

## Why the liquidationists champion the black nation theory In service of reformism and nationalism

Today the various opportunist trends in the U.S. left, whether pro-Soviet revisionist, Maoist or Trotskyite, have joined together in a common policy of liquidationism. They have no loyalty to the independent interests of the workers and oppressed masses and instead favor class collaboration with the capitalist liberals. In the struggle of the black people against racism and national oppression, the liquidators all adapt themselves to reformism and bourgeois nationalism. They have turned themselves into cheering squads for the black bourgeois misleaders tied to the Democratic Party.

The liquidators flagrantly distort the Marxist-Leninist principles to cover for their opportunism. Among them, they find a variety of ways to justify their support for reformism and nationalism. A small section of the liquidators, such as the Maoist League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS) and the pro-Soviet Communist Labor Party (CLP), use the theory of the black nation in the South to bolster their treacherous policies in the black liberation movement.

Those liquidators who champion the black nation theory insist that the struggle for the right to self-determination of the black nation must be at the heart of a revolutionary program for the black people in the U.S. In this article, we take a brief look at how this view flouts the real world and we show how the advocates of this view put it forward in order to oppose a revolutionary orientation on the black question. Here we again stress that we are referring to the main theoreticians of this theory, the liquidators, and not to various activists who may be under the influence of this theory while sincerely striving for revolution or pushing forward the mass struggle.

### Flying in the Face of Reality

As we describe in the other articles in this journal, a black nation did at one time come into being in the black belt South. This nation was formed in the decades following the Civil War and lasted for a period. But following World War II, a series of major economic and social changes swept the black belt. A new wave of migration bigger than any heretofore dispersed large numbers of the black people to urban centers across the U.S.

The liquidators who continue to hold fast to the black nation theory today simply shut their eyes to the changes that have taken place as a result of this dispersal. None so blind as they who refuse to see the facts before their eyes.

The emigration of blacks from the black belt has meant the dispersal of the black nation. Today, the

black belt no longer has a majority black population. There is no longer a sizeable continuous territory with a black majority. In fact, there are roughly five separate clumps of areas with a majority black population. All together, there are just over a million black people in these areas, where they constitute a bare majority (51.1%). The blacks who live here only make up about 4.1% of the total black population in the U.S., fewer than the number of black people in either New York City or Chicago. The vast majority of the 27 million blacks live in urban areas across the U.S.

This stands in contrast to the situation when there was in fact a black nation in the black belt. In 1880 for example, there were nearly 3.5 million black people in the black belt, where they constituted a 60.3% majority. And this black population made up just over half the total number of black people in the U.S. Even as recent as 1930, there were 4.8 million blacks in the black belt where they formed a 50.3% majority. This comprised about 40% of the total black population in the country, a large section though no longer a majority. Still even then a majority of the black people continued to live in the South as a whole.

The dispersal of the black nation does not mean that the national oppression of the black people in the U.S. has been resolved. Far from it. The black people retain many of the features of an oppressed nation, but today they form an oppressed national minority concentrated in urban centers spread across the country. Everywhere the black people face a common struggle against segregation, discrimination, and racist terror, and they join with with the rest of the working people in the struggle against capitalist exploitation.

This dispersal has put an end to any real material and economic basis for an independent country. There is no longer a nation, no longer a historical territory with a black majority, that could provide the basis for such a country. The dispersal of the black nation has rendered meaningless the question of the right of such a nation to self-determination or secession.

With their stubborn adherence to the black nation theory, the champions of this theory not only disregard reality, but as well, by raising the slogan for the right to self-determination for a non-existent black nation, these liquidators have made a complete hodge-podge of the principles of Marxism-Leninism on the national question.

With the black nation theory the liquidators try to sound oh-so revolutionary and militant. They pretend as if their stand holds dear the highest interests of the black people. But this is sheer

demagogy. In fact, it is all just a cover for their craven support for reformism and bourgeois nationalism.

### A Cover For Promoting Reformism

The champions of the black nation theory claim that recognition of a nation means a fight for self-determination which is revolutionary, while denial of a nation means a "mere" fight for "equality" which they say is non-revolutionary and reformist. Many times this is accompanied by pointing the finger at reformists and liberals who promote a reformist and pacifist approach in the name of fighting for equality.

The liquidators are talking nonsense. There can be a reformist approach both in the name of fighting for equality as well as in the name of upholding self-determination. The real issue is what the actual conditions call for, and the content of one's approach.

It is indeed true that there are liberals and reformists who speak of equality for the black people. But the problem with liberalism is not that it speaks in the name of equality, it is that liberalism is entirely hypocritical. Liberal talk of equality is merely lip service. And what is more, in recent years a whole section of liberals have directly joined the Reaganite racist campaigns around so-called "reverse discrimination" and "anti-crime" hysteria.

As to "equality", when revolutionary Marxist-Leninists speak of a fight for equality, or against racist terror, or on any democratic question, we do not mean simply verbal declarations and hand-wringing, like the liberal bourgeois friends of the liquidators do. And we do not promote any illusions that progress will come through the good graces of the capitalists. No, we mean mobilizing the masses for real struggle. And we link the struggle for equality with the struggle against the merciless capitalist exploitation of the masses. When the masses rise in struggle, they rise against the miserable conditions they face and do not stop at the boundary between democratic issues and the fight against exploitation of all kinds.

