

The Communist Left and Marxist Humanism

Part 2/2 The 'Unfinished American Revolution'

by Fredo Corvo

"It is no historic secret that the later the bourgeois revolution against feudalism or slavery takes place, the less complete it is, due to the height of class opposition between capital and labor. The lateness in the abolition of slavery in the United States accounts for the tenacious economic survivals of slavery which still exist in the country." Raya Dunayevskaya 'American Civilization on Trial.'

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The preceding part of this article on Marxist Humanism¹, took the rise of the ultra-right in the United States - and worldwide - since the election of Trump, as a starting point to review historical similarities and differences between the situation in the USA and in Europe. Since my point of view has been influenced by the Italian and especially the German-Dutch Communist Left, the article could not avoid the subject of differences in analysis and positioning between proletarian internationalist groups. Focusing on the position of the American internationalist current that referring to Raya Dunayevskaya calls itself 'Marxist humanist', I came to the conclusion that any serious discussion of the Communist Left with the Marxist-Humanist internationalists should include the theoretical-historical source of their actual analyses: Raya Dunayevskaya's 1963 [American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard](#).²

1 [The Communist Left and Marxist Humanism. Part 1/2 On Trump and Neo-Fascism](#).

2 Current edition: [American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard](#) (Chicago: News and Letters, 2003).

Marxist Humanism's internationalist roots

The American communist Raya Dunayevskaya (also known by the pseudonym Freddie Forest) broke with Trotsky in 1939, when he continued to maintain that the Soviet Union was a 'workers' state' even after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. She concluded from this that workers couldn't be asked to defend this 'workers' state' allied with Nazi Germany in a world war. Dunayevskaya argued that the Soviet Union had become 'state capitalist'.

Dunayevskaya was not the only one breaking with Trotskyism's 'critical' defense of the Soviet Union in the Second World War. In the Netherlands, Sneevliet (by the pseudonym Maring known as a co-founder of the Chinese CP) took the same internationalist position at the beginning of the Second World War, and formed the Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front. During the 1941 massive *February Strike* against anti-Semitic raids and workers being obliged to forced labour in Germany, the MLL-Front distributed the following appeal:

*"How to struggle?
Germany? No!
England? No!
The Third Front, the socialist proletariat.
Against National Socialism and national Bolshevism!
The international class-struggle!"*

After the Germans executed Sneevliet and several members of his group, his secretary, Stan Poppe, continued with part of the MLL-Front (the other part of the left to defend the Soviet Union). Some members of the left-communist Group of International Communists (GIC) joined the MLL-Front and formed *Communistenbond 'Spartacus'*, mainly on the positions of the German and Dutch Communist Left.³

This is how Raya Dunayevskaya in 1963 remembers 1943, which saw half a million mine workers (a big part of which were Blacks⁴) go on strike and an outburst of mass Black demonstrations against racism in New York, Chicago and Detroit:

"We have heard the 'new voices' ever since 1943, the year of growth of the Resistance Movement in Europe, the year of the miners' strike and Negro demonstrations in the United States. For the first time in American history, right in the midst of a war, a section of the proletariat and a minority grouping representing

3 Philippe Bourrinet "[The Dutch and German Communist Left \(1900-68\). 'Neither Lenin nor Trotsky nor Stalin!' - 'All Workers Must Think for Themselves!'](#)" or version at [Left-dis.nl](#).

4 The term *Negro* in citations from Dunayevskaya's 1963 document, was not intended in the now-days pejorative sense, and should be read as synonymous with *Afro-American*, or *Black*.

one-tenth of the nation, were saying: our main enemy is at home. As has happened throughout U.S. history, an activity by the Negroes demands that all others 'take sides.' Whereupon the American Communists showed up on the same platform as the police and the established forces of 'law and order' to demand that the demonstrators 'go home.' " (p. 93, all page numbers refer to the current edition, mentioned in note 2)

Note that the 'Resistance Movement in Europe' was led by the Stalinists ('Communists' in her terminology) and aligned with the Allied Front. Therefore these nationalist fronts with the bourgeoisie can in no way be compared with the 1943 miners' strike and Black demonstrations in the United States. Apart from this mistake, the quotation above contains in a nutshell Raya's position on the importance of struggles of Black masses in the United States. All the same, it shows Marxist Humanism's profound proletarian internationalist position. Understanding that all states participating in the Second World War (including the Soviet Union) were capitalist and therefore imperialist, the internationalists concluded that the proletariat could not support any of the sides in this inter-imperialist war, exactly as in the First World War.

