

W.E.B. DUBOIS

Socialism and the American Negro

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DUBOIS**
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the American Negro

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W.E.B. DUBOIS

Socialism & the American Negro

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Side 1, Band 1.

Introduction

Its very rarely that we have the opportunity to hear a man with the stature of Dr. DuBois. He is 92 years old at present. I was trying to think just a few minutes ago what living way back in about 1868 was like. Its rather striking that Dr. DuBois has lived through all of the major wars with the exception of about three. He has witnessed a great number of social changes to our country. The reconstruction period, the advent of Jim Crow, the coming and going of almost every President since President Lincoln. He was able to watch the campaign of dev's, he saw both of the Russian revolutions, 1905 and 1917, he quite recently could watch the Supreme courts decision on Segregation in the South, was able to tour Russia

and the new China and recently to watch the Negro demonstrations in the South. All of which have interested him enough to put them in writing as well as in speaking. Dr. DuBois has a very impressive list of writing to his credit aside from one time editing the magazine Crisis. He is the editor of Fireline Magazine a quarterly on a Negro social and historical problems and has a list of much greater than 16 books to his credit dealing with all subjects dealing with the Negro problems to social problems in this country, social problems abroad, social revolutions in all the countries which have had social revolutions of late. His educational background I find very impressive also. He received his bachelor's degree from Fisk University, did his Masters and PhD work at Harvard and has also studied at the University of Berlin, Howard University and a couple of others. He has about 8 honorary PhD's to his credit which is in itself quite a sizeable array of decorations for a wall plus the very deep feelings behind these decorations. I'm very honored and very pleased at this time to present to you Dr. W.E.B. DuBois (applause).

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Side 1, Band 2.

Dr. DuBois

Ladies and Gentlemen, Socialism and the American Negro. Democracy has so disappeared in the United States that there are some subjects that cannot even be discussed. The essence of the democratic process is free discussion. There was a time when men were not allowed to talk about universal suffrage of the education of women, or freedom for Negro slaves. Today Communism is the dirty word and Socialism is suspect. I often refer to my education in democracy. In the little New England town where I was born we had a high school of about 25 pupils.

I entered it in 1880 at the age of 12. As I attended the town meeting annually in the Spring there used regularly to appear one of the dirtiest old men I ever saw. He was fat and greasy, and every year he made a fierce attack on wasting his taxes on a high school. I was always furious. I wondered why the citizens sat silent and let him rant but they did and then quietly they voted the money for the high school. There I learned my lesson in Democracy. Listen to the other side. In this state and in our time occurred one of the worst blows to the democratic process which our nation suffered. Senator McCarthy succeeded in making America afraid to discuss Socialism or to recognize Communism as bought with a conspiracy and this in the state of Robert LeFollet. I knew LeFollett and his valiant wife. I voted for him for President in 1924 and I saw him give his life fighting monopolized wealth and asking world peace. My own work at the time was trying to secure freedom and equality for American Negroes. For a quarter of a century I edited a little monthly magazine the Crisis and despite opposition I spoke plainly. I was criticized as being bitter, as seeking not simply political but social equality for Negroes, for favoring the teaching of Karl Marx, and for joining the Socialist Party. These accusations were true. But largely as a result of my work and the work of others the Negro made progress toward equal citizenship. Progress but not complete success. The collapse of the capitalist system after the first World War brought poverty, unemployment and distress worse than America had ever seen. And then came a surge toward Socialism called the New Deal. The nation relieved distress, built public works, helped agricultural trade, encouraged literature and art. It joined the Soviet Union in overthrowing Hitler, Mussolini and Japan and informing the United Nations to avoid future war. With the death of Roosevelt came reaction. The United States not only stopped progress toward socialism but ceased to discuss or study it and came to regard the object of Socialism and Communism as a crime. Especially the American Negro. Still as a mass, poor, ignorant and sick, were given no opportunity to know the sort of progress the world was making to immemorate the plate of the unfortunate working people the world over who were in conditions similar to ours.

