

tremendously, there will be great difficulty in maintaining these gains after the war. When the shooting is over the plants responsible for the current boom will shut down entirely, or production will be sharply curtailed. And a glance at the record shows that there is a heavy concentration of this type of industry and activity. The South is packed with Army camps, shipbuilding, airplane and munitions plants further account for much of our industrial development. None of these offers a rosy future as a peacetime investment.

Lasseter added:

The South faces a grave readjustment. Having had its first taste of prosperity resulting from increased industrial activity, it is slated to lose the source of this prosperity"

It goes without saying that expansion and building of new industries in the Black Belt would, of course, have its influence among the Negro people. Such a process would lead to the extension of the working class base among the Negro people. Instead of de-limiting the national characteristics of the Negro people, it would help importantly to develop the national consciousness of the Negro people and thus accelerate the realization of the aim of self-determination. The extension of the working class base in the oppressed Negro nation is fundamentally the guarantee of the successful forward movement of the national liberation cause of the entire Negro people.

### Self-Determination – A Guiding Principle

It is my opinion that we again must raise the right of self-determination for the Negro people in the Black Belt, not as a slogan of immediate action, but essentially as a *programmatic demand*. It might perhaps be argued that, raised in this manner, the slogan is academic and should therefore not be raised at all. Such criticism fails to take into account the difference between a slogan advanced as an issue on the order of the day and a *guiding principle*.

We must place the question in terms of historical perspective, taking into account concretely the stage of the Negro liberation movement today and the present practical struggle for full Negro rights, on behalf of which there must be established both the broadest Negro unity and the broadest Negro and white alliance. Between the current struggles and the programmatic slogan here advanced there is no conflict, but a vital interconnection. The goal of national self-determination should serve as a beacon to the day-to-day struggles for Negro rights and should serve to hasten the realization of the right to self-determination.

## Women's Rights

"From 1947–52 – active in national women's movements and united front movements such as the Congress of American Women; National Council of Negro Women"

Autobiographical History

"These special forms of oppression particularly affect the working women, the farm women and the triply oppressed Negro women; but, in varying degrees, they help us to determine the inferior status of women in all classes of society."

International Women's Day and the Struggle for Peace

### Introduction

Claudia Jones became a political prisoner for writing and delivering an International Women's Day address which in its original form was titled "International Women's Day and the Struggle for Peace" and republished in pamphlet form by the National Women's Commission, CPUSA as "Women in the Struggle for Peace and Security" (both in 1950). This section on Women's Rights includes that historic essay and contains three (3) other representative essays, all dated from 1949-1953. These essays are more mature and illustrate her gender-related work as an activist and theoretician on women's rights.

In 1947, when the first of these essays appear, she would have been thirty-two years old. "For New Approaches to Our Work Among Women," was actually an internal discussion piece, its title signaling the start of this new Claudia Jones-led initiative when she was secretary of the Women's Commission of the CPUSA but also involved in other women's organizations. All the subsequent essays on women's rights stem from this beginning point even though, of course, they take a variety of different angles, nevertheless to get at a series of core ideas that she saw as relevant. In this essay, we see her challenging the CP hierarchy on race and gender as she takes apart its draft resolution which was supposed to be building a peace coalition. Her position is: Where are women in this? Where are black and working class women? In her first sentence, she states that the resolution did not "sufficiently

stress the need to fight for the special social, economic and political needs of the masses of American women." Her argument seems to run that the Party wants to build a mass movement but was not dealing with women substantially. In her view: how could this be when women represented "half the nation." This would be her position consistently and is identified as representing a divergent view from the basic Communist Party position which would have been arguing then that class was prior to gender or race. Jones reversed this paradigm and instead found a variety of ways to argue against this. To reveal how gender fit, Claudia would find theoretical positions within Marxism-Leninism, especially Lenin on the "woman question" to make that argument.

Thus, "For New Approaches To Our Work Among Women," sets the terms for subsequent discussion and can be read as a concept paper which would lay out a few issues: the move to send women back into the kitchen following the war; the inadequate social services; lack of child care and the absence of training programmes to help women get new skills. She references the 1947 establishment of the Women's Commission and speaks to the failure to integrate the work of the Commission into the Party structures because of the absence of a theoretical understanding of the "woman question." In this effort, she counted William Z. Foster, General Secretary of the CPUSA from 1945 as an ally and would consistently refer to his advanced position on women for validation. This is evident in her autobiographical history to him and in her essay, "Foster's Theoretical Guidance to our Work Among Women." In this essay she credits Foster for the founding of the Women's Commission and identifies their common sensitivity to the lot of women in their mothers' poverty and early death. Of interest to the reader will be her identification of the Main Resolution of the 15th National Convention of CPUSA which centred on the "role and importance of women" and uses language identical to Jones (she obviously collaborated on its writing) in the call for "increased integration of our women membership in the leadership of the Party on all levels, particularly working class and Negro comrades..." My sense is that this is her resolution; her ideas.