So where is the difference between the Communist Left and internationalist groups breaking with Trotskyism? The latter groups inherited from Trotskyism certain tactics of the Communist International that the Communist Left resisted, specially parliamentarism and the formation of bourgeois fronts. The German-Dutch Left refused trade-unionism and certain functions of the party as well, understanding that the period of proletarian mass parties was over and that trade unions had become instruments of capital. The left currents in Social-democracy that became communist (Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin), later left communist (Bordiga, Gorter, Pannekoek), understood more or less the need of a **change in tactics** as a result of **a change in period**, characterized by imperialist war, economic crises and mass strikes, as in 1905 in Russia (and Poland) and in several European countries. In 1914 Anton Pannekoek, being the first to declare 'dead' the Second International and demanding the formation of a Third International, stated this change of period as follows:

"The policies and theories that comprise the spirit and nature of modern capitalism may be summed up under the name of Imperialism. (...) This policy of 'imperialism' controls nowadays to a greater or lesser extent, the political life of all nations and the mental attitude of the bourgeoisie. It has given to the possessing classes, who hitherto had nothing to oppose to the Socialist ideals of the working class, a new ideal: to make the fatherland great and mighty among the peoples of the earth. The intellectuals, who had formerly flirted with Socialism, now became the enthusiastic supporters of the bourgeoisie; the old ideals of world-peace,

*progress and democracy were supplanted by the ideals of world power, patriotism, race prejudice, the admiration of force and brutality.(...) On the other hand, the forces of resistance in the proletariat were also growing. The ever increasing taxes and military burdens aroused the bitterest opposition in ever widening circles, as was plainly evidenced by the electoral victories of the Social Democracy. Spontaneous outbreaks from among the masses revealed possibilities of new methods of working class warfare, other than parliamentarism and labor unionism. They showed the weapons at the disposal of the proletariat in the struggle against imperialism: mass-actions, in which the working masses demonstrate their opposition on the streets or seek to impose their will upon governments by means of political general strikes. Thus the political and industrial struggles of the workers flow together into one united struggle against the government and organized capital. (...) But at the same time the elements of weakness also become more apparent. The rapid growth of the party and labor union organizations has produced an army of parliamentarians, functionaries and officials, who, as a sort of specialists, became the representatives of the traditional methods of warfare and obstructed the adoption of new methods. (...) The second International is dead. But this ignoble death is no accident; like the downfall of the first International, the collapse of the second is an indication of the fact that its usefulness is at an end. It represents, in fact, the downfall of the old fighting methods of the epoch“.*⁵

In his Pannekoek biography, Gerber notes the difference with Lenin and Trotsky. Whereas these attributed the capitulation of Social-democracy before imperialism to treacherous leadership, Pannekoek stressed the objective factors.⁶ The Communist Left maintained this theory of change of tactics in response to a change of period, when the Communist International advocated what the CI described as an adoption of pre-war Bolshevik tactics successful in Tsarist Russia. In fact it proposed a continuation of social democrat tactics under different – their – leadership. With that in mind, let's have a closer look at the theoretical foundation Raya Dunayevskaya undertook to understand the importance of struggles of Black Masses in the United States.

5 Anton Pannekoek [The Downfall of the International](#) in *The New Review*, New York, November 1914.

6 John Gerber [Anton Pannekoek and the Socialism of Workers' Self-Emancipation, 1873-1960](#). Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1989, p. 108.

The success of Black nationalism before the Second World War, Lenin's theories on the Right of Nations to Self-determination and on Workers' Aristocracy

Raya Dunayevskaya was right to understand the rise of Black demonstrations and their massive participation in the miners' strike in 1943 in a situation of inter-imperialist war as their understanding that *the main enemy is at home*. The Black proletariat had no reason whatsoever to believe their participation in war industry and on the front would in any way improve its desperate situation, even after the war.

In fact, since 1918 millions proletarian African Americans were organized for the first time on a countrywide basis in Marcus Garvey's *Universal Negro Improvement Association* (UNIA). Garvey addressed the Blacks as a nation, and in a reverse utopianism proposed a return to Africa, "*uniting all the Negro peoples of the world into one great body to establish a country and Government absolutely their own.*" Against the Black intellectuals who were proud of the Negro's participation in the First World War, Garvey lashed out: "*The first dying that is to be done by the black man in the future will be done to make himself free.*" (p. 62/64)

Dunayevskaya pays much attention to the apparent success of Black nationalism in the Interbellum. While rejecting the perspective of a Black state as in contradiction with the Blacks' wish to integrate into American life, she falls back on the IV Congress of the Communist International (1922) which adopted Lenin's *Theses on the National and Colonial Questions*, and the III Congress (1920) that already had considered "the Negro in America" as part of the National Question. She also accepts the theory of Workers' Aristocracy as the "*specific political implication in Lenin's Imperialism is that, owing to the super-profits of imperialism, imperialism is able to bribe a section of its own proletariat and thereby lay the basis of political opportunism.*" (p. 66)

The German Communist Left (KAPD), following Rosa Luxemburg's early rejection of Lenin's defense of national liberation, in 1920 kicked out its 'national Bolshevik' tendency (Wolffheim and Laufenberg) ... at that moment on explicit demand of the Communist International. But soon the International changed its course into embracing in fact 'national Bolshevism': into considering Germany as an oppressed nation, victim of imperialism. Already in 1919 Radek from his German prison cell secretly negotiated on behalf of the Soviet Union with German generals and Rathenau on a military and economic alliance with Germany.⁷ In 1935 the GIK look back bitterly on the disastrous effects of Lenin's "Right of nations":

7 Bourrinet Idem p. 227/228.

“In the years 1921-1925, Germany was reckoned among the peoples oppressed by imperialism and that should led a national liberation struggle. The secret military treaty (Rapallo 1922) between bourgeois Germany and Soviet Russia was thus justified. This treaty made it possible for the German bourgeoisie to set up factories for the production of military equipment in Russia, which according to the Treaty of Versailles it was not allowed to have in Germany itself. With the help of Russia, the German bourgeoisie was armed in its liberation struggle against the imperialist oppressors France - England. That this ‘national liberation’ of Germany finally took the form of the Nazi Hitler government, and that was hostile to Russia, changed the assessment of Germany by the Third International into its opposite. Germany now appears in propaganda as fascist imperialism, as the worst enemy of the national independence of small nations whose national independence is threatened by ‘Hitler fascism.’ ”⁸

In the history of the Soviet Union we can see that Lenin’s [Right of Nations to Self-Determination](#) could be used in ever changing ways as a flexible instrument of Russia’s foreign policy, if not mere imperialism.

