

# Race, Nation and the Concept "Negro"

By Doxey A. Wilkerson

MARXISTS UNDERSTAND THE NEGRO question in the United States as a *national* question—that of an oppressed nation in the Black Belt area of Negro majority population, and that of an oppressed national minority in other parts of the country. From this basic theoretical conception flow the program and policies of the Communist Party on the Negro question, including: building Negro unity of all classes under leadership of the Negro workers, strengthening the Negro liberation movement as an independent force on the American political scene, extending the struggle for Negro democratic rights and against white chauvinism, consolidating the Labor-Negro Alliance, which will culminate in the ultimate achievement of Negro freedom through self-determination in the Black Belt.

Bourgeois ideologists, on the other hand, conceive the Negro question simply as a *race* question, devoid of national character, and involving merely the accommodation of two biologically differentiated population groups, the "white" (or Caucasian) race and the Negro race. In the hands

of imperialist reaction and its apologists, this basic conception leads to "justification" and intensification of the oppression of the Negro people on grounds of their alleged "racial inferiority" and of supposed "white superiority." In the hands of the bourgeois "liberals" and those under their ideological influence, this conception leads to illusory "gradualist" and "integrationist" approaches to a "solution" of the Negro question.

Marxists in our country have long struggled to establish the scientific understanding of the Negro question as a *national* question, and to popularize terminology which reflects this point of view. The increasingly widespread use of the term "Negro people" in the Negro community during the past two decades is largely a direct result of growing ideological influence of the Communists among the Negro people.

The correct struggle of Marxism-Leninism against the false and misleading "race problem" conception of the Negro question, especially against the racist, white supremacist connotations, has been distorted by many progressives into a rejection of the

concept of race altogether. "Race" has tended to become a bad word among some Marxists, so much so, indeed, that some have polemized against even the common phrase "no discrimination because of race, religion or national origin." This nihilist approach to the concept "race" is theoretically unsound. It represents a pseudo-Leftist deviation which distorts and weakens the correct struggle for an understanding of the Negro question as a *national* question.

Comrade William Z. Foster warned against this incorrect tendency during the Communist Party's discussion on the Negro Question six years ago. Writing in *Political Affairs*, in June, 1946, Foster said: "We must not brush aside the question of race, as we have done too often in the past."

The full implications of Comrade Foster's admonition seem not to have been grasped by certain Marxists; for the incorrect tendency completely to reject the concept of "race" not only persisted, but became more widespread during the past three years as the Communist Party developed its ideological campaign on the Negro question and the struggle against white chauvinism. There were isolated instances in which even the term "white chauvinism" was questioned on grounds of its implied "race" connotations.

This incorrect tendency to negate the concept and role of race was carried to its logical conclusion at a Marxist educational conference on race theories in the fall of 1951. I, together with others, developed a de-

viation on the question of "race" and "nation," which has done considerable harm to the struggle for a theoretically sound understanding of the Negro question as a national question, and thus has served to weaken the struggle against white chauvinism.

At this conference three papers were read and discussed. The first report, entitled "A Marxist Evaluation of the 'Race' Concept," developed the thesis that "race" is an unscientific concept ("There are no races of mankind."); and that a struggle must be waged against remnants of the "race" concept in Marxist discussions of the national question. The second report, entitled "'Race' and Capitalism," traced the rise of the "race" concept with the rise of capitalism; asserted that any classification of populations into "races" necessarily leads to racism, to the false doctrine of racial superiority and inferiority; and concluded that the science of socialism has no need of the concept "race." The third report, presented by me, was a paper entitled "On the Concept 'Negro.'" It is this report that has been the subject of extensive discussion in Marxist circles during recent months.

My report accepted the basic premises of the other two papers and sought to apply them to the Negro question. Documenting in considerable detail what is called "confusion in current usage" of the term "Negro," the report undertook to establish the following propositions:

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derstood scientifically "only as a sociological concept," devoid of all racial meanings, there being "no such thing as a 'Negro race'—anywhere in the world."

2) Correctly conceived, the term "Negro" designates only the Negro people of the United States, a product of history and social development in this country.

