

Black National Question



BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT, ALLY OF SOCIALISM

A The Black people in the U.S. have traveled a long and hard road of particular and special oppression as a people. Brought to these shores in chains, torn from diverse civilizations in Africa, forced to speak the language of their oppressors and denied all rights to cherish and retain any connections with their ancestral past, Black Americans, in the course of four centuries, have been welded into a distinct and common people, a nationality. Together they have weathered the trial of history's most barbaric slavery, endured a century of semi-feudal peonage and racist white minority rule in the deep south, and have faced for decades the brutality of urban ghettoization, mass unemployment and super-exploitation in industry both North and South. These long years of special oppression and social ostracism have

created among Black people a common national identification and character. They have become an oppressed nationality with a developing national consciousness.

Today, this Black national identification is stronger than ever, despite the fact that many of the material conditions which once characterized the Black people as a separate nation no longer exist to any great degree.

Blacks are no longer mainly concentrated in the agrarian Black Belt region, where they had all the characteristics of a nation. Today, they are dispersed in ghetto concentrations in the two dozen major cities throughout the U.S. This transformation of the conditions of Black life in America began during World War I and has generally increased since then. It is the product both of mechanization of agriculture in the agrarian South and of the vicious nature of southern white oppression. Both factors acted to drive millions of Blacks from the agrarian Black Belt region into the cities.

One might expect this dispersal of the Black national concentration in the Black Belt to have weakened the national sentiment of the Black people. However, this has not been the case. The revolutionary explosions of the Black liberation movement during the 1960's graphically demonstrated this rising national sentiment. Despite the dispersal of the Black nation, the popularity and intensity of the national movement among Blacks during that period reached a level which had never previously been attained. Life has shown that Black nationalism continues to have, today, an ever increasing mass appeal and an enormous revolutionary potential.

B The continued profoundly popular and profoundly revolutionary character of the national movement among the 24 million Black Americans derives from the fact that national oppression is a vital component of the U.S. imperialist system. It is so deeply woven into the fabric of modern U.S. society, and has become such an important social prop for the system's survival, that it can only be obliterated with the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism.

This makes the Black liberation movement an extremely important ally of the revolutionary proletarian movement. The two movements have common objectives and a common enemy. Therefore, it is strategically imperative that the socialist revolution be merged with the long-delayed national-democratic revolution of the Black people in the U.S. This requires the forging of the firmest possible alliance between the two movements in the course of anti-imperialist struggle.

C Critical to this revolutionary merger is the clear recognition, particularly on the part of white workers, of the independent revolutionary significance and potential of the Black liberation movement, and the firm respect for the national sentiment of the Black people. The Black liberation movement is, and will remain for some time, a movement of Black people independent of the labor movement, a movement which unites all Black people despite their class differentiations. The independence of the Black liberation movement is safeguarded by Blacks, largely because their cruel history has taught them to rely mainly on themselves for their own liberation. Though Black liberation depends on the socialist revolution, the Black liberation movement remains the mightiest weapon of the Black people. Therefore, the merger of the two movements will largely take the form of an alliance

between two revolutionary partners.

The slogan, "Workers of All Nationalities Unite!," while certainly essential and correct, is not sufficient. "Black People Unite!" must be included. As an overall slogan, "Workers and Oppressed Nationalities Unite To Defeat the Common Oppressor, To Establish Socialism, and To Win Black National Liberation!," or something similar, will alone be capable of creating a basis for the firm alliance of the two movements. This is because the Black liberation movement, as a Black national movement contains its own independent revolutionary potential and significance.

D The theory and practice of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), under the slogan, "Workers Unite To Lead the Fight Against All Oppression!," is a good teacher by negative example. This slogan is dangerous, not because it is wrong, but because it purposefully omits any recognition of the independent revolutionary significance and potential of the Black liberation movement. As practice has shown, the RCP insists that the Black liberation movement be subsumed within the multi-national labor movement, and must abandon its independence. This they term, "Building the fight against national oppression as a component of the overall class struggle." In short, they liquidate the Black national movement as an independent revolutionary ally of labor. The trademark of the RCP is confusion and inconsistency on this issue, and they continue to speak of the "Black people's struggle" and of the need for "an alliance". Where is any RCP practice in building the Black liberation movement? There is none. Why? Because the RCP sees no need for it. In fact, they view the independent Black liberation movement as a threat to multi-national unity.