Thus Claudia's activism, writing and thinking on women's rights critiques the weaknesses she saw in the CP around the issues of race and gender. She counters these theoretically: providing information on facts and trends as it relates to women, working with trade unions, avoiding the neglect of black women in particular, providing services which would allow women to do organizational work. She felt then that working class women would respond if the Party would address these weaknesses.

We begin with perhaps the most well known Claudia Jones essay: "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women" (1949), which is a wonderful documentation of where women were located in the 1940s and 1950s but which continues to have implications for ongoing arguments which account for black women in a variety of locations. It is perhaps the most important essay on black women in that

time-period laying out the statistics on a range of issues and economic hardships that confronted black women but also providing historical background and information on black woman's status at the time as women, as black people and as workers. And she ends it by challenging white supremacist thinking and the callousness in the treatment of black women and suggests that the responsibility for dealing with this behaviour and its limitations rests squarely with white people. The key issues section is an important summary as it included supporting struggles that are generated by racism, advancing the employment of black women and moving away from the idea even in the party that black women were naturally domestic. She felt that if the CP would deal with the more benign structural and individual racism, inside as it keeps challenging the more extreme forms outside such as lynching, it would be a natural organization for black people. This essay proves that in the Communist Party, Jones advanced a pro-black, pro-women, pro-black women agenda. This is an indispensable essay for anyone studying this period, the history of black feminism and subjects of race, gender and class.

Another essay published that same year, "We Seek Full Equality for Women" (1949), is short but one of my favourites in that it captures her art of black left feminism. She references Foster again but as a lever to talk about how Marxism-Leninism saw the woman question as of course related to woman's relation to the mode of production. Written for a general audience, it is a nice summary of the basics of Marxist-Leninist feminism, outlines the theoretical work that was taking place and the praxis in terms of the organization of state branches of the Women's commission and saw the Communist Party as leading the way to developing a progressive women's movement. "For the Unity of Women in the Cause of Peace" (1951) was organized around the theme of building an international women's peace movement. The other essays in this section were published in various print media: journals like *Political Affairs*, newspapers like *The Worker* and some republished as pamphlets. The famous International Women's Day essay was first a speech then republished in *Political Affairs* and made available in pamphlet form by the Women's Commission.

Claudia Jones' repeated concerns are with the super-exploitation of women, especially the black woman's location in society, the effects of war on women's lives and the need to organize generally but also to create women's peace organizations, the international connections between women and the fact that women make up half the world, which became her theme for a series of journalistic columns in *The Daily Worker*. One sees in Claudia Jones's thinking and activism the back story of a struggle which got lost in the 1970s mainstream Feminist Movement which black women contested consistently, we see with good reason, as it tended to operate too often along the principles of bourgeois feminism, i.e., blaming men only for the oppression of women and not the policies and practices of the states.

# An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women (1949)<sup>15</sup>

An outstanding feature of the present stage of the Negro liberation movement is the growth in the militant participation of Negro women in all aspects of the struggle for peace, civil rights and economic security. Symptomatic of this new militancy is the fact that Negro women have become symbols of many present-day struggles of the Negro people. This growth of militancy among Negro women has profound meaning, both for the Negro liberation movement and for the emerging anti-fascist, anti-imperialist coalition.

To understand this militancy correctly, to deepen and extend the role of Negro women in the struggle for peace and for all interests of the working class and the Negro people, means primarily to overcome the gross neglect of the special problems of Negro women. This neglect has too long permeated the ranks of the labour movement generally, of Left progressives and also of the Communist Party. The most serious assessment of these shortcomings by progressives, especially by Marxist-Leninists, is vitally necessary if we are to help accelerate this development and integrate Negro women in the progressive and labour movement and in our own Party.

The bourgeoisie is fearful of the militancy of the Negro woman and for good reason. The capitalists know, far better than many progressives seem to know, that once Negro women undertake action, the militancy of the whole Negro people and thus of the anti-imperialist coalition, is greatly enhanced.

Historically, the Negro woman has been the guardian, the protector, of the Negro family. From the days of the slave traders down to the present, the Negro woman has had the responsibility of caring for the needs of the family, of militantly shielding it from the blows of Jim Crow insults, of rearing children in an atmosphere of lynch terror, segregation and police brutality and of fighting for an education for their children. The intensified oppression of the Negro people, which has been the hallmark of the postwar reactionary offensive, cannot therefore but lead to an acceleration of the militancy of the Negro woman. As mother, as Negro, and as worker, the Negro woman fights against the wiping out of the Negro family, against the Jim Crow ghetto existence which destroys the health, morale and the very life of millions of her sisters, brothers and children. Viewed in this light, it is not accidental that the American bourgeoisie has intensified its oppression, not only of the Negro people in general, but of Negro women in particular. Nothing so exposes the drive to fascism in the nation as the

callous attitude which the bourgeoisie displays and cultivates toward Negro women.

