

THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE  
STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

Working Paper #2

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## II. HISTORY OF THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

### A. Introduction

Even an initial examination of the communist movement's handling of the contradiction of racism should keep the following questions in mind: (1) What were the objective conditions at the time; namely, what was the overall state or maturation of the the workers' movement, where were Blacks situated in terms of US political economy, and what was the specific character/nature of racism prevailing within the broader society at the time? (2) What was the communist movement's formal line, and what was its actual operative line on the question of the struggle against racism and national oppression? (3) What was the relationship between how the movement took up the struggle against racism in the broader society and how it took it up within the communist movement itself? At each stage of development, the objective conditions, the standards of judgment and the lines have altered effecting the actual practice of the communist movement and its influence on the anti-racist struggle. (4) Lastly, for the purpose of this brief historical examination we will concentrate on the question of the communists' relation to the Black liberation struggle, since this was the principal aspect which has shaped and determined the movement's orientation and practice in the struggle against racism through the years.

### B. Early Socialist Movement

#### 1. Socialist Party

The early socialist movement in the United States never developed a strong grounding in Marxism, it consisted of numerous ideological currents united around a broad anti-capitalist political unity. In addition, located in the most dynamic, expanding capitalist country, with no theoretical grasp of the precise nature of imperialism, the US socialist movement by the turn of the century was thoroughly riddled with opportunism. This was conspicuously reflected in the socialists' relation to the Black struggle.

The Socialist Party maintained the classic liquidationist and opportunist position on the question of Black oppression. The oppression of Negroes was merely seen as a quantitatively extreme form of the class oppression faced by all workers. Eugene Debs, a foremost spokesman of the Socialist Party once said, We have nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make special appeals to all races. The Socialist Party is the party of the working class, regardless of color - the whole working class of the whole world". In short, Black oppression had no special significance in the Socialist Party's overall political analysis and strategy for the class struggle in the US.

Prior to World War I the vast majority of the Black masses were still locked into the sharecropping system in the rural south; massive European immigration was still the main source for filling in the bottom rungs of the growing US proletariat. Throughout the country, legalized segregation, Jim Crow, was the socially accepted norm. Consequently, blatant racist practices were quite acceptable both politically and economically. The crudest notion of Social Darwinism held sway.

The Socialist Party never openly challenged the prevailing racism against Blacks and other minorities. In fact, it was a major political force backing the anti-Oriental exclusion movement on the West coast. Nor did the Socialist Party ever seriously attempt to analyze the specific character of Negro oppression. In fact, the Socialist Party actually accepted many of the "race theories" prevalent at this time. Debs himself was well-known for his 'darkie jokes' at Socialist Party conventions.

On a "formal" level, the Socialist Party maintained its outward democratic, progressive posture towards Blacks. In the organizing convention of the Socialist Party in 1901, a resolution was passed which would shape its formal line for over 20 years. Here is an excerpt from that resolution:

"We socialists of America...do hereby assure our Negro fellow worker of our sympathy with him in his subjection to lawlessness, and oppression...that the causes which have made him the victim of social and economic inequality are the effects of the long exploitation of his labor power; that all social and race prejudices spring from the ancient economic causes that still endure, to the misery of the whole human family, that the only line of division which exists in fact is that between producers and owners of the world - between capitalism and labor; and be it further RESOLVED, that we the American Socialist Party invite the Negro to membership and fellowship with us in the world movement for economic emancipation..."

Essentially, the Socialist Party extended to the Negro its sympathy, analyzed Black oppression as being that of over-exploited workers, and then invited them to join the struggle against capitalism. This was as far as it went. Even the "formal" line was liquidationist in that it denied the special and distinct character of Black oppression; and made no attempts to pursue the question theoretically.

A large part of the racism in the practice of the Socialist Party stems from the overall opportunism of its general line. In short, the Socialist Party was attempting to become the party of the US labor aristocracy, with all the national chauvinism and racism that implied. It saw itself only organizing among the skilled trades and the craft unions. The Socialist Party's narrow conception of working class organizing meant that the mass manufacturing and agricultural sectors were neglected. This definitely had a racist impact since at this time, the overwhelming majority of Blacks and other non-white peoples were concentrated in those sectors. But even where the Socialist Party did organize, they did not challenge the racially prejudiced bi-racial system of the craft unions; and furthermore, organized only amongst the white sector. No special demands were put forward, nor any special attention given to how the basic democratic rights of Black workers would be won.

Given the overall line and practice of the Socialist Party, it is not surprising that internally it would tolerate some of the most bigoted attitudes and practices among its membership. It is also not surprising that few Blacks and other minority workers were attracted to the socialist movement in the period.

## 2. International Workers of the World - IWW

The IWW essentially represented a radical break (1905) from the increasing class collaboration of the Socialist Party; it represented a left pole attracting the more radical elements away from the conservative mainstream of the Socialist movement. Ideologically the IWW was a diverse and unstable alliance of left wing socialist, anarcho-syndicalists and elements who would later (after the Bolshevik revolution) become communists.