By denigrating any struggle that fails to raise the banner of the right to self-determination as "reformist," the liquidators are sneering at the struggles the black people are engaged in on a daily basis. They are turning the theory of the right to self-determination -- which in Lenin's hands was part of a powerful struggle against all forms of national oppression -- into a wet blanket to put out the flames of the ongoing struggles against oppression, to oppose anything that goes beyond the bounds that their liberal bourgeois friends will allow.

No, the liquidators will never get away with their mock cries about the horrible "reformism" of the struggle for "equality". Indeed, when one

examines what the liquidators are actually advocating in the name of "the right to self-determination," one finds that it is not some revolutionary policy but the crassest reformism. Today in the name of championing "self-determination," the liquidators are supporting the efforts of the black bourgeois politicians to get elected to office as candidates of the Democratic Party.

This politics is being promoted as a substitute for the actual struggle against racism and it is aimed at keeping the black masses hitched to the coattails of the Democratic Party of monopoly capital, precisely at a time when the disenchantment of the black people with the Democrats is growing. But to the lying liquidators, this becomes "black empowerment," "black political power", "black self-determination," etc. Everything from the election of black Democrats to local offices in the South to the election of Harold Washington in Chicago -- which of course is quite far removed from the black belt, to the electoral campaign of Jesse Jackson has been justified in the name of "self-determination."

### Collaboration With the Black Bourgeoisie

The class content of the program advocated by the champions of the black nation theory is collaboration with the black bourgeoisie. These liquidators use the black nation theory to play down the class differentiation within the black people and to claim that there is a unity of interests between the black upper crust and the black working people.

**This flows from the strange theory of these liquidators that if there is an oppressed nation, then the bourgeoisie of that nation is automatically a progressive force, an ally of the toiling masses.** This is not true in general, and it is ridiculous with respect to the black bourgeoisie.

Marxism-Leninism holds that there may be instances where on a temporary basis the national bourgeoisie -- or, more likely, sections of it -- may take a national-revolutionary stand in the struggle against national oppression. This is particularly so where the class antagonisms within the nation are not much developed. More often, however, the national bourgeoisie takes at best a national-reformist stand or tends to fall into outright collaboration with the oppressors of the nation. Indeed, the more aroused the masses of toilers are or the more acute the class contradictions are within the oppressed nation, the more likely is the national bourgeoisie to embrace a compact with the oppressor bourgeoisie against the toilers of all nationalities.

Among the black bourgeoisie today in the U.S., one finds both reform spouters as well as outright collaborators like Reagan's lackey Clarence Pendleton. But even the reformists are conciliating with the Reaganite racist offensive and participating in the capitalist drive against the black working

masses. This does not need great insight to see. It is sufficient to take just a glance at what is taking place with the black masses in the big cities which are today governed by black reformist and liberal mayors, like Coleman Young's Detroit, Wilson Goode's Philadelphia, or Andrew Young's Atlanta.

**Denying the Postive Impact  
of the Dispersal of the Black Nation  
for the Black Liberation Struggle**

**The champions of the black nation theory promote the view that an oppressed people can fight against their oppression only if they are forged into a nation.**

This too is untrue. Just take a look at the history of the black people over recent decades. Contrary to the prejudices of the champions of the black nation theory, the dispersal of the black nation, despite the pain and suffering that it entailed, has helped to facilitate, not hinder the struggle of the black people against racism and national oppression.

The biggest upsurge of the black people in this century took place not when there was a black nation, but coinciding with its dispersal -- in the 1950's and 60's. The upsurge of the black liberation movement during this period was facilitated by the results of the dispersal of the black nation.

The dispersal of the black nation led to the widespread proletarianization of the black people. Today the majority of the black people are urban workers. The dispersal of the black nation has also meant that the large numbers of black people are not scattered in the rural countryside but concentrated in large urban communities. This proletarianization and concentration are favorable for the development of struggle and organization against the oppression of the black people. The black people's will to rise up and break down the barriers that stood in their way has only been stiffened.

The dispersal of the black people to urban centers throughout the country has also helped to bring the black workers in closer contact with the workers of other nationalities. This has helped to cut down national barriers within the ranks of the working class and promote class unity and struggle. The black workers have played a militant role in the

proletarian movement.

The conditions created by the dispersal of the black nation have not only been favorable for the growth of the black people's struggle but they have also been favorable for the eventual merger of the anti-racist movement with the other currents of the mass movement into a single torrent of the socialist revolution.

**Negating the Socialist Revolution**

The champions of the black nation theory will occasionally talk about socialism. But in their hands, socialism becomes a totally lifeless phrase. The result of their distortion of the right of self-determination is to oppose using the black liberation struggle as a lever for the socialist revolution.

These liquidators not only use the question of "self-determination" to downplay the day-to-day struggles of the black masses but they also counterpose it to the socialist revolution. They present the question of "self-determination" as the highest goal of the black people. Despite the verbal declarations about the socialism -- in some distant future -- this amounts to putting forward a nationalist program for the black people; not one that organizes towards the socialist revolution.

What is more, the practical activity of these liquidators goes directly against using the energy of the anti-racist struggle for the socialist revolution. One cannot promote alliance with the black bourgeoisie, thorough lackeys of capitalism that they are, and still claim to stand for socialism. One cannot promote hitching the masses to the black bourgeois politicians and the Democratic Party of monopoly capital, and still pretend to stand for socialist revolution. One cannot promote narrow bourgeois nationalist prejudices among the black working masses, undermine class unity, and still pretend to stand for proletarian revolution.

No, the champions of the black nation theory both betray the democratic struggle of the black people against national oppression and their struggle against capitalist exploitation. They denigrate not just democratic goals such as that of equality, but also the class struggle and the socialist revolution. <>