3) A correct definition of the concept "Negro" would "include nothing whatever about 'race,' physical characteristics, or African origin. It would run something like this: A 'Negro' is a person who shares the common psychological make-up of the Negro people of the United States, who views himself as belonging to the Negro people of the United States, . . . and who moves in the society and is fully accepted as an integral part of the Negro people of the United States."

4) Thus the several peoples of Africa and peoples of African origin in the West Indies and Latin America "are not Negroes. They should be referred to by their respective national and tribal designation. . . ."

5) The "very real and politically important bonds of sympathy among colored peoples' throughout the world, especially among those of immediate and remote African ancestry . . . should be encouraged and strengthened. This fact, however, does not justify a loose, 'racial,' misleading global use of the term 'Negro,' which correctly applies to a particular national development in the United States. . . ."

The intent of the paper was to polemize against bourgeois racist ideology and further to develop the Marxist conception of the Negro question as a national question. The report was received enthusiastically by most (not all) participants in the Conference, and by hundreds of other progressives who read a mimeographed digest of the report. Subsequent analysis and discussion have made it clear, however, that this whole thesis is theoretically unsound and politically harmful, that it constitutes a deviation from Marxist-Leninist theory on the national question.

#### THE CONCEPT "RACE"

It is a fact of nature that human populations in different parts of the world differ as regards certain external physical characteristics, notably skin-color, hair-texture, and body structure. These physical differences have a historic origin, representing variations in the human species, and dating far back in the era of primitive society. They were induced and developed by the process of people settling over the surface of the earth under widely divergent geographical conditions, and by the travel and crossing of tribes and nationalities.

These physical differences are superficial — only "skin-deep," as the common expression goes. Soviet scientists, for example, characterize such differences as "secondary, biologically superficial traits, having no significance for the biologic evolution of

man, and so much less for his social and cultural development."<sup>1</sup>

It is these superficial physical traits which constitute the sole basis for the classification of human beings into races. Thus, what are called "races" are loosely defined human population groups distinguished by more or less common external physical traits resulting from the prolonged isolation of these populations in different parts of the world under the influence of widely divergent geographic and climatic conditions. Soviet anthropologists define "race" as follows:

Race is a biological group of people formed in the early stages of mankind's development. Races are distinguished by such characteristics as the color of the skin, the textures and color of the hair, the structure of the body, etc. For instance, the distinguishing features of the black race (Negroes) are a dark skin and curly hair; those of the yellow race (Chinese, Japanese, Mongolians, Buryats) are a yellowish skin and straight black hair; those of the white race are a light skin. The emergence of races was influenced by natural environment in which people lived in primeval times and in a state of disconnectedness of the human groups and of the absence of a developed system of contact among them. Race differences are a subordinate fact. Of overriding significance is the fact of the biological unity of all mankind firmly established by science. Race differences have no significance for the social life of man. On the contrary they are waning with the development of society and the liquidation of the isolation and disconnectedness be-

tween human groups living in different geographical conditions. In the higher stages of society the primordial isolation of man gave way to contact and mutual aid—to the intermingling of races. In the course of time this resulted in the fact that there is no pure race in existence any longer. . . . Therefore the reactionary theories of the fascists and the present day Anglo-American racists of "pure" races is a lie and a fraud. It is impermissible to confuse nation with race; for nation is a social phenomenon, the result of prolonged historical development of society. The victory of Socialism in the U.S.S.R. has proven incontrovertibly that all nations and peoples—irrespective of racial characteristics—once they are free of exploitation and without mutual hostility are equally capable of assimilating advanced culture and impelling it forward. The practice of the Soviet Union has conclusively refuted the racist fiction of the imperialists.<sup>2</sup>

Understood in these terms, race is a valid concept which corresponds to objective reality. It has nothing in common with the pseudo-scientific myth of racial inequality, or "racism," which Joseph Stalin once characterized as being "as far removed from science as the sky from earth."

The most generally accepted classification of races is the three-fold grouping: Caucasoid (or "white"), centering in Europe; Mongoloid (or "yellow"), centering in Asia, and including the American-Indian descendants of Asian ancestors; and Negroid (or "black"), centering in Africa. Some American anthropologists use five categories (listing the

<sup>1</sup> *Bolshevik Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1950. (Translated from the Russian.)