The RCP line differs only slightly from the

thoroughly opportunist view of the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), which says that "all nationalism is reactionary". According to the PLP, there is no revolutionary potential whatsoever in the Black liberation movement. The Black liberation movement serves to divert the Black proletariat from the multi-national class struggle. The PLP actively opposes and attacks all Black national movements and even attacks the special demands for Black rights as a diversion from the common class issues. This latter practice has been adopted by the RCP. A most glaring example of this was the RCP's position on busing in Boston. The RCP "justified" its participation in the racist and fascist-led anti-busing march on the basis that this march upheld the common demand of all workers for quality education. Supposedly, the demand for school integration, diverted the Black people from this common demand, and therefore, had to be opposed. The fact that the Ku Klux Klan marched under this "common class demand", was of little importance to the RCP. It is this kind of chauvinist practice on the part of white "revolutionaries", rather than the national movement and the demands of Black people that creates disunity between white workers and Blacks.

II REVOLUTIONARY AND REACTIONARY NATIONALISM

A The position that "all nationalism is reactionary" is patently false and anti-Marxist. The Marxist-Leninist position recognizes both a reactionary and revolutionary potential in nationalism, firmly opposes the former, and actively supports and promotes the latter. It is the responsibility of Marxist-Leninists to draw out and expose before the masses the difference between the two, and to unleash and give conscious direction to the fullest revolutionary potential of the national movement. This requires that the Marxist-

Leninists join the Black liberation movement and promote revolutionary nationalism. Only if Marxist-Leninists become the vanguard of both the Black national and the labor movement will it be possible to take full advantage of the revolutionary potentialities of each, and merge them into a common anti-imperialist onslaught. This merger, and not opposition to "all nationalism", is the road to revolution.

B Revolutionary nationalism does not threaten multi-national unity in the least. Revolutionary nationalism links the question of Black liberation with the overthrow of imperialism, and therefore, in the final analysis, with the socialist revolution. Consistent revolutionary nationalism upholds the unity between the Black liberation movement and the revolutionary labor movement. In turn, it encourages multi-national revolutionary unity. This is so because the liberation of the Black people can come about only with the common efforts of all revolutionary forces in society.

C Reactionary nationalism, on the other hand, opposes the unity of all anti-imperialist forces. One form of reactionary nationalism targets all whites as the enemy of the Black people, not distinguishing between the imperialists and the people. This notion has led some Blacks to the suicidal advocacy of a war on all whites. But even less extreme forms of this notion have been utilized by various reactionary forces among Blacks who seek personal advantage through the Black liberation movement.

Another and more subtle form of reactionary nationalism, promoted mainly by the Black bourgeoisie, politicians and the clergy, is the delusion that liberation can be won "through the system" by building Black capitalism. This form of "nationalism" preaches conciliation with

imperialism and promotes the interest of Black capitalism as the interest of the Black nation. It is this kind of "nationalism" which today attempts to tie the Black liberation movement to the coat-tails of the Democratic Party.

Both forms of reactionary nationalism oppose the revolutionary alliance of the Black liberation movement and the labor movement, discourage multi-national unity and ultimately promote Black capitalism and not Black liberation. In the final analysis, reactionary nationalism not only opposes socialism, but can never lead to the liberation of the Black people. The U.S. imperialists, first and foremost, oppose the Black national movement. But, in addition, they also promote both forms of reactionary nationalism as a means of strangling the Black liberation movement from within and to disengage it from any and all potential allies. In the final analysis, therefore, reactionary nationalism is national betrayal, and capitulation to imperialism. Marxist-Leninists must expose reactionary nationalism for what it is: a tool of imperialism.

D The struggle between revolutionary and reactionary nationalism, between the revolutionary and the reactionary roads for the Black Liberation Movement, is a class struggle. By its very nature, the Black liberation movement is a united front movement of all classes of Black people. Within this united front, the various classes exhibit their own prejudices and act according to their own interests. Though practically all Blacks can be drawn into the anti-imperialist struggle, the Black bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie are given to great vacillation and inconsistency. Ingrained with bourgeois individualism, they will tend to be pulled toward compromise with imperialism. At the same time, the oppressive hand of white chauvinism continues to upset their schemes, and tends to

push them back toward an anti-imperialist stance. It is among these non-proletarian strata that reactionary nationalism finds its most fertile soil. This is because the class and national interests of these classes are forced into constant conflict under imperialism.