The German and Dutch Communist Left on the other hand opposed all kinds of nationalism as a bourgeois ideology, chaining the proletariat to ‘its own’ bourgeoisie. Its refusal included the nationalism of oppressed minorities, as e.g. Zionism with its ‘socialist’ influence on the Jewish proletariat. This didn’t prevent the Left from fighting racism in all its forms, e.g. anti-semitism and race prejudices from colonialist influences. Pannekoek in his critiques of Austromarxism underlined that nationalism is the most dangerous of bourgeois ideologies, because it not only derives its force from the past - such as religion - but from the economic foundations of society itself. Nationalism leads the proletariat away from its own class goals, divides it into different nationalities and weakens class consciousness by xenophobia. And addressing the situation of workers with different national origins in the United States, Pannekoek showed how they achieved class unity:

“They must wage their struggle as a compact unit; they know its vicissitudes and effects in the most intimate kind of community of fate. They have brought their national differences with them from their various countries, mixed with the primitive individualism of the peasants or the petit-bourgeoisie, perhaps also a little national consciousness, combined with other bourgeois traditions. But all of these differences are traditions of the past opposed to the present need to resist as a compact mass, and opposed to the living community of combat of the present

8 Group of International Communists (Holland) “Klassenkampf im Kriege; Der zweite Weltkrieg ist unabwendbar” in [Rätekorrespondenz, 1935, nr. 7](#), source: aap.be.

day. Only one difference has any practical significance here: that of language; all explanations, all proposals, all information must be communicated to everyone in their own language. In the great American strikes (the steelworkers strike at McKee's Rocks or the textile workers strike at Lawrence, for example), the strikers — a disjointed conglomeration of the most varied nationalities: French, Italians, Poles, Turks, Syrians, etc. — formed separate language sections whose committees always held joint meetings and simultaneously communicated proposals to each section in its own language, thus preserving the unity of the whole, which proves that, despite the inherent difficulties of the language barrier, a close-knit community of proletarian struggle can be achieved. Wanting to proceed here to an organizational separation between that which unites life and struggle, the real interests of those involved — and such a separation is what separatism implies — is so contrary to reality that its success can only be temporary.”⁹

Pannekoek doesn't analyze the difference between migrant workers and Black workers, that of a chattel slavery past. We will see in the next chapter how Dunayevskaya brings forward the importance of these differences.

Herman Gorter was rather close to Lenin's theory of labor aristocracy when he tried to explain the influence of revisionism on the proletariat of all imperialist states in his 1914 pamphlet *Imperialism, the World War and Social Democracy*:

*“(...) colonialist policies and therefore imperialism can provide small immediate benefits to small or even significant groups of workers (...) This is why, in every imperialist country which possesses colonies — England, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium — and even in those countries which aspire to play a leading role in world trade and to obtain worldwide influence and to become a world power — Italy, America, Australia, etc. — many leaders and the majority of the working masses are in favor of colonialism, that is, imperialism. Thus it was precisely colonialism which revisionism fostered.”*¹⁰

Lenin's thesis on labour aristocracy – like Gorter's position – has been criticized as in contradiction with the theory of surplus value.¹¹ It is more important however to see this theory as an attempt to present this suggested 'bribe from imperialist super profits' as the material basis for Lenin's essentially moralistic view of revisionism as treason by the leadership. In doing so it surpasses the material changes in global capitalism that made social democratic methods obsolete according to the German and Dutch Left. Moreover, it has been used by Stalinism to consider certain parts of the

9 Anton Pannekoek, [“Class struggle and nation”](#), 1912.

10 Herman Gorter [Imperialism, the World War and Social Democracy](#) 1914.

11 See e.g. in [The 'labour aristocracy': a sociological theory to divide the working class](#) 2009.

proletariat as 'bourgeois'. As we will see, unfortunately Raya takes over this incomplete and moralistic bolshevik approach when discussing trade-unions, political organizations and Black organizations.

However, the ideological influence of the former colonialism and imperialism on all classes in capitalism, not only in the past, cannot be denied. Communists should understand how racial prejudices are inherited in popular culture and by which actual class relations they are reproduced, even when their material basis of the past has gone. This is, as we will see, Dunayevskaya's analysis of racism and white supremacy in several stages of American history. Its Marxist-Humanist methodology may prove useful in analyzing ideological influences from colonialism that presently feed the extreme right in Europe as well. Ultimately the truth of this approach would have to be shown in developing more working-class consciousness than results from the actual left-bourgeois moralistic activism, for example in the Netherlands against 'Black Face/Black Peter', that by lack of a class perspective leave workers before the false choice between neo-liberal multi-culturalism and ultra-right racism.