<sup>2</sup> *Short Philosophical Dictionary*, ed. Rosenthal and Yudin, Moscow, 1951 (Russian), p. 429.

American Indian and the Australoid as separate racial groups); others use as many as thirty categories; and there are variations in between. Soviet anthropologists devote considerable attention to the study of a large number of "territorial anthropological types," defined in much the same terms as races.

A rounded discussion of the concept "race" is beyond the limits of this article. However, there are several important points which need to be established briefly before we proceed to discuss the role of race in the formation of the Negro nation.

First, race is not a fixed or static category, but a dynamic one. The incidence of particular physical traits used to distinguish a given race tends slowly to change in response to changing environmental conditions, a process which is accelerated by the conditions of modern life.

Secondly, the widespread intermingling of physically divergent populations through the centuries, a process enormously accelerated by the development of capitalist society, precludes any possibility of drawing a clear line of demarcation among the several races. Races are very loose groupings of human beings; and they vary in relative rather than absolute ways.

Thirdly, there is no scientific basis for the "racist" thesis that the superficial physical differences among races are paralleled by racial differences in physiological, mental or emotional traits, and that these alleged differences "explain" and "justify" inequalities in economic, political and social

status. Soviet scientists characterize as "*greatly at variance with reality*" the racist conjecture "that human races differ in their physical and mental endowments, and that these racial differences shape the history of human society and culture."<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that most bourgeois scientists now give at least superficial endorsement to the proposition that all races are equal—as, for example, in the recent UNESCO series of publications on "The Race Question in Modern Science."<sup>4</sup> Generally, however, through wholesale acceptance of the unsound Mendelian-Weissmann theories of heredity, they at the same time substantially buttress the pseudo-scientific foundation of racist ideology. Moreover, their half-hearted positions on this question—that racial inequalities have not been conclusively demonstrated, or are not so marked as once supposed, or are induced by environmental circumstances — represent no fundamental rejection of the race-difference hypothesis, but rather a tactical shifting of ground in the face of the enormous accumulation of scientific data which demolishes the whole rotten thesis of racial inequality.

It should also be noted that the Negro people, themselves, were the pioneer fighters against racist ideology in the United States. Beginning

<sup>3</sup> M. Levin, I. Roginsky, M. Cheboksarov, "Against Anglo-American Racism," *Voks Bulletin*, Moscow, No. 64, 1950.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris; especially: *The Race Question* (1950); L. C. Dunn, *Race and Biology* (1951); and Michel Leiris, *Race and Culture* (1951).

as early as the famous Benjamin Banneker letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1792 and continuing up to the present period, Negroes have always been in the forefront of the struggle against the false doctrine of racial inequality.<sup>5</sup>

The thoroughly established scientific principle that there is fundamental equality among all races of human beings emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing sharply between the *biological fact* of race and the *social myth* of "racial inequality." This distinction is crucial for an understanding of the relation between race and nation, in the formation of the Negro nation in our country.

### RACE AND NATION

In the course of social development, human beings living in close proximity have grouped themselves together in various forms of social organization, corresponding to the prevailing mode of production. The highest level of such development in primitive society was the *tribe* and the tribal federation. The class society of the slave period brought into being the *state*, which has continued through all successive epochs as an instrument of class domination. The merging of tribes into more or less localized *nationalities*, all embraced by the slave or feudal state, was a characteristic development of the pre-capitalist era. The development of

commodity production and trading as the predominant forms of economic activity, with the rise of capitalism, operated to undermine the isolation of small population groups characteristic of feudal society, and to weld different tribes and nationalities together into a unified, cohesive *nation*—into an "historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture."<sup>6</sup> The social organization of peoples into nations continues through the epoch of socialism; but it will tend to be dissipated with the emergence of communist society, with "the gradual amalgamation of all nations into one."<sup>7</sup>

It is important to emphasize that tribes, nationalities, and nations are *social* (not racial) formations, developed in response to the requirements of different modes of production. This is true, even though all or most of the members of a particular tribe, nationality, or nation, occupying a given territorial area, happen also to belong to the same race, or biological division of mankind.