American Negroes were not Socialists. They did not know what Communism was doing or trying to do but they knew that Negro education must be better, that Negroes must have better opportunities to work and to receive a wage which would let them enjoy a decent standard of life. They were victims of disease and drifting into crime. To remedy this they sort to pattern their life after successful Americans. They must work hard, save money, become employers and property owners and investors.

This they thought would bring them recognition as American citizens equal to others. But America had changed. There was still a chance for some to rise and get rich but the working classes were no longer generally able to buy land, their wages did not amount to what they in reality earned and those handicapped by race prejudice had small chance to overcome poverty and ignorance and disease. A class structure began to arise within the Negro group which produced haves and have-nots and tended to encourage more successful Negroes to join the forces of monopoly and exploitation and help victimize their own classes and any other lower classes that were possible. To remedy the situation thinking Negroes still regarded their first step toward emancipation as being political power. They felt that their present plate was due to the fact that they had never become voting citizens of the country and their first efforts were toward gaining the real right to vote. The young colored men of 1905 of which I was one emphasized this. This group meeting at Niagara Falls, Canada in June, 1905 demanded freedom of speech and criticism, manhood suffrage, the abolition of all distinction based on race, recognition of basic principles of human brotherhood and respect for the working man. They called themselves the Niagara movement. And despite violent attack on all sides they met again the next year, 1906 at Harper's Ferry. There they said in the past year the work of the Negro hater has flourished in the land. Step by step the defenders of the rights of American citizens have retreated. The work of stealing the Black man's ballot has progressed and 50 or more representatives of stolen votes still sit in the nation's capitol. Never before in the modern age has a great and civilized folk threatened to adopt so cowardly a creed in the treatment of fellow citizens born and bred on its soil. Stripped of verbal subterfuge and in its naked nastiness the new American creed says fear to let Black men even try to rise lest they become the equals of whites. This in the land professes to follow Jesus Christ. The blasemy of such a course was only matched by its cowardice. This was the statement of 1906.

The NAACP organized in 1909, added to the program of the Niagara Movement the realization that the fight for freedom could not be carried on by Negroes alone but by a national movement which united Negroes and whites. They emphasized the role which prejudice played. A prejudice often unconscious but nevertheless effective. The NAACP made a nationwide fight against the horror of lynching and mob violence. Then more and more began to concentrate on the legal aspects of race discrimination. The fact that the Negro was pressed because the constitution of the United States was not being enforced. This fight had unprecedented success and

culminated in 1954 in the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court against segregation. But during all this struggle we knew that something still was lacking. If we hark back to the cry of the French Revolution, liberty, equality and brotherhood it was clear that there was not and could not be liberty of individual action under the great industrial organization which was growing up in the world led by the United States. Production in industry and trade involved planning and planning curtailed liberty. Moreover our inequality as Negroes was a matter of fact Negroes with their ignorance and poverty and sickness were distinctly below the average of those of their white neighbors who were educated, well-to-do and healthy. Finally despite all propaganda we saw democracy failing in America. Fewer and few people went to the polls. It was increasingly difficult to know for whom or for what one was voting and the cost of election arose to suspicious heights. The election in which Abraham Lincoln became President of the United States cost about a hundred thousand dollars. The election which made Dwight Eisenhower President probably cost more than one hundred million. Its possible that it cost twice that. Election expenses today include not only direct bribery but indirect influences. Monopoly, propaganda and deception. Under these circumstances the appeal of Socialism to all Americans increased but the answer to the doctrines of Karl Marx, Utopias, Safuyay and others was that with human nature as it is Socialism simply would not work. To me the obvious approach to socialism seemed consumers cooperation. I tried to plan an organization among Negroes as consumers which would furnish employment, help savings and bring unity of action. But it was soon evident as many of my fellow workers warned me from the beginning that individual action alone could not bring consumers cooperation. That without the power of the government it would fail. And with government cooperation it was socialism. My own training in this thought came from my travel. My two years sojourn in Germany at the end of the 19th century. I saw the rise of the social democratic party. My repeated visits to England and France in the first decade in this second century. My visits to the Soviet Union in 1926, 1936 and 1949. Than as a peculiar aftermath of the two world wars and my advocacy of peace my travel abroad was stopped from 1950 to 1958. In 1958 I was able to make a trip covering 11 months in which I visited Western Europe, Eastern Europe including the Soviet Union and the Republic of China. This trip completely transformed my thinking. I started on it believing that socialism was a possible form of government, an economic organization and was being carried on successfully in Eastern Europe. That capitalism was also a form of organization and while it might degenerate into facism and the rule of wealth, nevertheless it could, as have been proven by Franklin Roosevelt, become a progressive organization. I returned with completely changed ideas. I saw socialism as the most successful form of government today possible in the Soviet Union and in the Chinese republic. I saw it evolving into Communism to an astonishing successful degree. On the other hand I was frightened and I am still alarmed at the degeneracy of