From a recent book review in *The Brooklyn Rail*¹², I understand that David Roediger in his *Class, Race, and Marxism* (London, Verso, 2017) shows the influence of '(chattel) slave management' to 'scientific managerialism' of wage slavery in the United States. This approach can be an important tool for a historic analysis of the management practices in former colonial countries as well. In the Netherlands e.g. Shell employed former soldiers and officers from the colonial army as part of its lower management. In the Dutch coal mines, managers on the shop floor - at the coal front - officially were called *overseers* (Dutch: 'opzichters'), like the slave drivers on the plantations in Indonesia and Surinam.

Strengths of Raya's view of the 'unfinished revolution'

In her analysis of the **American Revolutionary War** (1775 - 1783), Dunayevskaya shows how Jefferson under pressure of the southern states left out from his first draft of the Declaration of Independence the paragraph against chattel slavery: "*In this first burial of full freedom's call lies imbedded the social conflicts of today.*" (p. 31) She explains this as a deliberate effort to maintain unity with the southern slave masters. After the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, that transformed cotton into "a lush cash crop", during the birth of industrial capitalism (1820-1830) cotton became King, not only in the plantation economy of the South, and in trade (export to Eng-

12 Adam Theron-Lee Rensch [Identity and its Discontents](#). A critical review of David Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism* (London, Verso, 2017).

land), but also in the North where New England developed a textile industry, and “Cotton as King made and unmade presidents and induced so great a national conspiracy of silence that it poisoned the young democracy”. (p. 32)

Revolts of slaves and runaways sharpened antagonisms and social conflicts. Since 1825 the Underground Railway that helped slaves run away from the South to the North and Canada, was organized by both white Abolitionists and free Blacks. David Walker urged the free Blacks to make the cause of the slave their own, arguing the destiny of both was intertwined.

The American Civil War (1861 - 1865) was inevitable to achieve unity between North and South. Marx – who supported the North – noted, with the Abolitionist Wendell Phillips, that the integration of Blacks in the Northern armies was necessary to win the war. Lincoln however wanted to conciliate the so-called ‘moderate’ border slave-states that remained in the Union. Only to prevent a defeat, Lincoln finally was compelled to announce the *Emancipation Proclamation*. For Raya this “proved that, at bottom, the sectional struggle was in fact a class struggle” not limited to the struggle between North and South, but also for the “classless” Western democracy, where “everyman” could become a property owner, an independent farmer, this illusion of the Frontier.

After the Civil War the relations of production fitting for the dominance of cotton prevented the emancipation of the ‘freed’ slaves. The abolition of slavery in the Constitution was virtually nullified once the Northern Army was withdrawn. The slavocrats enacted the infamous ‘Black Codes’ with impunity as a consequence of the new, expansive development of Northern capitalism, that had been a motivating force for the Civil War as well as for the ending of the Second American Revolution. In line with Marx’s position in the 1848 European bourgeois revolutions, Raya states: “Only the most prodigious revolutionary exertions by slaves, Abolitionists and, in many of its stages, labor, could tear apart the power link of cash and compromise that bound together cotton and textiles; cotton growers, cotton shippers and financiers. (...) The three basic constituents of the betrayal, that is to say, the unfinished state of revolution, were: (1) the freedmen did not get ‘the 40 acres and a mule’ they were promised; (2) the old slave owners did get back their plantations and thus the power to institute a mode of production to suit cotton culture; and (3) the crop lien system was introduced with ‘new’ labor: share cropping. (...)” (p. 40-41) ‘Share cropping’ (a kind of debt slavery) continued the economic relations that suited both the class interests of the Northern capitalists and the Southern Bourbons.

The period between the retreat of Federal troops from the South (1877) and the outbreak of the First World War (1914) was one of **growth of industry, growth of the**

proletariat and growth of its struggle. For the first time Black workers in the North were unionized (in *The Knights of Labour*) side by side with white workers. American capital reacted strongly, with repression by the army and by the use of private armies by captains of industry. In 1886, against 80,000 workers on strike for the eight-hour day, the anarchist labor leaders, Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel, were sent to the gallows. The pressure by capital made it possible that the later AFL could take over the struggles for an eight-hour working day, as an apolitical craft union, openly racist with its “demand for the ‘Chinese Exclusion’ act, not to mention racially separate locals for Negroes. Its indifference to the unskilled was to cause such isolation from the Negro that it would become impossible to organize heavy industry without breaking away from that craft union stranglehold.” (p. 44)

In the South Blacks were excluded from light industries, e.g. textiles, but in the developing heavy industry – coal, steel, iron – Blacks got jobs alongside whites. By 1900 the United Mine Workers claimed 1/3 of the total organized Black labor force. Sawmills and fertilizer plants offered strictly “Negro jobs”. From discontent with the craft unionism of AFL the Western Federation of Miners merged into the IWW that had its most important unions in the South, in the lumber industries, among long-shoremen and dockworkers. *The most prominent of the Black IWW organizers was Ben Fletcher, who was jailed with the founders of the IWW, Haywood, Chaplin and others for their opposition to the First World War.*