Thus, Stalin stresses the fact that:

A nation . . . , a definite community of people . . . is *not racial*, nor is it tribal. The modern Italian nation was formed from Romans, Teutons, Etruscans, Greeks, Arabs, and so forth. The French nation was formed from Gauls, Romans, Britons, Teutons, and so on. The same should be said of the British, the Germans, and others, *who were*

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, Citadel Press, New York, 1951. (See index citations under "inferiority of Negro, argued against".)

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, International Publishers, 1942, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Stalin, *The National Question and Leninism*, International Publishers, p. 12.

formed into nations from peoples of different races and tribes."<sup>8</sup>

The biological fact of race, therefore, is not the basis of national formations. Rather, nations are the historical product of *social* development corresponding to the capitalist mode of production.

In response to the uneven development of capitalism, different peoples were formed into nations at different times in history; and the process is still under way.

Thus, whereas national states—one nation, one state—are characteristic in Western Europe, multi-national states are characteristic in Eastern Europe, "where feudalism had not yet been eliminated, where capitalism was feebly developed, where the nationalities which had been forced into the background had not yet been able to consolidate themselves economically into integral nations."<sup>9</sup>

Thus it is that various tribes and peoples of Africa and Asia are only now in the process of merging into nations. Thus it is also that the earlier developed nations of Europe, by virtue of their superior technology based on emerging capitalist economies, were able to extend their domination over and to enslave the primitive peoples of Asia, Australia, Africa and the Americas during the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

Moreover, the wealth accumulated through this enslavement of primitive peoples provided the main basis for the development of industrial capitalism. As Marx pointed out with reference to the African slave trade:

... the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.<sup>10</sup>

It was during this period of colonial expansion, in the wake of the maritime discoveries of the late fifteenth century, that the unscientific doctrine of race differences—of "superior" and "inferior" races—was developed by ideologists of the colonial powers as a mask or "justification" for their exploitation and enslavement of other peoples. As summarized by Soviet scientists:

... in the era of primitive capitalist accumulation when the European states first began to seize colonies and came into direct contact with representatives of other races, propaganda or racist ideas tried to justify the inhuman exploitation and extermination of the so-called "dark-skinned" peoples.

This period produced the reactionary "theory" of the racial inferiority of the Negro, the Indian, the other colonial peoples and of the superiority of the European or "white" race over the "black" and "yellow" races.<sup>11</sup>

This causal relationship between

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, op. cit., p. 9. (My Italics—D.A.W.)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 823.

<sup>11</sup> M. Levin et al., op. cit.

the development of capitalist colonial exploitation and the rise of racism, together with the further development of racist doctrines in the epoch of imperialism, has been recognized and clearly formulated by a number of progressive scientists. The eminent Negro sociologist, Oliver C. Cox, for example, generalizes that "racial ideologies were developed with reference to the relationship of Europeans with non-European peoples and subsequently refined to meet the needs of imperialism within Europe itself."

Harry Haywood characterizes the myth of racial inequality as "the theoretical foundation upon which rests the whole noxious system of Negro segregation and its corollary, 'white supremacy.' Formerly a rationalization of chattel slavery, it is used to justify the Negro's present-day vassalage."<sup>12</sup>

Herbert Aptheker shows how the unsurpassed fraud, terror and mass lynchings directed against the Negro people with the rise of imperialism during the late nineteenth century was backed up by "the evolving of a modern, 'scientific' white chauvinism."<sup>13</sup>

This whole relationship between capitalist exploitation and racism, together with its vital political role today, is effectively summarized by Howard Johnson:

In order to justify the economics of slavery, the whole myth of "white su-

premacy" was erected in the ideological sphere. The "white supremacy" myth pervaded American life. . . . This ideology outlasted the economic institution of slavery and today is used by the Wall Street imperialists as one of the main ideological buttresses of its national chauvinist drive to world domination.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, racist ideology became part of the superstructure of capitalist society, arising from and serving to reinforce the exploitative relations of capitalist production. The objective physical differences which alone constitute the basis for grouping human beings into races, in and of themselves, are devoid of social significance. Race *per se* plays no role in the development of nations or other social formations. This is by no means true, however, of the *social myth of racism*, which has attached to the biological fact of race a social significance by no means inherent in the physical traits themselves. This myth has played and continues to play an important role in social and political development.

