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AFRICAN AGENDA

A Voice Of Afro-American Opinion

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SPECIAL ISSUE DEVOTED TO W.E.B. DU BOIS

W. E. B. Dubois A Great Revolutionary Democrat

Dr. W.E.B. DuBois was born in the same month as the First President of the United States, more than a century later plus one day, February 23, 1868. He was born during the period of Black Reconstruction, a period of great democratic struggle in the United States that he duly described in his great book *Black Reconstruction*. His life's work was an effort to complete the democratic revolution by extending national rights to Afro-Americans. This effort was sabotaged during Dr. DuBois' childhood as it was also sabotaged during the period of George Washington's political ascendancy. The sabotage of the democratic revolution during DuBois' infancy took the form of big Northern capital uniting with the defeated South in a strategy analogous to Nixon's strategy (southern strategy) of recent vintage. As in the present, that southern strategy was supported by some blacks under the leadership of Booker T. Washington's who opted to liquidate the mass democratic movement of Blacks and poor whites, for personal gains for a small sector of the black community.

Dr. DuBois, Monroe Trotter, Ida B. Wells, and others attempted to reverse this recurring reactionary tendency in the Black Liberation Movement by initiating the famous Niagara Movement, an attempt to restore the mass character of the Black movement. Dr. DuBois had joined the ranks of such great revolutionary democrats as Chernyshevsky of Russia, Sun Yat Sen of China, and Jose Marti of Cuba. Their ranks were joined later by Mahatma Ghandi, Kwame Nkrumah, Gamel Abdel Nasser, Soe Sukarno and many more with the upsurge of the national liberation movements in the Third World.

It was during this period that DuBois

made the famous statement that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line. As with all national
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DuBois and Pan-Africanism

One of the most important weapons in the struggle to liberate man from imperialism is the weapon of ideology. In the struggle to win the minds of Black Americans and Africans, few ideologies have enjoyed the primacy of historical place as the ideology of Pan-Africanism. Indeed, few ideas have had so forceful and dedicated a votary as W. E. B. DuBois.

Because of historical circumstances at the time of the adumbration of Pan-Africanism, however, a vagueness lent itself to the interpretation of this doctrine. Because of the numerical and political weakness of the African working class dur-

ing the first general crisis of the capitalist mode of production and because the call for a Pan-Africa, free from imperialist bondage was intimately (and understandably) linked with black nationalism, a certain section of the U.S. black petty-bourgeoisie has *post haste* claimed for itself the doctrine of Pan-Africanism. To be sure, Pan-Africanism has been called upon to justify political doctrines ranging from militant socialism to bourgeois nationalism and tribal provincialism. The historical development of this doctrine, however, would lead one to but one theoretical conclusion. It is most important that we recognize that from 1900, when the first Pan-African Congress was held, to 1945, the year of the last Congress that W.E.B. Du Bois was to help organize and personally attend, that the major motion of Pan-Africanism was away from the Negro bourgeoisie in the U.S. and increasingly embraced the question of an all-African, and a critical all-class unity of Africans to fight imperialism. It is precisely this legacy that certain present-day 'Pan-Africanists' would have us forget.

The *Resolution* of the 1919 Pan-African Congress, held in Paris, for example, reveals clearly that its authors wished merely to reform capitalist relations between colonizer and colony (see Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism*, pp. 151-52). The recommendations were paternal in form and bourgeois in substance. It is clear that the signatories of this document envisioned that opportunities would be opened only to privileged Africans. There was little effort to create conditions which would have been conducive for the development of a broad-based national liberation struggle.