Apart from these enormous changes in industry and industrial relations in the North, the period between 1877 and 1914 was characterized by **agricultural unrest in both the North and the South**, stimulated by the agrarian depressions of the 1880s and 1890s. In the South, Black farmers (‘croppers’) struggled united with white farmers against the dominance of capital over agriculture. Not trusting any politician, the movement, called *Populism*, founded the People’s Party that got many Governors elected. But, as Raya notes: “The unity of white and black was soon, in turn, shattered by the combined interests of the Bourbon South with monopoly capital that had won the struggle over labor in the North, and spread its tentacles over the Caribbean and the Pacific. Monopoly capital’s growth into imperialism puts the last nail in the coffin of Southern democracy and thus not only re-establishes racism in the South but brings it to the North.” (p. 47) “Behind the apparent suddenness of the rise of imperialism stands the spectacular industrial development after the Civil War. The unprecedented rate of industrialization telescoped its victory over agriculture and its transformation from competitive to monopoly capital.” (p.51)

Generally I can agree with Raya’s analysis of the period from the Independence to the beginning of imperialism. But it is remarkable that in her whole text she only uses

once the marxist concept of *proletarianization*: “The Negro was to experience no serious proletarianization and urbanization until the First World War, when the flow of immigrant labor was shut off and Northern capital was compelled to comb the South for labor needed in war industries.” (p. 58-59) She doesn’t mention at all the very marxist concept of *industrial reserve army* for the changes in the social situation of Blacks in the South after the end of the Civil War. But in fact, it is this function as an *industrial reserve army* that American imperialism attributes to the Black proletariat (exactly as it did to women, who were only integrated on a mass scale in production in the First World War and the Second World War). However, what makes Raya’s analysis so outstanding is that she underlines the way capital tries to divide the growing proletariat: by racist prejudices against Black proletarians (as sexist prejudices in the case of women workers):

“(…) in the United States the national minorities that came to this country fought for integration within the larger society. They, the immigrants, more or less succeeded. The exception to the integration is the Negro. Why? Surely it isn't the Negro's doing; he only wants his assimilation accepted. We see that here is a complex pattern that cannot be solved by abstract criteria as to what constitutes a nation. It is the Negro's special oppression, the deprivation of his political rights, the discrimination against him on the job, Jim Crowism and racial segregation that makes of him 'a problem.' ” (p. 67)

See how Raya smuggles Lenins idea of the Right of Nations into her analysis, while evading the question where can be found the State, the ruling class, the territory and the language of this oppressed Black Nation. But this doesn’t prevent her making the point of **the importance of the racial prejudices and of the actual class relations by which they are reproduced**, even when their material basis of the past has gone. After the partial abolition of slavery and the continued importance of cotton, ‘share cropping’ became the material base for racism. When textile industries in the South opened their gates only for white workers, this gave them the false idea of being privileged above their Black class brothers. All the same when Black proletarians got the worst paying jobs in the South, the more when they were working (and struggling) side by side with poor whites, racism served to divide the class. Furthermore, American imperialism needed the idea of ‘white supremacy’ to justify what in fact has been a colonization of e.g. Liberia, the Philippines, Puerto Rico (till today, see Trump’s overt racist behavior after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico!) and Cuba.¹³

13 [List of United States colonial possessions.](#)

Weaknesses

Reading Raya on several unions and organizations for civil rights, I doubt if her analysis is really adequate. Does her history of Black Americans confirm Raya's statement on **industrial relations**?

"What is pivotal to the study of the role of the Negro in American Civilization is that, at each turning point in history, he anticipates the next stage of development of labor in its relationship with capital. Because of his dual oppression, it could not be otherwise." (p. 81)

With the move to the North since 1916, the Black industrial reserve army is led into production (and to the front) during world war, and out of it, to be removed back into the misery of unemployment when the war and after-war economic booms are over, that were the result of American expansion on the world imperialist scene. What do these movement in and out of production have to do with changes in trade-unionism and its relation to capital?

In this question Raya leans heavily on what Lenin sees as "betrayal" of the social-democratic leaders, not understanding that the imperialist phase made old tactics, like unionism, redundant.¹⁴ She takes over this incomplete and moralistic bolshevik approach when discussing trade-unions, political organizations and Black organizations.

We have seen in the chapter above that between 1877 and the outbreak of the First World War (1914) the Black workers in the North worked with, were organized with and struggled together with white workers. How can I consider this as his anticipation of *the next stage of development of labor in its relationship with capital*, when the next stage is that of the replacement of anarchist unions with those of the AFL? In 1886, against 80,000 workers on strike for the eight-hour day, the anarchist labor leaders, Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel, were sent to the gallows. The pressure by capital made it possible that the later AFL could take over the struggles for an 8 hour working day, as an apolitical craft union, openly racist with its "*demand for the 'Chinese Exclusion' act, not to mention racially separate locals for Negroes. Its indifference to the unskilled was to cause such isolation from the Negro that it would become im-*