The vaunted boast of the ideologists of Big Business – that American women possess "the greatest equality" in the world is exposed in all its hypocrisy when one sees that in many parts of the world, particularly in the Soviet Union, the New Democracies and the formerly oppressed land of China, women are attaining new heights of equality. But above all else, Wall Street's boast stops at the water's edge where Negro and working class women are concerned. Not equality, but degradation and super-exploitation: this is the actual lot of Negro women!

Consider the hypocrisy of the Truman Administration, which boasts about "exporting democracy throughout the world" while the state of Georgia keeps a widowed Negro mother of twelve children under lock and key. Her crime? She defended her life and dignity aided by her two sons – from the attacks of "white supremacists." Or ponder the mute silence with which the Department of Justice has greeted Mrs. Amy Mallard, widowed Negro school-teacher, since her husband was lynched in Georgia because he had bought a new Cadillac and became, in the opinion of the "white supremacists," "too uppity." Contrast this with the crocodile tears shed by the US delegation to the United Nations for Cardinal Mindszenty, who collaborated with the enemies of the Hungarian People's Republic and sought to hinder the forward march to fuller democracy by the formerly oppressed workers and peasants of Hungary. Only recently, President Truman spoke solicitously in a Mother's Day Proclamation about the manifestation of "our love and reverence" for all mothers of the land. The so-called "love and reverence" for the mothers of the land by no means includes Negro mothers who, like Rosa Lee Ingram, Amy Mallard, the wives and mothers of the Trenton Six, or the other countless victims, dare to fight back, against lynch law and "white supremacy" violence.

## Economic Hardships

Very much to the contrary, Negro women – as workers, as Negroes, and as women – are the most oppressed stratum of the whole population.

In 1940, two out of every five Negro women, in contrast to two out of every eight white women, worked for a living. By virtue of their majority status among the Negro people, Negro women not only constitute the largest percentage of women heads of families, but, are the main breadwinners of the Negro family. The large proportion of Negro women in the labour market is primarily a result of the low-scale earnings of Negro men. This disproportion also has its roots in the treatment and position of Negro women over the centuries.

Following emancipation and persisting to the present day, a large percentage of Negro women – married as well as single – were forced to work for a living. But despite the shift in employment of Negro women from rural to urban areas, Negro women are still generally confined to the lowest-paying jobs. The

Womans Bureau, US Department of Labour, *Handbook of Facts for Women Workers* (1948, Bulletin 225), shows white women workers as having median earnings more than twice as high as those of non-white women and non-white women workers (mainly Negro women) as earning less than \$500 a year! In the rural South, the earnings of women are even less. In three large Northern industrial communities, the median income of white families (\$1,720) is also 60 per cent higher than that of Negro families (\$1,095). The super exploitation of the Negro woman worker is thus revealed not only in that she receives, as woman, less than equal pay for equal work with men, but also in that the majority of Negro women get less than half the pay of white women. Little wonder, then, that in Negro communities their conditions of ghetto-living – low salaries, high rents, high prices, etc. – virtually become an iron curtain hemming in the lives of Negro children and undermining their health and spirit! Little wonder that the maternity death rate for Negro women is triple that of white women! Little wonder that one out of every ten Negro children born in the United States does not grow to manhood or womanhood!

The low scale of earnings of the Negro woman is directly related to her almost complete exclusion from virtually all fields of work except the most menial and underpaid, namely, domestic service. Revealing are the following data given in the report of 1945, *Negro Women War Workers* (Women's Bureau, US Department of Labour, Bulletin 205): Of a total 7½ million Negro women, over a million are in domestic and personal service. The overwhelming bulk – about 918,000 – of these women workers are employed in private families and some 98,000 are employed as cooks, waitresses and in like services in other than private homes. The remaining 60,000 workers in service trades are in miscellaneous personal service occupations (beauticians, boarding house and lodging-house keepers, charwomen, janitors, practical nurses, housekeepers, hostesses and elevator operators).

The next largest number of Negro women workers are engaged in agricultural work. In 1940, about 245,000 were agricultural workers. Of them, some 128,000 were unpaid family workers.

Industrial and other workers numbered more than 96,000 of the Negro Women reported. Thirty-six thousand of these women were in manufacturing, the chief groups being 11,300 in apparel and other fabricated textile products, 1,000 in tobacco manufactures and 5,600 in food and related products.

Clerical and kindred workers in general numbered only 13,000. There were only 8,300 Negro women workers in civil service.

The rest of the Negro women who work for a living were distributed along the following lines: 50,000 teachers, 6,700 nurses and student nurses, 1,700 social and welfare workers, 120 dentists, pharmacists and veterinarians, 129 physicians and surgeons, 200 actresses, 100 authors, editors and reporters, 39 lawyers and judges, 400 librarians and other categories likewise illustrating the large-scale exclusion of Negro women from the professions.