Africanism was that he saw the national liberation struggle in Africa as being inextricably interwoven into the fabric that was the world revolutionary process. The national liberation movement was but one

(continued on page 2)

Why Dr. DuBois Joined the Communist Party, U.S.A.

on imperialism. Certain present-day "Pan-Africanists" would have us dissociate the national liberation movement from the world socialist system, the working class, and oppressed nationalities in the developed capitalist countries. Herein lay their fatal error. It is here that they totter on the edge of the precipice of political opportunism. In *The World and Africa* Du Bois adumbrated the general ideas of what was later to become the Organization of African Unity (pp. 295-97). Although his call was in some places idealistic, its basic substance called for international non-alignment, peace, economic, political, social, and cultural integration, free from the fetters of imperialism, but "peaceful cooperation ... (with) socialism..." Unlike present-day bourgeois theories of "regional integration," which allow for the penetration into the Third World of imperialist capital, the notion of Pan-African unity was based on the material fact that the national liberation movement had not fully discharged its democratic mission, thus allowing for a stronger, more resolute, broader-based assault on imperialism under conditions of a numerically growing African working class. Even the nationalization of national resources is merely consistent with the national democratic demand of freedom from foreign control, and therefore must proceed under conditions conducive to the expansion of the home market and a wider proliferation of popular democratic rights.

It is the struggle between the two world systems—socialism and capitalism—that dominates the present historical stage. The worldwide national liberation movement cannot be isolated from this confrontation. The legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois would inevitably have placed the African liberation movement on the side of peace and historical progress. The danger today of supporting petty-bourgeois "Pan-Africanism," which splits the national liberation movements away from the other two contingents of the world revolutionary process, is that such a course of action leaves Africa and other underdeveloped countries defenseless in the face of rapacious and plunderous imperialist capital. "Pan-Africanism" would then be used as a cloak to disguise Western support of the African bourgeoisie to the detriment of the masses of Africa's peoples.

It is clear that only when seen as an intimate adjunct to the world revolutionary process does the substance of Pan-Africanism become materially altered. It is only then that the goals of African independence, unity, and self-determination become realizable. This is the Pan-African legacy of W.E.B. DuBois.

★ ★ ★

The *African Agenda* has received many inquiries on Dr. DuBois' relationship with the Communist Party of the U.S.A. Some of these letters have stated that Dr. DuBois was senile and had already made his contribution to the struggle of Black people. This view was often refuted by Dr. Dwame Nkrumah who called on Dr. DuBois to spend the rest of his life in Ghana to edit the *Encyclopedia Africana*. Dr. M. L. King also spoke to this question in one of his last major public speeches quoted in the spring issue of *Freedomways*, 1968 (see article "W. E. B. DuBois, A Great Revolutionary Democrat."). Stated below is Dr. DuBois' answer to these "critics" in his letter to Gus Hall, General Secretary of the C.P. U.S.A. on why he joined the C.P.



Dr. Du Bois' Letter
To GUS HALL,
Communist Party of the U.S.A.
New York, New York.

On this first day of October 1961, I am applying for admission to membership in the Communist Party of the United States. I have been long and slow in coming to this conclusion, but at last my mind is settled.

In college I heard the name of Karl Marx, but read none of his works, nor heard them explained. At the University of Berlin, I heard much of those thinkers who had definitively answered the theories of Marx, but again we did not study what Marx himself had said. Nevertheless, I attended meetings of the Socialist Party and considered myself a Socialist.

On my return to America, I taught and studied for sixteen years. I explored the theory of Socialism and studied the organized social life of American Negroes; but still I neither read or heard much of Marxism. Then I came to New York as an official of the new NAACP and editor of the *Crisis Magazine*. The NAACP was capitalist oriented and expected support from rich philanthropists.

But it had a strong Socialist element in its leadership in persons like Mary Ovington, William English Walling and Charles Edward Russell. Following their advice, I joined the Socialist Party in 1911. I knew then nothing of practical socialist politics and in the campaign of 1912,

I found myself unwilling to vote the Socialist ticket, but advised Negroes to vote for Wilson. This was contrary to Socialist Party rules and consequently I resigned from the Socialist Party.