capitalism and the possibility of it becoming a force so destructive that it cannot be endured. One of my first experiences was in England. I had in London a severe attack of intestinal disorder. A young physician summoned at midnight came and treated me. He made six or more visits within the next few days until he had me completely on my feet. When I asked for my bill I was told that there was no charge that his services were paid for by the British Government. I reminded him that I was an American and that in America we were repeatedly informed that socialized medicine in Great Britain was a failure. He smiled, the only cost of my illness was the medicine that he prescribed and that was less than five dollars. On the other hand I found that Great Britain, France and Holland and Belgium were countries which for the past centuries had built their comfort, their prosperity and civilization mainly on the free land and materials and cheap labor partly furnished by their own working class but mainly by colored people overseas whom they dominated by their colonial empires. In 1858 it was clear that the end of this colonialism was in sight. Already most of the colonies in Holland had become independent. Britain had lost the empire of India and France was fighting in vain to hold North Africa. Yet despite the fact that the colonial organization must end these three great countries of Western Europe and others like Italy, West Germany and Portugal were depending for their future life on materials which they underpriced in the world market on stolen land and on labor wretchedly underpaid. The political power to carry on this process depended upon the laboring class in Western Europe and America and that laboring class was being bribed by political power and high wage which came no so much out of the profits of the employers as out of the low wages of colored labor. I did not sense in Western Europe and certainly I had not seen in America any disposition so to improve the organization of work and the distribution of income as to make any essential change in the present capitalist system. On the other hand I was astonished and encouraged by what I saw socialism doing. Not only did I see the results of socialized medicine in England and progress in housing, health and worker's pensions in Sweden, Holland, Belgium and France but in the Soviet Union, and East Germany I saw a change of attitude toward the masses of people. Not as the wards and beneficiaries of the rulers of the nation but as the main body which itself owned the nation and for which the nation existed and as the reservoir out of which were being recruited those people who were making civilization. In China it seemed to me that the process was going even further. And that human nature was being so changed that instead of self seeking and class hatred which so characterized the west that there was coming a sense of partnership in a vast and growing nation of willing cooperation and of a wide spread content and happiness which I had not seen elsewhere in the world. All this was my deep and firm impression. I cannot prove it particularly not to you who have been poisoned by lies and distortions for ten years. After all I saw these countries only partially and for brief visits yet I am a traveler of some experience and I know personally the trials of the poor and despised. I was given unusual

opportunity for observation and thus my conclusions are of some value. I saw a spread of socialism and communism. Today more than half the people of the world live under a socialism which is growing toward communism. In my mind there is no doubt but that the world of the 21st century will be overwhelmingly communistic.