During the anti-Axis war, Negro women for the first time in history had an opportunity to utilize their skills and talents in occupations other than domestic and personal service. They became trailblazers in many fields. Since the end of the war, however, this has given way to growing unemployment, to the wholesale firing of Negro women, particularly in basic industry.

This process has been intensified with the development of the economic crisis. Today, Negro women are being forced back into domestic work in great numbers. In New York State, for example, this trend was officially confirmed recently when Edward Corsi, Commissioner of the State Labour Department, revealed that for the first time since the war, domestic help is readily obtainable. Corsi in effect admitted that Negro women are not voluntarily giving up jobs, but rather are being systematically pushed out of industry. Unemployment, which has always hit the Negro woman first and hardest, plus the high cost of living, is what compels Negro women to re-enter domestic service today. Accompanying this trend is an ideological campaign to make domestic work palatable. Daily newspaper advertisements which base their arguments on the claim that most domestic workers who apply for jobs through USES "prefer this type of work to work in industry," are propagandizing the "virtues" of domestic work, especially of "sleep-in positions."

Inherently connected with the question of job opportunities where the Negro woman is concerned, is the special oppression she faces as Negro, as woman and as worker. She is the victim of the white chauvinist stereotype as to where her place should be. In film, radio and the press, the Negro woman is not pictured in her real role as breadwinner, mother and protector of the family, but as a traditional "mammy" who puts the care of children and families of others above her own. This traditional stereotype of the Negro slave mother, which to this day appears in commercial advertisements, must be combated and rejected as a device of the imperialists to perpetuate the white chauvinist ideology that Negro women are "backward," "inferior" and the "natural slaves" of others.

### Historical Aspects

Actually, the history of the Negro woman shows that the Negro mother under slavery held a key position and played a dominant role in her own family grouping. This was due primarily to two factors: the conditions of slavery, under which marriage, as such, was non-existent and the Negro's social status was derived from the mother and not the father; and the fact that most of the Negro people brought to these shores by the slave traders came from West Africa where the position of women, based on their actual participation in property control, was relatively higher in the family than that of European women.

Early historians of the slave trade recall the testimony of travelers indicating that the love of the African mother for her child was unsurpassed in any part of

the world. There are numerous stories attesting to the self-sacrificial way in which East African mothers offered themselves to the slave traders in order to save their sons and Hottentot women refused food during famines until after their children were fed.

It is impossible within the confines of this article to relate the terrible sufferings and degradation undergone by Negro mothers and Negro women generally under slavery. Subject to legalized rape by the slave owners, confined to slave pens, forced to march for eight to fourteen hours with loads on their backs and to perform back-breaking work even during pregnancy, Negro women bore a burning hatred for slavery and undertook a large share of the responsibility for defending and nurturing the Negro family.

The Negro mother was mistress in the slave cabin and despite the interference of master or overseer, her wishes in regard to mating and in family matters was paramount. During and after slavery, Negro women had to support themselves and the children, necessarily playing an important role in the economic and social life of her people.

### The Negro Woman Worker

The negligible participation of Negro women in progressive and trade-union circles is thus all the more startling. In union after union, even in those unions where a large concentration of workers are Negro women, few Negro women are to be found as leaders or active workers. The outstanding exceptions to this are the Food and Tobacco Workers' Union and the United Office and Professional Workers' Union.

But why should these be exceptions? Negro women are among the most militant trade unionists. The sharecroppers' strikes of the 30s were spark-plugged by Negro women. Subject to the terror of the landlord and white supremacist, they waged magnificent battles together with Negro men and white progressives in that struggle of great tradition led by the Communist Party. Negro women played a magnificent part in the pre-CIO days in strikes and other struggles, both as workers and as wives of workers, to win recognition of the principle of industrial unionism, in such industries as auto, packing, steel, etc. More recently, the militancy of Negro women unionists is shown in the strike of the packing-house workers and even more so, in the tobacco workers' strike – in which such leaders as Moranda Smith and Velma Hopkins emerged as outstanding trade unionists. The struggle of the tobacco workers led by Negro women later merged with the political action of Negroes and whites which led to the election of the first Negro in the South (in Winston-Salem, NC) since Reconstruction days.

It is incumbent on progressive unionists to realize that in the fight for equal rights for Negro workers, it is necessary to have a special approach to Negro women workers, who, far out of proportion to other women workers, are the main

bread-winners in their families. The fight to retain the Negro woman in industry and to upgrade her on the job is a major way of struggling for the basic and special interests of the Negro woman worker. Not to recognize this feature is to miss the special aspects of the effects of the growing economic crisis, which is penalizing Negro workers, particularly Negro women workers with special severity.

