor of the capitalist social structure itself."

### **NEGROES AND THE S.L.P.**

This is the program and this the goal. To promote the former and insure the triumph of the latter, the place of the victim of race prejudice and color caste is in the ranks of the Socialist Labor Party. And to the Socialist Labor Party he must come if he is not to succumb to cynicism or utter desperation. For it is in this Spartan Marxist party alone that he will find the honest logic, scientific integrity and single-minded determination to go to the root of the problem. Its record is clean. It cannot be reproached with having exploited the workers' illusions for temporary advantage. And it alone, among all the parties claiming to represent labor's

## **Socialism: World Without Race-Prejudice**

interests, enjoys this distinction.

We do not doubt that human intelligence will rise to a mastery over the social blight of racism that class rule nourishes and keeps alive. Or that generations yet unborn will bracket it with other barbarous superstitions abandoned by the race in its onward march. But whether the happy day will dawn soon, or whether new and darker chapters will be written before the advent of a prejudice-free society, will depend on the energy with which enlightened men of good-will devote themselves to this great and good cause. The perceptible militancy among Negro workers particularly, and the soberness with which they are grappling with the problems confronting them, give rise to the hope that they will soon give to the Socialist movement a powerful impetus by taking their place in the embattled ranks of classconscious labor. As De Leon observed forty years ago:

“Once on the path of progress, the Negro cannot long remain out of the Socialist camp. Well may the Socialist camp make ready to receive this division of the army of the proletariat that has been wandering in the wilderness since 1865.”

*The End*