14 Lenin was not only wrong on tactics, but on strategy as well, on the aim of proletarian revolution. Lenin confused the capitalist and imperialist form, the cartel and monopoly, for its contents, for the change that the old Engels had demonstrated, from dispersion and competition into unified and socialized labour. By following reformist positions, contrary to the positions of F. Engels and the late 19th century social-democracy, Lenin in 'State and Revolution' favored in fact state capitalism to 'the association of free and equal producers', anticipating the elimination of workers' power of the soviets. See GIK "Basic principles of communist production and distribution", ([only in the 2nd Dutch Edition](#)), [Ch. 2](#), and GIC '[Marxism and state communism the withering away of the state](#)', 1932.

possible to organize heavy industry without breaking away from that craft union stranglehold.” (p. 45) This fundamental function of the AFL for imperialism is not contradicted by the seemingly ‘radical’ behavior of its president Samuel Gompers when he began by opposing American imperialism before ... capitulating to it (p. 55), or that Gompers “*sent delegates to the newly formed second Marxist International and got it to approve the American suggestion for a general strike, world-wide if possible, for the eight-hour day.*” (p. 45) Such verbal radicalism was very usual in the Second International, whose parties and unions in overwhelming majority defended ‘their’ imperialism in 1914. We cannot limit ourselves to look for ‘treason’ by its ‘bribed’ leaders, as the Bolsheviks did. The Communist Left in Germany understood that the period of imperialism had ended the possibility of reforms. Therefore the unions and parties that once belonged to the proletariat, were faced with the choice: continue their existence as formal organizations by accepting their function of integrating the working class into capitalism and imperialism, or be destroyed, as happened to the anarchist unions in the United States.

What about the advance of the CIO as industrial unions? The Left Communists at the German waterfront were greatly influenced by the transformation of American craft unionism (that had continued its existence into the 1920s in the German social-democratic unions) into industrial unionism. For this reason the *Allgemeine Arbeiter-Unionen* in Germany, linked to the left-communist KAPD, had been organized by industry. How did the Black worker anticipate *this next stage of development of labor in its relationship with capital*? Raya points out that the Black worker, in majority unskilled, was locked out from the craft unionism of AFL, and that he worked – side by side with whites – in new heavy industries like coal and steel in the South, plus in the strictly Black industries like lumber camps, sawmills and fertilizer plants in the South.

“By no accident, the discontent with the craft unionism of the A.F. of L. came first of all from the Western Federation of Miners, which merged into the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905. It was built on militant class struggle lines, industrial unionism 30 years ahead of the CIO. It also had, first, a socialist, and then a syndicalist philosophy of ‘one big union’ which would not merely fight to better conditions of labor and raise wages, but to control production. At the height of its power, the IWW claimed one million members, 100,000 of whom were Negroes. The most important of the IWW unions among Negroes were precisely in the prejudice-ridden South(...) In the United States, too, we see the vanguard role of the IWW not only as labor in general, but specifically in relationship to Negro labor who thereby not only as ‘mass’ but as reason refashioned American unionism. The most prominent of the Negro IWW organizers was Ben Fletcher who was jailed with the founders of the IWW, Haywood, Chaplin and

others for their opposition to World War I. (...) By then the war hysteria, persecution by the government and imprisonment of its leaders brought about the decline of the IWW. The only thing that awaited the Negro in the North was isolation and extreme frustration.” (p. 58-59)

The CIO got the chance to establish itself as a ‘reasonable’ union with decisive influence on workers - especially the unskilled and Black workers - in industries not covered by AFL only after the repression of the IWW in 1914-1918. Raya is overtly enthusiastic about the CIO in the crisis-ridden and disillusioning 1930s:

“For the first time, on a national scale, white and black labor had united to gain union recognition. For the first time, organized labor struck where it hurt capital most, in all the basic industries — rubber, coal, steel, auto. For the first time, employed and unemployed did not work at cross purposes.” (p. 72)

However, this is not in contradiction with the function that the CIO fulfilled for capitalism, in regions and industries that the AFL could not reach. As Raya states her-self: The CIO “created a break also in the ‘nationalism’ of the Negro. (...) It is true that, without the Negro, the CIO could not have organized the basic industries where Negro labor was pivotal.” This is very correct, but Raya shows a fundamental bias when she continues: “It is no less true that labor’s unity was a fact that could never again be controverted, not even when the Negro once again strikes out on his own during World War II and presently.” (p. 72-73) The point missed here is that the ‘unity’ between Black and white workers in the CIO has not been able to break the unity between labor and capital during and after the Second World War. No wonder the CIO supported Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal Coalition. As the AFL had arisen to serve capital at the beginning of its imperialist phase, now the CIO came up to serve capital from the 1930s on, at least since the Second World War. Therefore CIO and AFL could fuse in 1955 into the present AFL-CIO So where is the pretended ‘vanguard role’ played in American unionism? We can agree that in strikes and demonstrations during the war, Black workers played an important role, but strikes are not unions.

Unionism - no matter if it is based on craft or on industry - is an outdated form of workers’ struggle. Essentially it is an organization from a time when capitalism consisted of relatively small enterprises, isolated from each other and in mutual competition. Unionized workers did away with their mutual competition by having union leaders from their offices oversee the situation and decide where individual capitalists could be put under pressure by a strike. As the German and Dutch Communist Left underlined, the growth of enterprises, the power of financial capital and of employers’ organization makes obsolete this union tactic of organization of struggles by leaders from outside. Imperialism implies mass struggle and mass decision-making by

means of general assemblies on the shop floor, or in the streets, by elected and revocable committees, at a certain stage centralized in workers' councils.