### The Domestic Worker

One of the crassest manifestations of trade-union neglect of the problems of the Negro women worker has been the failure, not only to fight against relegation of the Negro woman to domestic and similar menial work, but also to organize the domestic worker. It is merely lip-service for progressive unionists to speak of organizing the unorganized without turning their eyes to the serious plight of the domestic worker, who, unprotected by union standards, is also the victim of exclusion from all social and labour legislation. Only about one in ten of all Negro women workers are to be found in states having minimum-wage laws. All of the arguments heretofore projected with regard to the real difficulties of organizing the domestic workers – such as the "casual" nature of their employment, the difficulties of organizing day workers, the problem of organizing people who work in individual households, etc., must be overcome forthwith. There is a danger that Social-Democratic forces may enter this field to do their work of spreading disunity and demagogic, unless progressives act quickly.

The lot of the domestic worker is one of unbearable misery. Usually, she has no definition of tasks in the household where she works. Domestic workers may have "thrown in," in addition to cleaning and scrubbing, such tasks as washing windows, caring for the children, laundering, cooking, etc. and all at the lowest pay. The Negro domestic worker must suffer the additional indignity, in some areas, of having to seek work in virtual "slave markets" on the streets where bids are made, as from a slave block, for the hardest workers. Many a domestic worker, on returning to her own household, must begin housework anew to keep her own family together.

Who was not enraged when it was revealed in California, in the heinous case of Dora Jones, that a Negro woman domestic was enslaved for more than 40 years in "civilized" America? Her "employer" was given a minimum sentence of a few years and complained that the sentence was for "such a long period of time." But could Dora Jones, Negro domestic worker, be repaid for more than 40 years of her life under such conditions of exploitation and degradation? And how many cases, partaking in varying degrees of the condition of Dora Jones, are still tolerated by progressives themselves!

Only recently, in the New York State Legislature, legislative proposals were made to "fingerprint" domestic workers. The Martinez Bill did not see the light of day, because the reactionaries were concentrating on other repressive

legislative measures; but here we see clearly the imprint of the African "pass" system of British imperialism (and of the German Reich in relation to the Jewish people) being attempted in relation to women domestic workers.

It is incumbent on the trade unions to assist the Domestic Workers Union in every possible way to accomplish the task of organizing the exploited domestic workers, the majority of whom are Negro women. Simultaneously, a legislative fight for the inclusion of domestic workers under the benefits of the Social Security Law is vitally urgent and necessary. Here, too, recurrent questions regarding "administrative problems" of applying the law to domestic workers should be challenged and solutions found.

The continued relegation of Negro women to domestic work has helped to perpetuate and intensify the chauvinism directed against all Negro women. Despite the fact that Negro women may be grand mothers or mothers, the use of the chauvinist term "girl" for adult Negro women is a common expression. The very economic relationship of Negro women to white women, which perpetuates "madam-maid" relationships, feeds chauvinist attitudes and makes it incumbent on white women progressives and particularly Communists, to fight consciously against all manifestations of white chauvinism, open and subtle.

Chauvinism on the part of progressive white women is often expressed in their failure to have close ties of friendship with Negro women and to realize that this fight for equality of Negro women is in their own self-interest, inasmuch as the super-exploitation and oppression of Negro women tends to depress the standards of all women. Too many progressives and even some Communists, are still guilty of exploiting Negro domestic workers, of refusing to hire them through the Domestic Workers' Union (or of refusing to help in its expansion into those areas where it does not exist) and generally of participating in the vilification of "maids" when speaking to their bourgeois neighbours and their own families. Then, there is the expressed "concern" that the exploited Negro domestic worker does not "talk" to, or is not "friendly" with, her employer, or the habit of assuming that the duty of the white progressive employer is to "inform" the Negro woman of her exploitation and her oppression which she undoubtedly knows quite intimately. Persistent challenge to every chauvinist remark as concerns the Negro woman is vitally necessary, if we are to break down the understandable distress on the part of Negro women who are repelled by the white chauvinism they often find expressed in progressive circles.

courtesy to Negro women and to integrate Negro women into organizational leadership, are other forms of chauvinism.

Another rabid aspect of the Jim Crow oppression of the Negro woman is expressed in the numerous laws which are directed against her as regards property rights, inter-marriage (originally designed to prevent white men in the South from marrying Negro women) and laws which hinder and deny the right of choice, not only to Negro women, but Negro and white men and women. For white progressive women and men, and especially for Communists, the question of social relations with Negro men and women is above all a question of strictly adhering to social equality. This means ridding ourselves of the position which sometimes finds certain progressives and Communists fighting on the economic and political issues facing the Negro people, but "drawing the line" when it comes to social intercourse or inter-marriage. To place the question as a "personal" and not a political matter, when such questions arise, is to be guilty of the worst kind of Social-Democratic, bourgeois-liberal thinking as regards the Negro question in American life, it is to be guilty of imbibing the poisonous white-chauvinist "theories" of a Bilbo or a Rankin; similarly, too, with regard to guaranteeing the "security" of children. This security will be enhanced only through the struggle for the liberation and equality of all nations and peoples and not by shielding children from the knowledge of this struggle. This means ridding ourselves of the bourgeois-liberal attitudes which "permit" Negro and white children of progressives to play together at camps when young, but draw the line when the children reach teen-age and establish boy-girl relationships.