Revolutionary nationalism, on the other hand, finds its most fertile soil among the workers and the poorest strata of the Black people. Their conditions of life press upon them a more social outlook. Under imperialism, there is no conflict between their class and national interests. Both interests demand an unrelenting struggle against imperialism. The struggle between revolutionary and reactionary nationalism is a class struggle. Within the Black united front, Black workers must take the lead, promote revolutionary nationalism and defeat reactionary nationalism.

E In the U.S. today, revolutionary Black nationalism is applied internationalism. It is the internationalist duty of Black Marxist-Leninists to join the Black liberation movement, promote revolutionary nationalism, and lead the fight against reactionary nationalism. Marxist-Leninists must champion the cause of revolutionary nationalism, and fight for the revolutionary unity of the Black liberation movement and the labor movement. At the same time, white Marxist-Leninists are duty bound to build support for the Black liberation movement among white workers, and to oppose all forms of national oppression.

Internationalism is not the antithesis of nationalism. It is wrong to erect a wall between internationalism and "all nationalism". Internationalism demands only that nationalism be applied in a revolutionary manner and contribute to the international struggle against imperialism. Internationalism and revolutionary nationalism are on the same side. The positions,

either that "all nationalism is reactionary"*, or that "all nationalism is nationalism"**, are attacks on revolutionary nationalism, and consequently, attacks on internationalism.

III WHITE CHAUVINISM, MAIN ROADBLOCK TO REVOLUTIONARY UNITY

A The main obstacle to both multi-national labor unity and to the revolutionary unity of the labor and the Black national movements, is the widespread hold of white chauvinism and racism among the white workers. Reactionary Black nationalism plays a role in obstructing unity, but white chauvinism is the main problem. More often than not, the strength of reactionary Black nationalism can be directly attributed to the strength of white chauvinism. The main expressions of white chauvinism among workers is the failure, on the part of white workers to oppose the national oppressive policies of imperialism, and the unwillingness to support and assist the Black liberation movement.

B White chauvinism is a form of nationalism which can only be reactionary, because white nationalism is the nationalism of an oppressor nation. White chauvinism among white workers is a form of class collaboration with imperialism against the Black and other non-white peoples. Its prevalence is a direct indication of the low level of class consciousness among American workers.

White chauvinism and all kinds of opportunism are conscientiously fostered by imperialism through the creation of a bribed sector of the working class (i.e. the labor aristocracy),

*PLP's line
**RCP's line

and through the widespread extension of petty privileges to all white workers (relative to non-whites). These privileges come in all forms: economic, political and social. These real privileges create the social basis for the spread of white chauvinism. However, aside from the substantial benefits derived by the labor aristocracy, these privileges amount to very little when compared to the exploitation and oppression the whites face themselves. It is a mere illusion that white workers benefit from the oppression of Blacks. What white workers sacrifice for their petty privileges is their own emancipation.

To create the conditions for multi-national unity and for an alliance between labor and the Black people's movement, above all else white workers must come to view Black oppression from the standpoint of their own class interests. When viewed from the class standpoint, the oppression of the Black people is a major prop of imperialism, and therefore, is a major prop of the system that exploits all workers. It is in the class interests of all white workers to fight against this oppression and to support the Black liberation movement, which is contributing greatly to the destruction of imperialism.

C In our battle against white chauvinism among white workers, the main responsibility falls on the shoulders of white Marxist-Leninists. It is their internationalist responsibility to develop a class conscious understanding among white workers and to build concrete support by white workers for the Black liberation movement. Special attention is required to eradicate white chauvinism from the ranks of Marxist-Leninists themselves. Without cleansing our own ranks of white chauvinism, we aren't in any position to lead the working class in its struggle for emancipation. Without a thorough struggle against

white chauvinism, in all its manifestations, victory in the struggle against imperialism is impossible.