The 1960s, when the period of international reconstruction was at its highest point, Black and white workers in the United States and in Europe in a series of wildcat strikes started to question union dominance of their struggles. In the U.S.A. a new generation contested the segregation between Black and white in public transport, in education, the misery of the ghettos, in short the treatment of the Black person as a second-class citizen. Raya understood very well that the dynamic of workers' struggles reopened the historic possibility for proletarian revolution. Her 1963 text is at the same time critical about the Kennedy Administration and several civil rights and Black movements, e.g. the *Black Muslims* for their being anti-white and claiming a separate territory (see p. 68).

Since the 1960s we have seen the development of a whole spectrum of civil rights and minorities' organizations (for Afro-Americans, Mexicans, women, sexual minorities, etc.). Some of those who claim to represent Afro-Americans, in fact function as a Black bourgeoisie, chaining Afro-Americans to the State, mostly as appendixes of the Democratic Party.¹⁵ In doing so, they follow the example of the academics called 'Talented Tenth', but this time with overwhelming success. Their success renders questionable the underlying idea in many actual positions of Marxist Humanist organizations that sectional struggle of Afro-Americans *is* class struggle, or 'dialectically', 'spontaneously' or 'inevitably' *will become* class struggle.

There is a second reason. In the past this position was seemingly correct at those historical moments (the First World War and the Second World War and their aftermath of prosperity) that the Black industrial reserve army had the chance to be integrated into production and threatened to go into mass demonstrations - or actually did so - and of course when it worked and struggled side by side with white workers. Those historical moments are definitely over. The resurgence of autonomous workers' struggles of the 1960s and 1970s has been defeated by 'neo-liberalism.' With America's actual decline as the no. 1 economic world power, there is no chance that the Black workforce will be employed on a mass scale. Now is the time for mass unemployment, repression and racism. Now is the time for struggle against the effects of the crisis of capitalism and imperialist wars. We can see a beginning of these struggles in the U.S.A. in the mass mobilizations against police repression and against Trumpism. However, if Marxist-Humanists play down the importance of left-bourgeois influences in these movements, instead of denouncing their maneuvering, if

15 Fredo Corvo "[What's Left after the election of Trump?](#)", Libcom, Nov 28 2016.

John Clegg "[Black Representation After Ferguson.](#)", The Brooklyn Rail, May 2016.

they continue acting the same as trotskyist organizations, this internationalist current will finally be lost for the proletariat.

The period of bourgeois revolutions, will it ever end?

Our period is unique in history. This urges reflection on the value of marxist theories that were developed on different continents and in other times, reflecting different balances of forces between classes. Therefore it's worth the effort to reflect on the important changes that imperialism brought to the development of capitalism. As I tried to show above, Marxist Humanism, as developed by Raya Dunayevskaya, in part relies on some of the weakest Leninist theories about the implications of the imperialist stage of capitalism: the theories of Right of Nations to Self-Determination and that of the bribing of a Labor Aristocracy and its treason against the workers' movement. The Communist Left in Germany and the Netherlands, in line with Rosa Luxemburg, opposed all nationalism, including that of the oppressed. In line with the first texts of the Communist International, it considered the outbreak of the First World War as the end of the 'progressive' period of capitalism and the opening of a period of social revolution. The German and Dutch Communist Left concluded from this that the era of social-democratic tactics like parliamentarism, trade unionism and fronts with progressive parts of the bourgeoisie was over, and that the time was for mass struggles, led by the masses themselves.

But what about bourgeois revolutions and national liberation struggles? Many at that time considered the Russian Revolution a bourgeois revolution, or a bourgeois revolution executed by the proletariat, to become a part of the world revolution (according to Marx's model of the 1848 bourgeois revolution in Germany). We can see from this that at that time - and still today - many believe that bourgeois revolutions and national liberation are still possible in the era of imperialism. However, the upsurge of nationalism in Eastern Europe during the Interbellum was used by the Whites to form a cordon of states to isolate the Soviet Union, all governed by the ultra-right, e.g. Piłsudski, who before as a socialist had fought for the independence of Poland. Raya hailed national liberation struggles in the '3rd World', especially Africa, not understanding that in the period of imperialism these struggles only survive as proxy wars between imperialist powers. Since the disintegration of imperialist blocs after the implosion of the Soviet Union, these wars are part of a process of disintegration of states and whole regions of the world. This disintegration is in no way to the advantage of the proletariat, as different shades of trotskyism believe.

The truth is that capitalism isn't able nor willing to complete its proper revolutions. Apart from the never-realized abstract slogans with which the bourgeoisie convinced proletarians and peasants to fight for its revolution ("freedom, equality, brotherhood"), pre-capitalist class relationships were continued for several reasons. Slavery in the colonies was continued, including those of countries with fully fledged civil rights, such as France. After the formal abolition of slavery, slavery actually continued, e.g. as "contract" slavery by Hindustanis in Dutch Guyana (Surinam). The continuation of chattel slavery in the Southern States of the USA after Independence and its replacement by debt-slavery of the share croppers after the Civil War were no exception.