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Side II

Returning now to the United States I look again upon the scene. The legal fight led by the NAACP has been an astonishing success but its very success shows the limitations of law and law enforcement. Unless this program has an economic foundation, unless a mass of Negro people have not simply legal rights but have such rights to work and wage that enable them to live decently. Here in the United States we have had a stirring of the Negro population which emphasizes these facts. In the slave South Negroes impoverished and mistreated have sought remedy by pouring into the cities of the South and especially into the great cities of the North. They caused problems of housing and of crime of poverty and disease. It spells the damnation of youth and death of children and degradation of women. Through this the American Negro is passing. It emphasizes our national problem of gambling and prostitution and drug using and murder and suicide. On the other hand the Negroes who have grown in intelligence and awareness of their handicaps have begun to fight back by the use of the boycott and the pass of resistance. The experience in Montgomery, the extraordinary uprising of students all over the South and beginning in the North shows an awareness of our situation which is most encouraging. But it still does not reach the center of the problem. And that center is not simply the right of Americans to spend their money as they wish and according to law but the chance for American Negroes to have money to spend because of employment by which they can make a decent wage. What then is the next step? It is for American Negroes in increasing numbers and more and more widely to insist upon the legal rights which are already theirs and then to add to that increasingly a socialistic form of government an insistence upon the welfare state which denies the further carrying out of industry for the profit of those corporations which monopolize wealth and power. The stopping of a government of wealth for wealth and for wealth and the returning of governmental power to the individual voter with all the freedom of action that can be preserved along with an industry carefully organized for the good of the masses of people and not for the manufacture of millionaires. Does capitalism offer such a program? It does not. It offers war. We have gone insane with the idea that the world is going to be ruled by physical force. More than any other nation on earth or in time we are spending fantastic sums of money to prepare

for war and facing this necessity of war preparation on dislike and distrust and contempt for most of the human beings who inhabit the world. We have no peace movement in the United States that deserves the name. We have almost no men of intelligence and prestige who dare speak up for peace. Coward and silent we face immeasurable catastrophe and the first duty of Americans is to realize this fact. To illustrate what I'm trying to say, let me remind you of certain occurrences in recent times. On October 27, 1951, 8½ years ago, Colliers Magazine, a flamboyant pictorial with a circulation claimed to be a million and a half, published a number in which the leaders of American Science and literature made contributions. At a time when few socialists in the United States dared open their mouths and many were in jail, when economics and social science were being taught in institutions like this with the utmost caution, and when I was being handcuffed for advocating peace with the Soviet Union this extraordinary magazine was on every newsstand and on radio and television. It predicted and described in one hundred and thirty pages the aggressive war of the United States against the Soviet Union and the editors and contributors said that this year, 1960 would see the utter destruction of communism the world over and the victorious American troops walking in the streets of Moscow. Who wrote these words and made these prophecies. The editors say and I quote this historical report was written by the west's top historians political, economic and military experts commentators and artists among them were Alan Nevins, Stewart Chase, Edwin R. Murrow, Robert Sherwood, J.B. Priestly and Margaret Chase Smith. Senator Smith wrote on America's on Russia's rebirth which she pictured as being accomplished by American soldiers presumably like those then raping Korean women and burning children alive in Korea and dripping disease germs on China. For myself I knew these writers were wrong. I'd been in the Soviet Union. In 1926 and in 1936. In 1949 25 Americans were invited to attend a Soviet peace congress with expenses paid. I was the only one who accepted. I addressed a cross-section of that great nation. I did not and I would have been justified in doing devote this opportunity to describing the plight of my people. On the contrary. I contended that I was speaking for those Americans who did want war and that they were a majority of the nation. No one visiting the Soviet Union at that time could for a moment doubt its peaceful intentions. The reply to my thesis was this extraordinary article which broke all rules of international decency, told lies and spread information and yet was received with applause in most quarters, and an unforgivable silence in others. The year 1960 has come and is over 1/3 gone. What has happened? Colliers Magazine is dead. Its wanted million and a half readers have ceased to subscribe because the reduced prices which they charged for Colliers and a dozen other flashy periodicals which are thrust down our throats are not needed by the publishers. Saved as bait to advertisers who pay millions to make you buy their goods. The day will come I suspect when Life and Look will pay their subscribers to allow the use of their names. Amer-

