

# Celebrate the Legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois

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On this February 23rd, 2001, we mark the birthday in 1868 of W.E.B. Du Bois, pioneering Black leader, Pan-Africanist and communist. As W.E.B. Du Bois made use of his birthday and autobiography for the political issues of the day, it is fitting that we come together on an issue that Du Bois raised again and again in his lifetime.

In 1820, the largest gap between any two countries in per capita income was over 3:1, but by 1992 it had steadily increased to 72:1. So it is that what Du Bois called the “color line”

has deepened in economic significance. The countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America continue to face brutal exploitation by the Western imperialist countries, even while openly colonial rule has been replaced with other forms of control in most Third World countries.

Since Du Bois died in 1963, Mao also died and the Soviet bloc fell apart. Despite these changes for communists to consider, more broadly, in the world, the class and national struggles of the people focus most sharply in the Third World and with an increasing intensity. All of this is known to the communists especially those most dedicated to rescuing Marx from scientific irrelevance.

What remains more controversial is why the white working class of the imperialist countries persists in its political quietude or outright support of imperialism. Like his contemporary Lenin, Du Bois put his finger on this question exactly. Echoing Engels before him, Du Bois in his 90th year of life said, “There is no European labor party ready to help emancipate the workers of Asia and Africa. On the contrary, all are willing to take higher wages based on colonial profits; and to fight wars waged to defend those profits. Back of this attitude of Western Europe is the United States: ready with funds to help Europe; ready to assist any European power to keep control of colonial peoples, or to supplant it as a colonial ruler.”

Nor did this attitude reflect a treacherous leadership by the labor parties of the imperialist countries, because it extends to the masses of the white oppressor nations. The leaders merely reflect the will of their white followers on this question. That is why, when he was 90, Du Bois said, “Western Europe hopes that without essential alteration in its way of life an accommodation can be made between their demands and the upsurging of the lower classes and peoples. They see this chance in four ways: home labor appeased by elementary education and some political power; with higher wages paid out of profit from investment in foreign lands, which the home labor makes sure by fighting in world wars.”

This is not to say Du Bois believed that white

people had some biological characteristic that forced them toward imperialism. Du Bois explicitly denied that race had any scientific meaning in that sense. Rather, the underlying basis of racist ideology backing up imperialism is economic.

Shortly before death,

Du Bois said, “Today my resentment at the doctrine of race superiority, as preached and practiced by the white world for the last 250 years, has been pointed to with sharp criticism and contrasted with the charity of Gandhi and of the colored minister [Dr. Martin Luther King] who led the recent boycott in Alabama. I am quite frank: I do not pretend to ‘love’ white people. I think that as a race they are the most selfish of any on earth. . . . I refer to the white world as a whole.

We are come to a time when the sins and mistakes of the

whole group must be considered and judged, not simply small localities or single individuals.” (“Whites in Africa after Negro Autonomy,” 1962)

Du Bois turned to analysis of national oppression because of the failure of the white man to accept integration, as Du Bois learned through strenuous struggle in his days with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) until 1934. Today his analysis of national oppression and its underlying economic basis is even more relevant than when he wrote it.

For his analysis, he was attacked from various quarters that tried to claim that the white working class of the imperialist countries was as proletarian as the miner in Azania, and maybe more advanced. Today when the international communist movement has at least three different organizations trying to regroup in the name of Mao Zedong, who made Du Bois’s birthday a national holiday, we cannot stand aside and let Marxism die because we did not heed Du Bois’s teachings.

The “dictatorship of the proletariat” is a central idea of Marxism, but the white workers of imperialism are not a proletariat. There are many claiming to work to overthrow imperialism, but few who know how to measure it. Surely those who believe that the white worker of the United States is qualitatively the same as the Third World proletariat have no plans to end the plunder of the Third World on the oppressor nation workers’ behalf. They plan only to create social-imperialism, socialism in words and imperialism in deeds. They will continue to rob the Third World to assist with



the living standards of the imperialist countries if they come to power, and we will have nothing to do with such alleged communists.

Du Bois criticized Norman Thomas in his day for ignoring the Black man in the call for socialism. Today with the deepening of the economic basis of the color line, there are those who still ignore the Third World worker when talking of socialism. We call on all true proletarian internationalists to criticize all Third World organizations covering for super-exploitation and destroy all imperialist country organizations covering for super-exploitation. Such organizations cannot be said to be opposing imperialism. The oppressed and exploited people on one side of the color line will prevail.

We call to the active elements of the international proletariat not to capitulate to another round of unity with the white chauvinist line. It is not we who are isolated. It is the white chauvinists and their would-be comprador props of a new social-imperialist order who are isolated. Unity with them can only lead to more exploitation, national oppression and war. Let us struggle to overthrow imperialism, once and for all.

*The Maoist Internationalist Movement is seeking signatories for the above statement to be issued February 23rd, 2001. MIM plans to ask the Pan-Africanist organizations of the world, the African People’s Socialist Party, the Communist Party of the Philippines, Luis Arce Borja, the Turkish comrades*

*of TKP/ML, the Russian Maoist Party, the William Wallace Society, the Ghetto People’s Liberation Party, SLALA, USW, RAIL chapters, Dennis Brutus and any other interested organizations and individuals to sign the declaration. We will report back on our successes and failures. If you would like to be a signatory, please write to [mim3@mim.org](mailto:mim3@mim.org).*

**“The white workers of Europe and America are just as culpable as the white owners of capital. . . The foundation of its [capital’s —ed.] present world-wide power is the slavery and semi-slavery of the colored world including the American Negroes. Until the colored man, yellow, red, brown and black, becomes free, articulate, intelligent and the receiver of a decent income, white capital will use the profit derived from his degradation to keep white labor in chains.” (“The Negro and Communism,” 1931)**