The national developments underway in Africa, for example, are social formations which arise in response to changes in the mode of production, just as in the case of similar formations in Europe or elsewhere. The simple biological fact that certain "Negroid" physical traits (*i.e.*, skin-color, texture of hair, etc.) predominate among the peoples of Africa is in and of itself, irrelevant to these national developments. By no means

<sup>12</sup> Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation*, International Publishers, 1948, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Aptheker, "American Imperialism and White Chauvinism," *Jewish Life*, July, 1950.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Johnson, "Aspects of Negro History and the Struggle Against White Chauvinism," *Political Affairs*, February, 1950.

irrelevant, however, is the fact that the European conquerors of Africa parade under the banner of "white superiority," and seek to justify their dominance on the ground that the Negro race is an "inferior" branch of humanity.

This widespread racist ideology of the European conquerors constitutes a major political force, furthering the subordination and enslavement of the African peoples. In turn, it calls into being a counter-force among the several Negro peoples of that continent—a consciousness of race, supplementing and reinforcing their tribal and emerging national consciousness. Because of the social significance attached to skin-color and other racial traits by the early colonial and later imperialist oppressors, color identification operates as a further basis of unity among the peoples who constitute the emerging African nations.

Thus it is, for example, that *consciousness of race* is an important component of the national consciousness of the rapidly emerging Nigerian and other African nations. So it is also with the development of nations and national minorities among peoples of the Negro race in the West Indies, Latin America and the United States.

The African tribesmen who were brought to this land and enslaved during the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries came from widely divergent cultures, spoke different languages, and represented quite discrete social groups. They shared in common, among other things, a de-

veloping consciousness of membership in a common race, the Negro race—a sense of the unity of "black" people in common struggle against their "white" ruling-class oppressors.

Under the conditions of two and one-half centuries of slavery, these up-rooted African tribesmen and their descendants, centered overwhelmingly in what is now known as the "Black Belt" area of the South, learned to communicate with one another on the basis of a newly acquired common language, the English language. They shared in common the murderous oppression of a system of slave production geared to an ever-expanding capitalist world market. They struggled in common against this inhuman oppression—through strikes, flights, revolts, and other means. They were constantly confronted with, and they struggled in common against, the slave owners' ideological weapon of racism, buttressed by pseudo-scientific "evidence" and alleged pronouncements of God. As a result of these common associations and experiences, including their growing race consciousness, there developed among the slave population strong and abiding psychological bonds of unity, which found reflection in their unique cultural creations during this period, most notably the Negro spirituals.

Thus, during the period of slavery, the once more or less disparate groups of African tribesmen and their descendants were welded together into a distinct people, a nationality developing toward nationhood. The de-

velopment could not run its full course because of the plantation barriers which prevented free association among the slave population as a whole.

Following the destruction of the slave system during Civil War and Reconstruction, the conditions were established for the fuller development of the Negro people as a nation. The defeat of Reconstruction, consummated in the Hayes-Tilden betrayal in 1876, destroyed the hopes of the emancipated Negro for full integration into American national life on the basis of freedom and equality. The Negro peasant masses were left landless under the subjection of the new Bourbon masters of the South. More and more, class groupings and stratifications began to manifest themselves among them. With the development of a Negro bourgeoisie at the turn of the century, side by side with the growing numbers of Negro wage laborers, as well as a Negro middle class, the struggle against segregation and discrimination, and against the oppressive plantation system, assumed more and more the essence of a national struggle, a struggle for national affirmation. Common integrating economic, political and social conditions and experiences during the past 75 years have served more firmly to weld the Negro people in the Black Belt area of their majority population into a distinct *nation*, a nation hindered in its development by brutal national oppression.

The essential characteristic of this

continuing development among the Negro people in the United States is not racial, but social—their merging together into an increasingly integrated nation through an historic succession of unifying experiences based on common territory, language and economic life, and giving rise to the development of a common psychological make-up — traditions, ideas, aspirations, etc.—which more and more find reflection in day-to-day conversations, customs, literature, music, the dance, and other forms of art. An important unifying factor in this whole development is *race*—or more precisely, the social significance which has come to be attached to race by virtue of the false racist ideology against which the developing Negro nation has continuously been forced to struggle.