For the next twenty years I tried to develop a political way of life for myself and my people. I attacked the Democrats and Republicans for monopoly and disfranchisement of Negroes. I attacked the Socialists for trying to segregate Southern Negro members; I praised the racial attitudes of the Communists, but opposed their tactics in the case of the Scottsboro boys and their advocacy of a Negro state. At the same time I began to study Karl Marx and the Communists; I read *Das Kapital* and other Communist literature; I hailed the Russian Revolution of 1917, but was puzzled at the contradictory news from Russia.

Finally in 1926, I began a new effort: I visited Communist lands. I went to the Soviet Union in 1926, 1936, 1949 and 1959; I saw the nation develop. I visited East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. I spent ten weeks in China, traveling all over the land. Then, this summer, I rested a month in Rumania.

I was early convinced that Socialism was an excellent way of life, but I thought it might be reached by various methods. For Russia I was convinced she had chosen the only way open to her at the time. I saw Scandinavia choosing a different method, half-way between Socialism and Capitalism. In the United States I saw Consumers Cooperation as a path from Capitalism to Socialism, while England, France and Germany developed to the same direction in their own way. After the depression and the Second World War, I was disillusioned. The Progressive movement in the United States failed. The Cold War started. Capitalism called Communism a crime.

Today I have reached a firm conclusion:

Capitalism cannot reform itself; it is doomed to self-destruction. No universal selfishness can bring social good to all.

Communism—the effort to give all men what they need and to ask of each the best then can contribute—this is the only way of human life. It is a difficult and hard end to reach—it has and will make mistakes, but today it marches triumphantly on in education and science, in home and food, with increased freedom of thought and deliverance from dogma. In the end Communism will triumph. I want to help to bring that day.

The path of the American Communist Party is clear: It will provide the United States with a real third Party and thus restore democracy to this land. It will call for:

1. Public ownership of natural resources and of all capital.
2. Public control of transportation and communications.
3. Abolition of poverty and limitation of personal income.
4. No exploitation of labor.

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News Briefs

Chicago — The following message was sent to PAIGC on the death of Amilcar Cabral in Conakry, Guinea: "We express compassion and solidarity with the heroic people of Guinea-Bissau, and the comrades of PAIGC about the tragic loss of Amilcar Cabral, a great leader in the fight to defeat Portuguese colonialism and imperialism. A Luta Continue. Venceremos. African American Solidarity Committee. P.O. Box 1941, Chicago, Ill. 60690, USA".

Conakry — The funeral service for Mr. Amilcar Cabral, Secretary General of PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau was attended by more than 25,000 people and delegates from 80 nations. Mr. Cabral was assassinated on Jan. 20, 1973 by agents of Portuguese colonialism and U.S. imperialism. The traitor arrested for the murder is Inocenuo Kani formerly in charge of PAIGC's navy. This desperate act by the agents of colonialism end imperialism will not set back the heroic struggle of PAIGC. Already the party announced that Aristides Pereira will be acting Secretary General of the party pending a decision by the party council.

South Africa — Most of the 30,000 black and Asian workers recently returned to their jobs in Durban after one of the most successful strikes against 100 U.S. and South African companies. Some of the workers returned to work after accepting a 15% increase in pay — about \$2.35 a week. Brickworkers returned to their jobs after accepting an increase of \$4 that brought the weekly minimum wage at the factory to about \$16.

The level of exploitation by world imperialism and South African facism in South Africa is indicated by the fact that 80% of the Black workers are paid well below the South African government designated poverty line which is calculated at about \$120 a month.

★ ★ ★ The Encyclopedia Africana: DuBois' Last Project

At the invitation of Ghana's late President Kwame Nkrumah, W. E. B. DuBois headed the *Encyclopedia Africana* project to prepare an accurate interpretation of African history. Ghana had recently achieved independence and Nkrumah had emerged as a progressive proponent of building socialism in Africa. It is a well known fact that imperialist ideology attempts to distort the true role of class, people, and culture in fighting colonialism and imperialism. It presents a racist Euro-American view of history. DuBois' historic initiative to organize the *Encyclopedia Africana* mitigated against the racist, imperialist interpretation of African history, and was to play no small part in setting the record straight about the history of African peoples. Both Nkrumah and DuBois saw the *Encyclopedia* as a powerful instrument for the African peoples' achievement of their cultural renaissance. It was to be Afro-centric, basically concerned with the African continent, but at the same time give due attention to Africa's relationship to the outside world.