History shows that pre-capitalist phenomena of superstructure also persist after bourgeois revolutions, as shown by the lack of women's rights and discrimination on the basis of sexual preference (from criminalization to limitation of parental rights). Certain states also have limited the political rights (such as the right to vote) for certain citizens (e.g. lower incomes) and sometimes still do (hindering Black voters in the U.S.A.).

Capitalism is unable to incorporate the entire world population as laborers into its production process, even where it 'freed' them from pre-capitalist relations. The masses of former craftsmen and farmers change into unemployed proletarians. The enormous number of these desperate unemployed masses of proletarians means that we hardly can consider them to form an 'industrial reserve army', because the vast majority has no hope ever to be integrated into capitalist production.

This does not mean that the revolutionary proletariat, nor the communists, in order to overcome these pre-capitalist class relationships and ideologies, would have to fight for bourgeois democracy, for bourgeois revolutions or national liberation, or in other cases to struggle to give these a finishing touch. On the contrary, only in the struggles of the working class, integrating the giant masses of unemployed proletarians, the deeply felt desire for freedom, for equality and recognition of human dignity will transform into revolutionary energy, not for bourgeois projects, but for the proper class aims of the proletariat. Recognizing the exceptional position of Black proletarians, understanding how slavery and continued discrimination formed the Black identity, communists should explain that the proletariat isn't Black or white, that it is capital that uses racism to divide the working class. In doing so, communists emphasize overall proletarian identity, expressing the fact of being a 'community of fate' (Pan-nekoek), the need for the proletariat to develop itself from a 'class in itself' to active solidarity, especially with oppressed minorities of the class, into a 'class for itself', forming autonomous mass organization, unmasking class divisions in material and

ideological respects, both 'white supremacy' and its left-bourgeois democratic counterpart.

Fredo Corvo, November 21st, 2017

Abstract

Marxist Humanism takes its internationalist roots from Raya Dunayevskaya's break with Trotsky in 1939 on his defense of the Russian 'workers' state' in case of a world war. In the Netherlands, Sneevliet's Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front took the same position. During the 1941 massive February Strike against anti-Semitic raids and workers being obliged to forced labour in Germany, the MLL-Front defended its internationalist position. Dunayevskaya in 1943 saw half a million mine workers (a big part of which were Blacks) go on strike and an outburst of mass Black demonstrations against racism in New York, Chicago and Detroit.

The Communist Left differs from internationalist groups breaking with Trotskyism in the latter's inheritance from Trotskyism of certain tactics of the Communist International that the Communist Left resisted, The Communist Left understood more or less the need for a change in tactics as a result of a change in period, characterized by imperialist war, economic crises and mass strikes. However, Lenin and Trotsky attributed the capitulation of Social-democracy before imperialism to treacherous leadership and proposed a continuation of social democrat tactics under different - their - leadership.

Dunayevskaya takes the apparent success of Black nationalism in the Interbellum as an occasion to fall back on the IV Congress of the Communist International (1922) which adopted Lenin's Theses on the National and Colonial Questions and to accept the theory of Workers' Aristocracy. The German and Dutch Communist Left on the other hand opposed all kinds of nationalism as a bourgeois ideology, including the nationalism of oppressed minorities. Pannekoek underlined that nationalism is the most dangerous of bourgeois ideologies, because it not only derives its force from the past - such as religion - but from the economic foundations of society itself.

The article generally agrees with Dunayevskaya's analyses of the American Revolutionary War, of the American Civil War and the period thereafter till the beginning of imperialism. By using the marxist concepts of proletarianization and industrial reserve army, the article on the one hand confirms Raya's outstanding analysis of the division of the growing proletariat by racist prejudices against Black proletarians, but on the other hand criticizes her analyses of the development of unionism and of industrial relations, underlining the function that the AFL and the CIO fulfilled for imperialism.

Concerning the movement for civil rights, the article states that some of those who claim to represent Afro-Americans in fact function as a Black bourgeoisie, chaining Afro-Americans to the State, mostly as appendixes of the Democratic Party. Their overwhelming success renders questionable the underlying idea in many actual positions that sectional struggle of Afro-Americans is class struggle, or 'dialectically', 'spontaneously' or 'inevitably' will become class struggle. This position was seemingly correct at those historical moments (the First World War and the Second World War and their aftermath of prosperity) that the Black industrial reserve army had the chance to be integrated into production. With America's actual decline as the no. 1 economic world power, there is no chance that the Black workforce will be employed on a mass scale. Now is the time for struggle against the effects of the crisis

of capitalism and imperialist wars. We can see a beginning of these struggles in the U.S.A. But Marxist-Humanists seem to play down the importance of left-bourgeois influences in these movements.

The revolutionary proletariat, and the communists, should not fight for bourgeois democracy, for bourgeois revolutions or national liberation, or in other cases struggle to give these a finishing touch. Recognizing the exceptional position of Black proletarians, understanding how slavery and continued discrimination formed the Black identity, communists should explain that the proletariat isn't Black or white, that it is capital that uses racism to divide the working class.