The bourgeois ideologists have not failed, of course, to develop a special ideological offensive aimed at degrading Negro women, as part and parcel of the general reactionary ideological offensive against women of "kitchen, church and children." They cannot, however, with equanimity or credibility, speak of the Negro woman's "place" as in the home, for Negro women are in other peoples' kitchens. Hence, their task has been to intensify their theories of male "superiority" as regards the Negro woman by developing retrospective attitudes which coincide with the "new school" of "psychological inferiority" of women. The whole intent of a host of articles, books, etc., has been to obscure the main responsibility for the oppression of Negro women by spreading the rotten bourgeois notion about a "battle of the sexes" and "ignoring" the fight of both Negro men and women — the whole Negro people — against their common oppressors, the white ruling class.

Chauvinist expressions also include paternalistic surprise when it is learned that Negroes are professional people. Negro professional women workers are often confronted with such remarks as "Isn't your family proud of you?" Then, there is the reverse practice of inquiring of Negro women professionals whether "someone in the family" would like to take a job as a domestic worker.

## Manifestations of White Chauvinism

Some of the crassest expressions of chauvinism are to be found at social affairs, where, all too often, white men and women and Negro men participate in dancing, but Negro women are neglected. The acceptance of white ruling-class standards of "desirability" for women (such as light skin), the failure to extend

The responsibility for overcoming these special forms of white chauvinism rest, not with the "subjectivity" of Negro women, as it is often put, but squarely on the shoulders of white men and white women. Negro men have a special responsibility particularly in relation to rooting out attitudes of male superiority as regards women in general. There is need to root out all "humanitarian" and patronizing attitudes toward Negro women. In one community, a leading Negro trade unionist, the treasurer of her Party section, would be told by a white progressive woman after every social function: "Let me have the money; something may happen to you." In another instance, a Negro domestic worker who wanted to join the Party was told by her employer, a Communist, that she was "too backward" and "wasn't ready" to join the Party. In yet another community, which since the war has been populated in the proportion of sixty per cent Negro to forty per cent white, white progressive mothers maneuvered to get their children out of the school in this community. To the credit of the initiative of the Party section organizer, a Negro woman, a struggle was begun which forced a change in arrangements which the school principal, yielding to the mothers' and to his own prejudices, had established. These arrangements involved a special class in which a few white children were isolated with "selected Negro kids" in what was termed an "experimental class in race relations."

These chauvinist attitudes, particularly as expressed toward the Negro woman, are undoubtedly an important reason for the grossly insufficient participation of Negro women in progressive organizations and in our Party as members and leaders.

The American bourgeoisie, we must remember, is aware of the present and even greater potential role of the masses of Negro women and is therefore not loathe to throw plums to Negroes who betray their people and do the bidding of imperialism.

Faced with the exposure of their callous attitude to Negro women, faced with the growing protests against unpunished lynchings and the legal lynchings "Northern style," Wall Street is giving a few token positions to Negro women. Thus, Anna Arnold Hergeman, who played a key role in the Democratic National Negro Committee to Elect Truman, was rewarded with the appointment as Assistant to Federal Security Administrator Ewing. Thus, too, Governor Dewey appointed Irene Diggs to a high post in the New York State Administration.

Another straw in the wind showing attempts to whittle down the militancy of Negro women was the State Department's invitation to a representative of the National Council of Negro Women — the only Negro organization so designated — to witness the signing of the Atlantic Pact.

But none so dramatizes the oppressed status of Negro womanhood as does the case of Rosa Lee Ingram, widowed Negro mother of fourteen children — two of them dead — who faces life imprisonment in a Georgia jail for defending herself from the indecent advances of a "white supremacist." The Ingram case illustrates the landless, Jim Crow, oppressed status of the Negro family in America. It illuminates particularly the degradation of Negro women today under American bourgeois democracy moving to fascism and war. It reflects the daily insults to which Negro women are subjected in public places, no matter what their class, status, or position. It exposes the hypocritical alibi of the lynchers of Negro manhood who have historically hidden behind the skirts of white women when they try to cover up their foul crimes with the "chivalry" of protecting white womanhood. But white women, today, no less than their sisters in the abolitionist and suffrage movements, must rise to challenge this lie and the whole system of Negro oppression.

American history is rich in examples of the cost — to the democratic rights of both women and men — of failure to wage this fight. The suffragists, during their first jailing, were purposely placed on cots next to Negro prostitutes to "humiliate" them. They had the wisdom to understand that the intent was to make it so painful, that no women would dare to fight for her rights if she had to face such consequences. But it was the historic shortcoming of the women's suffrage leaders, predominantly drawn as they were from the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, that they failed to link their own struggle to the struggles for the full democratic rights of the Negro people following emancipation.