D A specific area of the struggle against white chauvinism in practice is the struggle to win support of white workers for affirmative action policies in industry, education, and all other spheres. This issue is often opposed by white workers because it requires adjustments in seniority systems and aspects of "reverse discrimination" in hiring and promotion, as well as college entrance requirements etc. The demand for affirmative action places before white workers the very real choice of protecting their immediate petty privileges against the Black people, or supporting the Black people and supplementing the demand for affirmative action with the demand for a system that can provide for all. The notion advanced by certain "Marxist-Leninists" that the demand for affirmative action contradicts the demand for full employment because it asks for special privileges for the oppressed minorities, is a bogus argument which seeks to justify white workers' defense of their petty privileges. Support or non-support for affirmative action is an acid test of internationalism.

IV THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

A U.S. Marxist-Leninists must uphold the Black people's right to self-determination. This includes their right to community control and to regional autonomy in the areas they inhabit and are the majority. But it must also include their right to reconstitute and to govern their national-homeland in the Black Belt.

Self-determination is a political concept that cannot be divorced from geography. All extra-territorial concepts of self-determination are

utopian and illusionary schemes. They can never lead to self-determination. Only on a definite territory can a people achieve self-determination.

The right to self-determination must not be confused with the obligation to form a separate state. Such a concept is nothing but forced segregation. Marxists are opponents of forced segregation, just as we are opposed to forced integration. We stand for the obliteration of all force in regards to the national question. The right to self-determination is the right to voluntarily separate or not to separate. It is the fight to free choice. In this light, we support the demand raised in the 1966 10-point program of the Black Panther Party: "We want... as our major objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of the black people as to their national destiny."*

B Whether or not to uphold the right to self-determination for the Black people is a hotly debated issue among Marxist-Leninists. There is general agreement that prior to the Second World War, the Black people constituted a nation in the Black Belt region of the U.S., with a legitimate right to self-determination on that basis*. There is much disagreement, however, on whether the Black nation continues to exist, and what role the demand for the right to self-determination plays in today's conditions.

*Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, Vintage Books, 1970. p. 68

**See the 1928 and 1930 resolutions of the Communist International

The three major views in this regard are:

1. The Black Belt nation continues to exist, hence, its right to self-determination must be upheld. Outside of the Black Belt, where Blacks are a national minority, the fight is for individual democratic rights.
2. The Black Belt nation no longer exists; its population has been dispersed, and its economic cohesion upset. Blacks throughout the U.S. are a dispersed national minority, whose fight is for individual democratic rights. To raise the issue of self-determination, is to uphold the right of the Black people to organize or "reorganize" a nation. Since Marxist-Leninists are not "national builders", it is reactionary to uphold this right.
3. And finally, the Black Belt nation no longer exists (for the same reasons as above). However, the nation has been transformed into a "nation of a new type", a nation no longer requiring a common territory and a common economic life. This "nation" retains the right to self-determination (i.e. the right to reconstitute their national integrity in the Black Belt, and to self-determination on that basis). But, a fight for this right constitutes "nation-building", and would be a step backward for the Black people. The "main thrust" of the Black struggle is for individual democratic rights, and it is not for Marxist-Leninists to raise the right to self-determination as any kind of immediate demand. The right to self-determination is a "negative" demand that Marxist-Leninists should only raise when (and if) it has become the "main thrust" of the Black liberation movement.

The first mistake of all three views is their mechanical assumption that a nation (of some type) need, in fact, exist for Marxists to uphold the right of a people to self-determination. The history of the national policy in the Soviet Union proves beyond any doubt that the right to self-determination has not, and could not be mechanically applied to full nations alone, but wherever practical, was extended to national minorities. The most striking case in point is the example of Soviet policy toward the Jewish nationality.

Most Marxist-Leninists are aware of Lenin and Stalin's sharp struggle against the Jewish Bund, a pseudo-Marxist organization which advocated a form of "nation building" known as "cultural-national autonomy". Both Lenin and Stalin castigated the Bund for attempting to "organize a nation". But, it is anti-historical to use this example of opposition to "nation building" as the basis for our national policy today. If one looks at the actual policy of socialism, once in power, one finds that under Stalin's leadership, in 1935, the region of Birobidzhan was declared an autonomous region for voluntary Jewish settlement. In fact, a Jewish national region, the key missing national characteristic of the Jewish people, was created by the Soviet government. The right to organize a nation (i.e. to "build a nation") was granted by the Soviet government. The case of Birobidzhan is not unique in Soviet history. There are other examples of upholding or granting the right of a nationality to organize itself into a nation.* The point is, that insisting that it is only for full nations that

* See; *THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE SOVIET UNION*, by M. Chekalin - pamphlet, Workers Library Publi., New York, 1941 - for a more complete discussion of Soviet national policy.