This significant project undertaken by DuBois merits attention today for primarily two reasons. Firstly, had the *Encyclopedia* been carried on as originally planned, its ideological orientation would have been an important tool providing scientific data with which to combat reactionary views about African history. Secondly, the *Encyclopedia* would have revealed the nature of colonialism and imperialism in Africa as well as the fight of African

peoples against these forces.

No sooner was this project launched that bourgeois interpreters of African history began to attack its product as being "racism in reverse", "unscientific" and "subjective". Many of these critics supported transferral of the project to a "committee of international experts" who would have diluted the real essence of the work. The projection suffered two major setbacks: Dr. DuBois died in 1963 and Nkrumah was overthrown by reactionary forces in 1966.

Before his death, DuBois invited the views of well over a hundred leading students of Africa in all parts of the world. The *Encyclopedia Africana* Secretariat, with DuBois as Director, was established in Accra in 1962 under the sponsorship of the Ghana Academy of Sciences. After the death of DuBois, Dr. W. Alphaeus Hunton carried on as Director until Nkrumah's overthrow. In 1964, a draft was presented setting forth the plan for a ten-volume *Encyclopedia Africana* totalling over ten million words with maps and illustrations. The volumes were to include an overview of the essential features of African history, articles on Africa as a world unit, factual analyses about the present day African states, biographical articles on notable women and men of Africa, as well as essays devoted to the political, economic and cultural developments in Africa.

In 1965, the Organization African Unity gave its support to the All-African Editorial Board of the *Encyclopedia* in a resolu-

Last Message of Dr. DuBois To The World

The body of Dr. W. E. B. DuBois was laid to final rest with full military honors on the afternoon of August 29th at a spot some fifty yards from the pounding surf, beside the wall of The Castle, residence of the President of Ghana. Immediately following the interment, a last message to the world written by Dr. DuBois was read to the thousands of assembled mourners. It was dated June 26, 1957, and had been given to his wife, Shirley Graham DuBois, for safekeeping until the hour of his death.

It is much more difficult in theory than actually to say the last good-bye to one's loved ones and friends and to all the familiar things of this life.

I am going to take a long, deep and endless sleep. This is not a punishment but a privilege to which I have looked forward for years.

I have loved my work, I have loved people and my play, but always I have been uplifted by the thought that what I have done well will live long and justify my life; that what I have done ill or never finished can now be handed on to others for endless days to be finished, perhaps better than I could have done.

And that peace will be my applause.

One thing alone I charge you. As you live, believe in life! Always human beings will live and progress to greater, broader and fuller life.

The only possible death is to lose belief in this truth simply because the great end comes slowly, because time is long.

Goodbye.

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tion that pledged full African participation in the project as opposed to relying on European and American groups. The Editorial Board stressed that the "responsibility for financing the *Encyclopedia* project should and must rest primarily upon independent African countries".

Since the overthrow of Nkrumah, the project has been taken over by reactionary scholars and sponsors in Ghana. The ideological orientation of the *Encyclopedia* has been changed to conform with the views of traditional Western scholars on Africa. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Encyclopedia Americana* are acting as advisory consultants to the project, and European scholars have been sought to write and edit the articles. Universe Books of New York has been contracted to produce the first volume this year.

The *Encyclopedia Africana* as envisioned by DuBois and his co-workers would have set a new direction in the writing of African history. DuBois devoted his final days to the constant struggle against imperialist ideologies.

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Recommended Books

(continued from page 1)

The following selections of Dr. DuBois' writing is only a very small selection of some of his major works. A further list of the hundreds of articles and books can be obtained by writing the African Agenda. Please enclose one dollar. Ed.

1. *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638*, N.Y. Social Science Press, pp. 336.
2. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, Philadelphia, U. of Pennsylvania, pp. 520.
3. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, Chicago, A. C. McClurg and Co., pp. 265.
4. *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, N.Y., Meridian Books, Inc. pp. 746.
5. *The World and Africa*, N.Y., Viking Press, pp. 276.
6. *In Battle For Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday. With Comments by Shirley Graham*, N.Y., Masses and Mainstream Publishers, pp. 192.

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democrats, DuBois was wrestling with the question of how to reconcile the national struggle against an oppressor white nation with the class struggles of all working peoples. Moreover, as with the other aforementioned national democrats, DuBois had to wrestle with the question of nationalism versus internationalism. All "Third World" leaders were faced with this aversion since they were faced with the tasks of national regeneration in the Age of Internationalism. Instinctually, the progressive leaders, DuBois not excepted, took the path recommended by V.I. Lenin to all consistent democrats:

"Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favor, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeoisie stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, we stand against."

Dr. DuBois had his weaknesses; he was a human being. One was his unwarranted faith during his youth in the possibility that petty middle class blacks could become consistent democrats as a class (the famous notion of the Talented Tenth). In the late twenties and early thirties, he divested himself of this position and moved toward the working masses. As a result of his experience with petty bourgeois blacks after visiting the Soviet Union in 1926 for two months, he averred that if that country was an example of what Bolshevism can produce then "I am a Bolshevik."

Dr. DuBois was an internationalist who was able to wage a consistent struggle for the national rights of Afro-Americans, without falling into narrow-minded nationalism. His attack on provincialism and sectarianism in the Black Liberation movement is worthy of our serious consideration today if we wish to maintain our consistent democratic thrust. As with Martin Luther King, Kwame Nkrumah, among others, Dr. DuBois saw a direct relation between the peace struggle and the struggle of Black people for their national rights. One of his later books, *In Battle for Peace*, which is no longer in print, contains one of his most frequent quotes: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called communists. Is this shame for the peacemakers or praise for the communists?"

Dr. DuBois had moved from the position of the great Russian democrat Cheryshevsky to the position of an even greater Russian, V.I. Lenin.

Possibly no citizen in the history of the United States made a greater contribution to the advancement of democracy in the age of imperialism than Dr. DuBois. Of course, DuBois lived before the age of the assassins in the U.S. who cut short the lives of such great leaders as Martin Luther King and Malcom X. The fact is that DuBois was a consistent democrat, active in the fight for peace and democracy for over three quarters of a century. During this period he never ceased to develop his political outlook in the face of changing circumstances. He, like all other human beings, did not come into the world fully developed. Hence, we should be wary of the practice of reactionary historians, publicists, and political opportunists who attempt to take DuBois out of history and arbitrarily decide that this or that statement reflects the position of the real DuBois. DuBois developed from a petty bourgeois democrat through a progressive nationalist phase to the position of a Marxist-Leninist. Dr. Martin Luther King, another great revolutionary democrat, duly noted in his last speech on February 23, 1968, the following: "We cannot talk of Dr. DuBois without recognizing that he was a radical all of his life. Some people would like to ignore the fact that he was a communist in his later years. It is worth noting that Abraham Lincoln warmly welcomed the support of Karl Marx during the Civil War and corresponded with him freely... it is time to cease muting the fact that Dr. DuBois was a genius and chose to be a Communist." (Quoted from Freedomways, Spring, 1968, pg. 108)

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(continued from page 2)

5. Social medicine, with hospitalization and care of the old.
6. Free education for all.
7. Training for jobs and jobs for all.
8. Discipline for growth and reform.
9. Freedom under law.
10. No dogmatic religion.

These aims are not crimes. They are practiced increasingly over the world. No nation can call itself free which does not allow its citizens to work for these ends.

W. E. B. Du Bois

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