A developing consciousness on the woman question today, therefore, must not fail to recognize that the Negro question in the United States is prior to and not equal to the woman question; that only to the extent that we fight all chauvinist expressions and actions as regards the Negro people and fight and fight for the full equality of the Negro people, can women as a whole advance their struggle for equal rights. For the progressive women's movement, the Negro woman, who combines in her status the worker, the Negro and the woman, is the vital link to this heightened political consciousness. To the extent, further, that the cause of the Negro woman worker is promoted, she will be enabled to take her rightful place in the Negro-proletarian leadership of the national liberation movement, and by her active participation contribute to the entire American working class, whose historic mission is the achievement of a Socialist America — the final and full guarantee of woman's emancipation.

The fight for Rosa Lee Ingram's freedom is a challenge to all white women and to all progressive forces, who must begin to ask themselves: How long shall we allow this dastardly crime against all womanhood, against the Negro people, to go unchallenged? Rosa Lee Ingram's plight and that of her sisters also carries with it a challenge to progressive cultural workers to write and sing of the Negro woman in her full courage and dignity.

## Key Issues of Struggle

There are many key issues facing Negro women around which struggles can and must be waged.

The recent establishment of the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family fulfills a need long felt since the early movement which forced commutation to life imprisonment of Mrs. Ingram's original sentence of execution. This National Committee, headed by Mary Church Terrell, a founder of the National Association of Coloured Women, includes among its leaders such prominent women, Negro and white, as Therese Robinson, National Grand Directress of the Civil Liberties Committee of the Elks, Ada B. Jackson and Dr. Gene Weltfish.

One of the first steps of the Committee was the visit of a delegation of Negro and white citizens to this courageous, militant Negro mother imprisoned in a Georgia cell. The measure of support was so great that the Georgia authorities allowed the delegation to see her unimpeded. Since that time, however, in retaliation against the developing mass movement, the Georgia officials have moved Mrs. Ingram, who is suffering from a severe heart condition, to a worse penitentiary, at Reedsville.

Support to the work of this committee becomes a prime necessity for all progressives, particularly women. President Truman must be stripped of his pretense of "know-nothing" about the Ingram case. To free the Ingolds, support must be rallied for the success of the million-signatures campaign and for UN action on the Ingram brief soon to be filed.

The struggle for jobs for Negro women is a prime issue. The growing economic crisis, with its mounting unemployment and wage-cuts and increasing evictions, is making its impact felt most heavily on the Negro masses. In one Negro community after another, Negro women, the last to be hired and the first to be fired, are the greatest sufferers from unemployment. Struggles must be developed to win jobs for Negro women in basic industry, in the white-collar occupations, in the communities and in private utilities.

The successful campaign of the Communist Party in New York's East Side to win jobs for Negro women in the five-and-dime stores has led to the hiring of Negro women throughout the city, even in predominantly white communities. This campaign has extended to New England and must be waged elsewhere.

Close to 15 government agencies do not hire Negroes at all. This policy gives official sanction to, and at the same time further encourages the pervasive Jim Crow policies of the capitalist exploiters. A campaign to win jobs for Negro women here would thus greatly advance the whole struggle for jobs for Negro men and women. In addition, it would have a telling effect in exposing the hypocrisy of the Truman Administration's "Civil Rights" programme.

A strong fight will also have to be made against the growing practice of the United States Employment Service to shunt Negro women despite their qualifications for other jobs, only into domestic and personal service work.

Where consciousness of the special role of Negro women exists, successful struggle can be initiated which will win the support of white workers. A recent

example was the initiative taken by white Communist garment workers in a shop employing 25 Negro women where three machines were idle. The issue of upgrading Negro women workers became a vital one. A boycott movement has been initiated and machines stand unused as of this writing, the white workers refusing to adhere to strict seniority at the expense of Negro workers. Meanwhile, negotiations are continuing on this issue. Similarly, in a Packard UAW local in Detroit, a fight for the maintenance of women in industry and for the upgrading of 750 women, the large majority of whom were Negro, was recently won.

### The Struggle for Peace

Winning the Negro women for the struggle for peace is decisive for all other struggles. Even during the anti-Axis war, Negro women had to weep for their soldier-sons, lynched while serving in a Jim Crow army. Are they, therefore, not interested in the struggle for peace?

The efforts of the bipartisan warmakers to gain the support of the women's organizations in general, have influenced many Negro women's organizations, which, at their last annual conventions, adopted foreign-policy stands favouring the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine. Many of these organizations have worked with groups having outspoken anti-imperialist positions.