Thus, the Negro nation developing in the Black Belt is a historic and unique social formation among that part of the United States population which stems from the loose grouping of human beings designated as the "Negro race." It is not a "racial" community of people; but the fact of common race, distorted by capitalist exploiters into racism, has played and continues to play an important unifying role in the further integration of the Negro nation in our country.

At the same time, the question cannot be left on the level of race, since the posing of the issue as a "race issue" is the way in which the white ruling class seeks to conceal the national essence of the Negro people's struggle. In the words of

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Comrade Foster:

Preoccupation with this burning question of racial discrimination tends to obscure the more basic conception of their status as a nation.

### THE ROLE OF AFRICAN HERITAGE

The African tribesmen captured by the traders in men and transported to the New World brought with them much more which they shared in common than certain external physical characteristics. They brought also cherished memories of their homeland, their native languages, patterns of family life, religious beliefs and ceremonies, forms of artistic expression, and various other attributes of the primitive African cultures.

This African cultural heritage, despite variations among the different tribes, included much that was common or strongly similar among the early Negro slave populations in the Americas. It operated as a further unifying influence, reinforcing and strengthening other factors contributing toward the integration of these populations into nationalities and nations. Even today, the impact of the African heritage is clearly evident in the social life and culture of the several Negro peoples of the West Indies and Latin America, and to a lesser extent in the United States.

Estimates of the extent of African cultural survivals among United States Negroes differ considerably. For example, Melville J. Herskovitz, anthropologist at Northwestern Uni-

versity, has found what he interprets as African survivals in practically all phases of contemporary Negro life.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, E. Franklin Frazier, sociologist at Howard University, while conceding the influence of African culture on early Negro life in this country, is convinced that in the "process of adjusting themselves to American civilization, the majority of the Negroes have sloughed off completely the African heritage."<sup>16</sup> A decade and a half of careful and extensive research by Lorenzo D. Turner, linguist at Roosevelt College, has revealed the current use of about 4,000 words of West African origin, together with many African speech patterns, among approximately 250,000 Gullah Negroes who live on the islands and in other isolated areas along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina.<sup>17</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois asserts that "there still can be traced not only in words and phrases but in customs, literature and art, and especially in music and dance, something of the African heritage of the black folk in America. Further study will undoubtedly make this survival and connection clearer."<sup>18</sup>

Whatever may be the precise extent of African cultural survivals in Negro life in the United States today, there is no question that this African heritage played an important, inte-

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, his effective critique of the race-difference doctrine: *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Harper and Brothers, 1941.

<sup>16</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States*, Macmillan, 1949, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanism in the Gullah Dialect*, University of Chicago Press, 1949.

<sup>18</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Folk: Then and Now*, Henry Holt and Co., 1939, p. 198.

grating role in the earlier life of the Negro people. Moreover, the enormous mass appeal of the Garvey movement during the 1920's, the tremendous concern of the Negro people over Italy's rape of Ethiopia during the 1930's, the widespread interest in African liberation struggles reflected in the Negro press today, and the frequent development of African themes by Negro musical, dance, literary and graphic artists—all attest to the continuing vitality of the African heritage as a force among the Negro people of our country.

### POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The major theoretical errors expressed in my paper of last September are of more than academic significance; they are pregnant with harmful political implications for the Negro people and the working class. To the extent that these incorrect ideas are still current in the progressive movement they operate to retard the struggle for Negro liberation and the broader people's struggle for peace, democracy and socialism. There are several important respects in which this is true.

*First*, the denial that race (especially skin-color) is a component of the concept "Negro" tends to undermine the basic understanding of the Negro question as a *national* question; for this understanding rests, in large part, on a grasp of the unifying role which consciousness of race has played and continues to play in the national development of the Negro people. It follows, of course, that the

practical effect of this theoretical distortion is to weaken the whole program of struggle which flows from the Marxist understanding of the Negro question as a national question.

A word of caution, however, is in order. At the same time that we recognize the unifying influence of race consciousness among the Negro people, we must remain alert to the fact that racism and consciousness of race also tend to obscure the true *national* character of the Negro question. This is the danger which my paper of last fall sought to combat; and it continues as an important area of ideological struggle.

*Second*, and more concretely, the denial of the racial component of the concept "Negro" tends to destroy the theoretical basis of the struggle against white chauvinism; for the very concept "*white* chauvinism" is predicated upon an understanding of the role which "*race* prejudice"—the myth of "*white* superiority"—plays in the national oppression of the Negro people.

It should be emphasized that the concept "*white* chauvinism" embodies both the idea of national superiority ("*chauvinism*") and racial prejudice ("*white* superiority"). Effective struggle against white chauvinism must rest upon a full understanding of the nature of this ideological weapon of imperialism—and also, of course, of its corrupting impact upon the working class.

It is also worth noting that the imperialist ideology of white chauvinism is directed not alone against the

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Negro people, but also against other "dark-skinned" peoples — such as many Puerto Ricans and Cubans, West Indians, Mexicans, Indians, Filipinos, Chinese, and Japanese. Thus, these and other "colored" peoples are the objects of both racial and national oppression, and of the corresponding ideology of white chauvinism.

*Third*, the denial that race and African heritage are essential components of the concept "Negro" serves to minimize the very strong and important bonds of unity between the Negro people of the United States and other Negro peoples in Africa and the Americas; and the political effect of this error is to narrow and weaken the world coalition of anti-imperialist forces in the struggle for democracy and peace.

Right now, for example, millions of American Negroes are following closely, and large numbers are giving direct aid to the heroic Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws being conducted by the peoples of South Africa against the fascist tyranny of the Malan government. The special concern of American Negroes for these and other African liberation struggles reflects close identification with the African peoples. It is based primarily on consciousness of common race and common interest in struggle against the ruling class myth of "white superiority," and secondarily on a sense of awareness that Africa is the historic homeland of the Negro people of the United States, that the enslaved peoples of

that continent are descendants of our own forebears.

This special concern of Negroes in our country for the peoples of Africa is paralleled by—indeed, is an integral part of—their deep sympathy for oppressed "colored peoples" elsewhere. The bonds are especially firm with the several oppressed Negro nations in the British West Indies, as well as with Cuban, Puerto Rican and other Latin-American Negroes. These bonds of sympathy extend even beyond the Negroid peoples of African heritage and embrace also the Mongoloid peoples of Asia, whom American Negroes recognize to be also victims of the imperialist ideology of "white superiority." Moreover, there is abundant evidence that these feelings of unity and sympathy on the part of the Negro people in our country are fully reciprocated by the Negro peoples of Africa, the British West Indies, and Latin America, and by other colonial peoples in Asia.

These international bonds of unity among Negro and other colored peoples are of prime political importance. They operate greatly to strengthen the anti-imperialist struggles of these peoples for their own liberation, and thereby to strengthen and more firmly to consolidate the whole world coalition of democratic peoples' forces now fighting to halt the predatory, chauvinist, imperialist drive toward war and fascism.

*Fourth*, the widespread discussions precipitated by my theoretical errors on the concept "Negro" tended to

divert parts of the Marxist movement away from today's crucial main line of ideological struggle on the Negro question and to focus attention on a somewhat sterile, academic discussion not directly linked to the major political tasks of this period.

The drive of United States imperialism toward war and fascism is accompanied by a marked intensification of white chauvinism. The Negro liberation movement, itself, is assailed by bourgeois ideas which tend to sap its unity and strength.

These are the ideological battlefields toward which our theoretical understanding on the national and Negro question should be directed.

Finally, one of the most important outcomes of the recent discussions held to correct the false ideas contained in my paper on the concept "Negro" is an enhanced appreciation by all participants of the indispensability of Marxist-Leninist theory as a guide to sound and effective work in this as in other fields of activity.

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Readers are cordially invited to submit manuscripts, not exceeding 4,000 words, for publication in *Political Affairs*. Letters of comment will also be welcomed; those submitted for publication should not exceed 400 words—the Editor.

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