Marxist-Leninists will uphold the right to self-determination, does not accord with the historical experience of socialism, and is unsound theoretically. Such a notion is a mechanical application of certain arguments raised by Lenin and Stalin during the pre-October period (prior to the October Revolution), without regard for condition, time and place, and in total disregard for the actual national policies of socialism once in power.

In the pre-October period, both Lenin and Stalin regarded the national question as, in essence, a conflict between the bourgeoisies of the oppressor and the oppressed nation. They considered the national movement as a danger to the united labor movement because it threatened to divert the workers of each nationality from the common class struggle to the nationally exclusive struggle. It was in this context that the often-quoted polemics of Lenin and Stalin against "nation-building" must be considered. It was a period in which Marxists sought to restrict the influence of nationalism among the masses.

In the post-October period, Lenin and Stalin changed their view on the nature of the national movement. They no longer regarded the conflict between the bourgeoisies as the main essence of the national question. Rather, the "quintessence" of the national movement, was the oppression of the broad working masses of the oppressed nationality. They now recognized not just the divisive potential of the national movement, but also (and to a greater degree), they recognized a profoundly revolutionary potential. From attempting to restrict the influence of nationalism, Lenin and Stalin turned to a policy of harnessing the revolutionary potential of nationalism, and allying it with the revolutionary movement for socialism. The socialist policy on the national question was thus radically changed.

It is only in this context that Stalin's policy of establishing Birobidzhan can be understood.

Turning back to the U.S., can our policy on the Black National Question be guided by the pre-October policy? We think not. Our policy must be that of creating the greatest possibility for trust and alliance between the revolutionary socialist movement and the Black liberation movement. For this reason, we must not restrict our concept of the right to self-determination to the right for full nations only. We should adopt the post-October policy of creating the conditions for the fullest possible national development of all nationalities wherever practical. And certainly, the reorganization of the Black Belt nation is practical. It is at least as practical, if not more so, than was the formation of Birobidzhan.

Our policy must be to guarantee that socialism will not only end the restriction of individual democratic rights of Blacks throughout the U.S., but also all restrictions on their full and free national development. Only in this way, can all basis for mistrust between Blacks and whites be eradicated and the foundation for the firmest alliance between the socialist and the Black liberation movements be laid. The interest of the U.S. proletariat of all nationalities lies in the unleashing of the full revolutionary potential of Black nationalism, and therefore, it is not in our interest to place any mechanical restrictions on the national development of the Black people. We must continue to uphold the Black people's right to self-determination, whether or not a nation in the Black Belt continues to exist!

Is the right to self-determination an immediate issue? Yes it is. A peculiar aspect of the RCP view; the "nation of a new type", is the insistence that while the right to self-determination must be upheld, it is wrong and

even harmful to raise it today as an immediate issue.

BACU believes that while the right to self-determination is not the main demand raised by the Black people, it has historically come to the fore during high tides in the Black liberation struggle. We are revolutionaries, and assume that the victory of socialism can only happen as a result of a major political and economic crisis, and most probably a series of such events. We have not seen a genuinely revolutionary situation in this country since the Civil War, and it is not possible to predict how and under what circumstances such a situation will unfold. However, if the history of the U.S. teaches us anything, an intensification of Black oppression is bound to be a major component of such a crisis. Black nationalism is likely to be given an even greater impetus, and its revolutionary potential is going to be even more profound.

Unless the demand for the Black people's right to self-determination - as well as their individual democratic rights - is popularized in the working class today, the workers will not be prepared for their future revolutionary responsibilities.

Raising this demand now, and popularizing it among the workers and oppressed Blacks, upholds the long term revolutionary interest of the working class. It removes all basis for mistrust between Black and white workers, and creates a firm foundation for a revolutionary alliance of the socialist labor movement and the Black liberation movement. It makes it possible for the future U.S. Communist Party to stand at the head of both movements, i.e. to be the vanguard party of the American workers and oppressed nationalities.