That there is profound peace sentiment among Negro women which can be mobilized for effective action is shown, not only in the magnificent response to the meetings of Eslande Goode Robeson, but also in the position announced last year by the oldest Negro women's organization, under the leadership of Mrs. Christine C. Smith, in urging a national mobilization of American Negro women in support of the United Nations. In this connection, it will be very fruitful to bring to our country a consciousness of the magnificent struggles of women in North Africa, who, though lacking in the most elementary material needs, have organized a strong movement for peace and thus stand united against a Third World War, with 81 million women in 57 nations, in the Women's International Democratic Federation.

Our Party, based on its Marxist-Leninist principles, stands foursquare on a programme of full economic, political and social equality for the Negro people and of equal rights for women. Who, more than the Negro woman, the most exploited and oppressed, belongs in our Party? Negro women can and must make an enormous contribution to the daily life and work of the Party. Concretely, this means prime responsibility lies with white men and women comrades. Negro men comrades, however, must participate in this task. Negro Communist women must everywhere now take their rightful place in Party leadership on all levels.

The strong capacities, militancy and organizational talents of Negro women, can, if well utilized by our Party, be a powerful lever for bringing forward Negro workers — men and women — as the leading forces of the Negro people's

Liberation movement, for cementing Negro and white unity in the struggle against Wall Street imperialism and for rooting the Party among the most exploited and oppressed sections of the working class and its allies.

In our Party clubs, we must conduct an intense discussion of the role of the Negro women, so as to equip our Party membership with clear understanding for undertaking the necessary struggles in the shops and communities. We must end the practice, in which many Negro women who join our Party and who, in their churches, communities and fraternal groups are leaders of masses, with an invaluable mass experience to give to our Party, suddenly find themselves involved in our clubs, not as leaders, but as people who have, "to get their feet wet" organizationally. We must end this failure to create an atmosphere in our clubs in which new recruits — in this case Negro women — are confronted with the "silent treatment" or with attempts to "blueprint" them into a pattern. In addition to the white chauvinist implications in such approaches, these practices confuse the basic need for Marxist-Leninist understanding, which our Party gives to all workers and which enhances their political understanding, with chauvinist disdain for the organizational talents of new Negro members, or for the necessity to promote them into leadership.

To win the Negro women for full participation in the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist coalition, to bring her militancy and participation to even greater heights in the current and future struggles against Wall Street imperialism, progressives must acquire political consciousness as regards her special oppressed status. It is this consciousness, accelerated by struggles, that will convince increasing thousands that only the Communist Party, as the vanguard of the working class, with its ultimate perspective of Socialism, can achieve for the Negro women — for the entire Negro people — the full equality and dignity of their stature in a Socialist society in which contributions to society are measured, not by national origin, or by colour, but a society in which men and women contribute according to ability and ultimately under Communism receive according to their needs.

The leading role of the Communist Party in the struggle to emancipate women from male oppression is one of the proud contributions which our Party of Marxism-Leninism, the Communist Party, USA, celebrates on its thirtieth anniversary.

Marxism-Leninism exposes the core of the woman question and shows that the position of women in society is not always and everywhere the same, but derives from woman's relation to the mode of production.

Under capitalism, the inequality of women stems from exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class. But the exploitation of women cuts across class lines and affects all women. Marxism-Leninism views the woman question as a special question which derives from the economic dependence of women upon men. This economic dependence as Engels wrote over 100 years ago, carries with it the sexual exploitation of women, the placing of woman in the modern bourgeois family, as the 'proletariat' of the man, who assumes the role of 'bourgeoisie.'

Hence, Marxist-Leninists fight to free woman from household drudgery, they fight to win equality for women in all spheres; they recognize that one cannot adequately deal with the woman question or win women for progressive participation unless one takes up the special problems, needs and aspirations of women — as women.

It is this basic principle that has governed the theory and practice of the Communist Party for the last three decades.

As a result, our Party has chalked up a proud record of struggle for the rights of women. American literature has been enhanced by the works of Marxists who investigated the status of women in the US in the 30s. Its record is symbolized in the lives of such outstanding women Communists as Ella Reeve Bloor and Anita Whitney and others who are associated with the fight for women's suffrage, for the rights of the Negro people, for working class emancipation.

Our Party and its leadership helped stimulate the organization of women in the trade unions and helped activize the wives of workers in the great labour organizing drives; built housewives' councils to fight against the high cost of living, taught women through the boycott and other militant actions how to fight for the needs of the family, helped to train and mould women Communist leaders on all levels, working class women inspired by the convictions and ideals of their class — the working class.

A pioneer in the fight for the organization of working class women, our Party was the first to demonstrate to white women and to the working class that the triply-oppressed status of Negro women is a barometer of the status of all women and that the fight for the full, economic, political and social equality of the Negro woman is in the vital self-interest of white workers, in the vital interest of the fight to realize equality for all women.

## We Seek Full Equality for Women (1949)<sup>16</sup>

Taking up the struggle of the Suffragists, the Communists have set tasks, new objectives in the fight for a new status for women. The special value of Foster's contribution is: