

SELF-DETERMINATION FOR

At a series of forums we held Sept of last year we polemicized with R U on a number of questions including R U.'s (RCP) revisionist position on the Afro-American National Question. We upheld the right of Afro-Americans to self-determination. We were asked in discussions that followed for the basis of our position. The article we are reprinting here was our response to these questions.

One of the "National forms" that opportunism has taken in this country is that of chauvinism. This opportunism has caused divisions within the working class and a split in the communist movement. ATM was born in the struggle against right opportunism, economism and great nation chauvinism, as is clearly laid out in our Unity Statement. There, we also correctly characterize the R U as revisionist.

The R.U. as we laid out in our forums (Selected Speeches-ATM 1974-1975), holds a revisionist position on the national question. Their position in a nutshell is simply this--that Afro-Americans have been dispersed from their historic homeland to the industrial centers of the North and South. That, because of this, the social composition of the Black masses has changed from overwhelmingly peasantry to overwhelmingly working class. That this change has brought about corresponding changes in the character of their demands from questions concerning land to general democratic demands. Therefore the heart of the question is now for general democratic rights and not for land nor for the right to political secession.

The R.U. makes two basic errors here: 1) they apply the revisionist theory of the productive forces and 2) they confuse the essence of the national question with the character of the National Movement (more on this later).

This then leads them to commit three more fundamental "contributions" to Marxism: 1) they resurrect the theory of American exceptionalism, 2) they are forced to revise Lenin's characterization of the nature of imperialism, and 3) they revise Stalin's definition of what constitutes a fully developed nation. As we stated before, this is stone right opportunism, chauvinism and revisionism.

Lenin on American Negroes

It was Lenin who first put forward the position that Afro-Americans constitute a nation. In his article entitled "Statistics and Sociology" written in 1917 he wrote "In the United States, the Negroes (and also the Mulattos and Indians) account for only 11.1%. They should be classed as an oppressed nation, for the equality won in the Civil War of 1861-1865 and guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic was in many respects increasingly curtailed in the chief Negro areas (the South) in connection with the transition from the progressive, premonopoly capitalism of 1860-1870 to the reactionary, monopoly capitalism (imperialism) of the new era, which in America was especially sharply etched out by the Spanish-American imperialist war of 1898." (LCW. Vol. 23, pp. 275-76)

It is important for comrades to

read this entire article and especially the paragraphs preceding and following the above quotation because some misinterpretations of this passage have occurred which must be answered briefly here. In this article Lenin stresses that he is writing this series of essays to

1) bring out the significance of the national question, 2) lay out the importance of concreteness and historical perspective, and 3) to struggle against those who, "smuggle in every manner of contraband under cover of general phrases" "We believe a few statistics will prove anything but superfluous" (Lenin)

He struggled against those who, "tear out individual minor facts" who do not recognize that, "everything hinges on the historically concrete situation." That facts must be taken "in their entirety, in their interconnection."

Some comrades have erred in dealing with the above quote, making precisely the errors that Lenin warns against in the article. Their position is that because Lenin states, "In national composition most of these countries are homogeneous or nearly homogeneous. National inequality, as a specific political phenomenon, plays a very significant part." That therefore he is not making a case for a nation. This last passage is in the paragraph preceding his remarks about Negroes in the U.S. The comrades make three main errors.

First, when Lenin speaks of homogeneity of the U.S. he is specifically speaking of the white population. "The white population of the U.S. makes up 88.7% of the total. We know that the especially favorable conditions in America for the development of capitalism and the rapidity of this development have produced a situation in which vast national differences are speedily and fundamentally, as nowhere else in the world, smoothed out to form a single 'American nation'." (ibid, p. 276)

When writing this essay Lenin makes it a point to single out Afro-Americans and state that they do constitute a nation. The homogeneity he points to is composed of native born and foreign born whites who quickly become "Americanized." Our comrades did not understand that when a general statement is made, that there are bound to be exceptions. Lenin singles out Afro-Americans in the U.S. as just such an exception.

Secondly, these comrades pulled individual passages out of context, specifically that the national question plays "a very insignificant part." They use this to liquidate the Afro-American national question. This was not at all Lenin's intent and if the comrades will re-read the article this should become clear. When addressing the question of national homogeneity in Western Europe, Japan and then specifically the U.S. he states, "Negroes... account for only 11.1%. They should be classed as an oppressed nation..." Lenin by no means is liquidating the national question.

Third error: The comrades failed to see the necessity for "concreteness and historical perspective." It may very well be true that the national question in these capitalist countries in 1917, "as a specific political phenomenon,

plays a very insignificant part," but can we say this today? In looking at the struggles of Black people in the U.S. over the last 15 years we can see that it has been anything but insignificant. After Martin Luther King was murdered Mao-Tse-Tung made the following statement in support of the Afro-American struggle:

"...it (the assassination) has touched off a new storm in their struggle against violent repression sweeping well over a hundred cities in the U.S., a storm such as has never taken place before in the history of that country. It shows that an extremely powerful revolutionary force is latent in the more than 20 million Black Americans. It is dealing a telling blow to U.S. imperialism..."

The Afro-American struggle is not only a struggle waged by the exploited and oppressed Black people for freedom and emancipation, it is also a new clarion call to all the exploited and oppressed people of the U.S. to fight against the barbarous rule of the monopoly capitalist class. It is a tremendous aid

Guardian photos by George Cohen



and inspiration to the struggle of the people throughout the world against U.S. imperialism. On behalf of the Chinese people, I hereby express resolute support for the just struggle of the Black people in the U.S." (Mao-Tse-Tung, 1968)

It would appear that the Afro-American national question is anything but insignificant today. Our comrades would do well to learn from our great teachers and become imbued with the spirit of internationalism, and to NEVER take a formal approach to the national question.

In June of 1920 Lenin again expressed his support for the Afro-American nation.

"Not only must the constant violation of the equality of nations and the guaranteed rights of national minorities that takes place in all capitalist countries, despite their 'democratic' constitutions, be consistently exposed in the whole propaganda and agitation of the Communist Parties--in parliament and out of parliament--but it is necessary also, firstly, constantly to explain that only the Soviet system is capable of granting real equality of nations, by uniting at first the proletarians and then the whole mass of the working population in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, and secondly, it is necessary that all communist

THE AFRO-AMERICAN NATION

parties render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and subject nations (for example, in Ireland, among the Negroes of America, etc.) and in the colonies " (Preliminary Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions)

Here Lenin makes it very clear that the movement of Negroes is a revolutionary national movement. Lenin placed great importance on this article. Before publishing it for the upcoming Second Congress of the Communist International, he mailed copies to leading members of the Party including Stalin who answered within a week after receiving it. Lenin also received responses to his requests for criticisms from representatives of the Bulgarian Communist Party, leading members from Bashkiria, Kirghizia and Turkestan as well as other leading members of the Russian Party. It was after receiving these responses that Lenin published the 'draft thesis' (cf LCW, Vol 31, p 555, note 51)

This draft was later adopted unanimously by the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions of

the CI was correct in 1928 or 1930 in the resolutions on American Negroes and whether or not the general conclusions drawn then are applicable today

We would respond by asking, "why stop there?" Why not throw up for question Lenin's brilliant analysis in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. Let's all begin to reinvestigate imperialism to see if Lenin was correct. Or let's trace the development of modern Europe to see whether or not Stalin was correct in Marxism and the National Question. All cadre out of the factories' Into the libraries'

This is an absurdity often raised by anarchistic intellectuals within our ranks which liquidates the role of communist leadership in the international communist movement, in communist organizations and within the working class. And it is nothing less than chauvinism to pick out the Afro-American national question for liquidation. Historically U S opportunists and revisionists have always attacked the Afro-American nation's right to self-determination. ATM accepts the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the Party of Labor of Albania

It is under their leadership that we will proceed, together with all genuine Marxist-Leninists, in the struggle to build the party, and to solve the practical and theoretical problems raised in the course of proletarian revolution in the U S

THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

On October 26, 1928 the Communist International adopted a resolution on the Negro Movement in the U S. Although it did not state that Afro-Americans constituted a nation, the CI nonetheless upheld their right of self-determination

"The various forms of oppression of the Negro masses, who are concentrated mainly in the so-called 'Black Belt', provide the necessary conditions for a national revolutionary movement among the Negroes"

In laying out the tasks of the Communist Party they state "To fight for the full rights of the oppressed Negroes and for their right to self-determination and against all forms of chauvinism, especially among the workers of the oppressing nationality"

In 1930 the Comintern again expressed its support for the Afro-American struggle and issued a resolution which expressed this support, gave direction to the CPUSA, and polemicized against the opportunist productive forces theory of Lovestone. It was in this resolution that the CI stated:

"In the interest of the utmost clarity of ideas on this question, the Negro Question in the US must be viewed from the standpoint of its peculiarity, namely, as the question of an oppressed nation, which is in a peculiar and extraordinarily distressing situation of national oppression not only in view of the prominent racial distinction (marked difference in the color of skin etc), but above all, because of considerable social antagonisms (remnants of slavery)"

And it was in this resolution that the CI took on the productive

forces theory as applied by Lovestone. "In its ranks, too, the party has relentlessly fought the slightest evidence of white chauvinism, and has purged itself of the gross opportunism of the Lovestoneites. According to the assertions of these people, the 'industrial revolution' will sweep away the remnants of slavery in the agricultural south, and will proletarianize the Negro peasantry, so that the Negro Question, would thereby presumably be solved, or could be put off until the time of the socialist revolution in America."

The CI saw that the South would be industrialized and they saw this as a good thing because it would create the class, the proletariat, which could lead the struggle of Black masses under the leadership of the CP. This is pointed out in both the 1928 and 1930 resolutions. The CI never said that industrialization would "solve" the Negro question

CHARACTER OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT HAS CHANGED

Since the time these resolutions were written, many changes have taken place in the south. But has the national question been solved? We have only to recall the rebellions of the sixties in Atlanta, Memphis, Birmingham, Watts, Newark, Detroit--in hundreds of cities across the U S to see that it has not. (It is not unusual that many of the rebellions took place in the North as they represent more prominent political centers than the Black South.) Even today we can see the national guard troops in Boston or Louisville

The demands of the Black masses, however, have changed since the 1930 CI resolution and there is nothing strange about this. In discussing this question in Marxism and the National Question, Stalin points out "The nature of the national movement will not everywhere be the same: it is wholly determined by the diverse demands made by the movement. In Ireland the movement bears an agrarian character, in Bohemia it is concerned with language; in one place the demand is for civil equality and religious freedom, in another for the nation's own officials or its own assembly."

The demands of the Black masses have changed from bearing "an agrarian character" to the "demand for civil equality", but this does not mean the question is solved. So while we see that the character of the movement has changed, the essence of the question has not, the essence being the oppression of the Afro-American nation by U S imperialism. And this is what the CI pointed out in 1928

"The various forms of oppression of the Negro masses, who are concentrated mainly in the so-called 'Black Belt' provide the necessary conditions for a national revolutionary movement among the Negroes"

And this is not only the essence of the Afro-American question but it is the political essence of imperialism-- the oppression of nations by a handful of imperialists. In his pamphlet "Imperialism and the split in Socialism" Lenin pointed out again that while the economic essence of imperialism is monopoly, it is national oppression

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the CI (ibid, p 240). The commission on the National and Colonial Questions was formed by the Second Congress of the Communist International and composed of representatives of the Communist Parties of Russia, Bulgaria, France, Holland, Germany, Hungary, the USA, British India, Persia, China, Korea, Britain and others.

The commission carried out its work under the guidance of Lenin, whose thesis on the national and colonial questions were adopted by the Congress on July 28 after being discussed at its fourth and fifth sessions. (cf LENIN ON THE NATIONAL AND COLONIAL QUESTIONS--three articles, FLP, Peking 1970, p.40, note 15)

The reason we lay so much stress on this question is to show that Lenin's reference to American Blacks was no casual remark but a seriously considered statement.

Before proceeding, we must address ourselves to the question of whether or not the communist movement in the USA is to accept the leadership of the international communist movement. This has been led by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and the CI under the leadership of Comrade Stalin. Today it is led by the Communist Party of China and the Albanian Party of Labor under Mao Tse-Tung and Enver Hoxha's leadership. Within the communist movement voices have often been raised as to whether or not

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which is the political essence of imperialism

And in the "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self Determination" he lays it out again: "... the central point in the social-Democratic programme must be the distinction between oppression and oppressed nations, which is the essence of imperialism, which is falsely evaded by the social-chauvinists and by Kautsky "

In "On Studying Some World History," the Chinese comrades support the struggles of Afro-Americans "Since World War II, Asia, Africa, and Latin America have become the focal point of the contradictions of the present-day world and are seething with struggles on an unprecedented scale against imperialism and colonialism and neo-colonialism. The ever-growing national democratic revolutionary movements in the heartland of capitalism, such as the Afro-Americans against racial discrimination and the struggle of the people of Northern Ireland for independence, all have profound historical origins."

The Chinese here distinguish between the essence of the national question as part of the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism and the character of the two national movements they cite. They, too, have seen a change in the character of both the Afro-American and Irish struggles from agrarian to a struggle against racial discrimination for the former and for independence for the latter. But the essence of the question has remained the same. Both are now part of the "focal point of the contradictions of the present day world .."

The R U as we pointed out before has been forced to revise Lenin on imperialism and the national question. To do this they resurrect the productive forces theory. Pointing to the social composition of the Black masses they conclude that the national question in the U S (only in the U S) is again an internal state problem. But doesn't this contradict Lenin on the national question?

The R U 's (RCP) dialecticians point out that just as the first period of the national question was negated by the second period, that we are in a new third period which represents a negation of the negation.

Comrades, the only negation we could find was the RCP's negation of Marxism-Leninism (We refer comrades to Selected Speeches-ATM 1974-1975 for a fuller polemic on the R.U 's position on the national question)

O L. : "SELF-DETERMINATION-YES SECESSION-NO"

The R U is not alone on this question. Another line which does not revise Marxism but which nonetheless represents an opportunist and chauvinist position on this question is the line of the October League. In words O L upholds the right of Afro-Americans to self-determination but states that politically it must "oppose secession" (We have not seen any repudiation of this second Congress position coming out of their third Congress)

The second congress position while not very concrete is much clearer than the position of the third congress reported in the Call.

This line of opposing secession invariably leads back to the productive forces theory, "The overwhelming majority of Afro-Americans are workers, living in industrial center " The Comintern very clearly saw that industrialization was taking place in the South but still upheld the following position

"As long as capitalism rules in the U S the Communists cannot come out against governmental separation of the Negro zone of the U S. They recognize that this separation from the imperialist U S would be preferable, from the standpoint of the national interests of the Negro population, to their present oppressed state, and therefore, the communists are ready at any time to offer all their support if only the working masses of the Negro population are ready to take up the struggle for governmental independence of the Black Belt." (1930 Comintern Resolution, quoted in C L 's Negro National and Colonial Question)

The OL sees the demand for secession as one which "objectively



Homes searched for weapons, Plainsfield, N J , July 1967

"Part of the 'focal point of the contradictions of the present day world' "

pushes the national bourgeoisie into the leadership " No, comrades, it is the white chauvinism of people like the OL, RU and the CPUSA which betrays the fundamental interests of the Black masses. They stand as guardians of the frontiers of the multinational U S state, which belittles the significance of the national question. It is this social-chauvinism which allows bourgeois nationalists to take leadership of the Black masses

But even if the Black bourgeoisie did lead a movement for secession, would OL be justified in opposing this?

"Moreover, the Party cannot make its stand for this slogan dependent upon any condition, even the condition that the proletariat has the hegemony in the national revolutionary Negro movement or that the majority of the Negro population in the Black Belt adopts the Soviet form (as Pepper demanded), etc " (Comintern 1930 resolution on the Negro Question)

So what is the basis for OL's stand? The basis is its social-chauvinist, thoroughly opportunist line, class stand and outlook (An example of this is the practice of the OL in the Greg Jones Defense

Committee in Oakland, California. This committee has been set-up to defend a Blackworker, a rank and file leader in his shop, who is accused of murder

Here the OL has refused, in the course of this struggle, to link it to the historical oppression of Afro-Americans and has refused to raise the slogan of the right of Afro-Americans to self-determination. In fact, when the Greg Jones Defense Committee refused to endorse the OL's Fight Back Conference, the OL threatened to pull out of the committee. So much for having the interests of the Afro-Americans at heart!

Here we must ask: what changes in the nature of imperialism have taken place to make secession a "backward slogan", if raised by the Black masses, thus necessitating that communists "oppose secession"? Was Lenin wrong when he repeatedly stated that imperialism represents the further intensification of all the contradictions of capitalism?

Was he wrong when he repeatedly stated that class oppression, national oppression and the oppression of women are not resolved under imperialism but are instead further aggravated? This question is not answered by the O L. Instead we get the following from their third congress

"In demonstrating how upholding the right of self-determination is not the equivalent of advocating separation or secession the document says that 'by making the struggle for democracy and self-determination of oppressed nations a component part of the working class program for struggle, each victory of the class as a whole becomes equally a victory of the oppressed nations ' In presenting the importance of the right of self-determination in the struggle for democracy, it becomes clear how the working class struggle for self-determination eliminates the desire for separation in a practical sense " (CALL, October, 1975)

IN CONCLUSION

Comrades, this article is our position on the Afro-American National Question as we have developed it thus far. We are continuing our work on this very important question. As communists within this imperialist country we recognize that chauvinism and racism have a long history here dating back to the colonization of the U.S. We have also seen the corrosive effect this has had within the working class and communist movements historically

We must struggle against this poison and be vigilant for its many signs and forms. We must imbue the working class and communist movements with the spirit of proletarian internationalism and a most bitter hatred for all forms of chauvinism and racism

"The territory of the Deep South belongs to the Negro people. They have earned it, as no other people have earned a homeland. This is the meaning of self-determination that the Negro people, in full possession of their homeland, have the right to decide the political future of that area." - Harry Haywood

**LONG LIVE PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM!!!
SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE AFRO-AMERICAN NATION!!!
MARXISTS-LENINISTS UNITE!!!**