

W. E. B. Du Bois Papers

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963

Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Communist Party of the U.S.A., October 1, 1961

Addressed to Gus Hall, Chairman; formally applying for membership to the Party; summarizing the scope and trajectory of his education and political affinities; noting the "firm conclusion" he's since arrived at -- "Capitalism cannot reform itself; it is doomed to self-destruction"; and outlining clearly the 10 values and projects the Party ought to endeavor to accomplish.

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[Communist Party]

October 1, 1961

To Gus Hall, Chairman
Communist Party of the U.S.A.
New York, New York:

41-8A-38

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

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

On my return to America, I taught and studied for sixteen years. I explained the theory of Socialism and studied the organized social life of American Negroes; but still I neither read nor heard much of Marxism. Then I came to New York as an official of the new NAACP and editor of the Crisis Magazine. The NAACP was capitalist orientated and expected support from rich philanthropists. But it had a strong Socialist element in its leadership in persons like Mary Ovington, William English Walling and Charles Edward Russell. Following their advice, I joined the Socialist Party in 1911. I knew then nothing of practical socialist politics and in the campaign of 1912, I found myself unwilling to vote the Socialist ticket, but advised Negroes to vote for Wilson. This was contrary to Socialist Party rules and consequently I resigned from the Socialist Party. 91

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

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

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

Today I have reached a firm conclusion:

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

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

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

1. Public ownership of natural resources and of all capital
2. Public control of transportation and communications
3. Abolition of poverty and limitation of personal income.
4. No exploitation of labor
5. Social medicine, with hospitalization and care of the old.
6. Free education for all
7. Training for jobs and jobs for all.
8. Discipline for growth and reform
9. Freedom under law
10. No dogmatic religion.

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

W.E.B. Du Bois