ican troops are not in Moscow and are not planning to be there. But the President of the United States is going and we hope on an errand of peace to which he has been graciously invited by the head of the Soviet state in one of the greatest speeches of our day. On the other hand, there are signs in this nation which should give us pause. There is stealing, cheating, poisoning, gambling and killing to a frightening degree. Our exports do not pay for our imports and we are settling the deficit by exporting four thousand million dollars of our hoard of gold in the past two years. Unemployment among our workers despite our desperate efforts to conceal the truth is far too high. Adulteration of food and overpricing of medicines have reached alarming heights and the cost of living is continuously rising. Perhaps our most unforgivable deed today is our attitude toward China. Historically in America, Chinks have always rated below wops and niggers. Negroes were lazy and jolly and this infuriated the slave drivers. But Chinese coolies worked like dumb driven cattle. They were valuable because they worked hard for almost nothing. During the 19th century they were not only worked at home but were transported and drove overseas like slaves to work for white folk. When they showed signs of rebellion in China we began to steal their land and make them buy opium and we planned to distribute the Chinese empire among the superior white nations. America willingly agreed so long as we got equal entry through this open door. The Christian world sent droves of missionaries to make Chinese submission quick and easy. Then just as we were stretching our claws to pluck the rich fruit of the white man's burden Sun-Yat-sen led the last revolt. The Soviet Union helped him and Chiang Kai-shek came forward to assume leadership. Our way is clear. Despite the advice of our own General Stillwell we bribed Chiang to betray and murder the communists. We gave him money and arms. And yet with desperate determination China won its independence and drove the murderous traitor into the sea where he still squats on an island protected by our guns and money. We hate China. We propose never to forgive the Chinese. We count them outside humanity. We charge them with every crime we can invent. I was on the borders of Tibet last year when China saved the Tibetan slaves and we shed crocodile tears. We have sympathy and money for the slave drivers who hold the Dalai Lama as prisoner. But for the prisoners in our own overcrowded jails who rebel each day and cry in vain for justice and mercy our only remedy is more jails. This shows the increase in our religion. This shows why we tax Americans into crime, poverty and suicide. And spend ten times more for war than for education, health and social security. Our national debt for war is greater than possibly we ever will or can pay. This nation tries to prove its prosperity by balancing monopolized wealth of the owners of great corporations against the poverty of our lower third. What this is called for? Not a compulsory rush into socialism. Many of us believe and hope that socialism will and must come to this land. We see no other way. But scores of others do not believe this and that is that right. They have however no right to prevent the truth

about socialism from being told. They have no right to prevent students from studying the remarkable philosophy of Karl Marx. They have no right to prevent Americans from traveling in China especially Americans of eminence must stop the spreading of lies about the socialist world. A few years ago I was invited to the Harvard Club of New York to hear a former President of Harvard lecture on the socialist education in the Soviet Union. I was to accept because no Harvard club has ever admitted a Negro membership but it was my duty to go. Knowledge always costs something and this is the kind of currency I have often had to pay in order to know. President Conant former Commissioner of Germany, and largely responsible for present conditions there, told his audience that after two visits to the Soviet Union he had been unable to learn on what basis of the examination Russian students were graduated from the high school into the University. Now on his return to America he had learned the truth. The Soviet party had refused to allow students to be examined in order to promote only followers of the party. He had hardly got his mouth closed before Sputnik had crossed the heavens and the back of the moon had been photographed proving beyond doubt the leadership of a communist state in modern science. The superiority of the Soviet Union in the education of children became indisputable and her lead in industry seemed soon inevitable. America must let youth know. American students must dare to study the Soviet Union and China as carefully as they study Great Britain and France. But especially American Negroes must know what is going on in the world today and learn for themselves what this has to teach them in order that they may preserve their culture, get rid of their poverty, ignorance and disease and help America live up at least to a shadow of its vain boast as the land of the free and the home of the brave. Remember how Browning once sang "Oh to be in England, and all that April's there." Today in Wisconsin one hears the winds of spring. But listen low and long the wails we hear are not all spring their moans beneath the swish of whips the thongs of South Africa lashing civilization into niggers with drip of blood and roar of guns and sob of mothers and babies. This is a part of the system which many of you defend. Americans have 350 million dollars invested in South Africa. Two and a half times as much as they had ten years ago. This investment must make profit even as England's April does. For our profits the Blacks must work for what we offer. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden chant Jew and Christian and I will give you hell. Take my yoke upon you or I will bash your Black faces in. Listen to the winds, listen to the whale of death and weep.

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