The preamble of their constitution declared that the historical mission of the working class was to do away with capitalism and to abolish the wage system. It stood for the establishment of 'one big union of all workers' as opposed to the common practice of organizing separate craft unions within the same industry. Importantly, it broadened the conception of who comprised the working class; and correspondingly, broadened the conception of who should be organized. The Wobblies became known for "organizing the unorganized and the unskilled".

Regarding the question of Black oppression, the IWW actually held a similar formal line as that of the Socialist Party; namely they basically took a 'color-blind' approach, reducing everything to the ultimate question of class. However, they were far more consistent than the Socialist Party, reflected in their broader class orientation of organizing the unorganized and the unskilled. As a result, they extended their organizing efforts to all workers, irregardless of race; and in fact, they moved away from the craft unions to the more "unorganized sectors" where more Black and minority workers were concentrated (including agriculture). At least for the IWW, race was not an obstacle in their organizing efforts.

The IWW was extremely critical of the craft and race policies of the AFL and saw them as the betrayal of the unskilled and Black workers. Consequently, the IWW took a firm stand against discrimination based on race or color, and opposed the racist practice of organizations affiliated with the AFL. Many of these organizations actually restricted the right of Negro workers to join the labor movement by having in their constitutions and by-laws, statements prohibiting the initiation of Negroes. By contrast, the first section of the by-laws of the IWW stated that 'no working man or woman shall be excluded from membership because of creed or color'.

However, the political line of the IWW on Black oppression was still qualitatively liquidationist--it failed to recognize or pursue theoretically the particularity of Black oppression distinct from the capitalist-proletariat polarization, consequently it recognized no special or distinct role of the Black liberation struggle in accomplishing the US revolution. Essentially its operative line was, if you were part of the work force, then you would be organized. Since the IWW did not take up the particularity of racism outside of the work force, conversely then, if you were not part of the immediate work force, then you were essentially left out of the picture.

After five years of existence the IWW actually began making more determined efforts to recruit Negroes. Leaflets and pamphlets were distributed by the thousands. The political line emphasized that the Negro was subject to discrimination first because of his color, and second because 'for the most part the Negro still belongs in the category of the 'unskilled'. The IWW raised the issue of racial equality in the course of their organizing. Negroes were organized together with whites in the lumber camps of Louisiana, the docks of Philadelphia, the wheat fields of Kansas, the grape ranches of California, and the waterfronts along the Atlantic coast, and even in a strike of trainwaymen in Johannesburg, South Africa.

But despite this practice, the IWW never succeeded in recruiting large numbers of Black workers. It had few locals in the areas where the bulk of the Black labor force was concentrated. As a result, Negro membership never constituted much more than 5% of the total. The vast majority of Blacks were still in the South as sharecroppers and tenant farmers; by the time Negroes were beginning to migrate to the Northern industries in large numbers (after 1915) the IWW was already falling apart.

Although the wobbles represented a good impulse rejecting class collaboration, it remained a politically punitive and ideologically immature movement. Consequently, there was an overall neglect of political line development and in particular an uncritical adaption of the previous liquidationist line of the Socialist Party on Black oppression. Due to the influence of anarchism and bowing to spontaneity, it is difficult to even speak of the internal party life of the Wobblies. However, it is probably a safe generalization to say that on an individual basis IWW organizers were far less racist than their SP counterparts.

## C. Communist Party (CPUSA) 1920-1956

### 1. Beginning Years: 1920-1928

The development of the C.P. position on the Negro question must be viewed in the overall context of the conditions in the U.S. and the world at that time. Economically during the early 20's the U.S. was expanding its post-WWI markets with increasing concentration on large scale industry. At the same time there was growing depression on the farms, especially for the Blacks in the South. There was a conspicuous movement within the South from the rural areas to the cities. There was also the first major out migration of Blacks from the South to the North in the search of work. It is during this period that the U.S. saw the revival of the KKK where in 1924 this organization reached its peak membership of 4.5 million. In this context there was also an upsurge of black political and cultural movements for race pride, dignity and democratic rights. The largest of such movements was the Garvey movement formed in 1917 and by 1924 having more than 500,000 members with millions more sympathizers. The Garvey movement called for complete control of Black social institutions and a community free from influence and control of whites. The more prominent aspect of this movement was the famed "Back to Africa" call.

In the midst of these significant changes and political currents among Blacks, a spontaneous revolutionary formation develops. In this period we find the formation of the African Blood Brotherhood, a secret, all-Black, revolutionary organization, which was conceived as an organization fighting for immediate protection and ultimate liberation of Negroes everywhere. The ABB published The Crusader, and represented a new ideological current reflecting a mood of militancy and anti-capitalist social awareness among young Blacks in the post-WWI period. (Most of the first black C.P. members were eventually recruited from this organization, including Cyril Briggs, Otto Huiswood and Harry Haywood).

On the international scene the post WWI period was dramatic, cataclysmic. The victory of the Russian Revolution loomed over the first half of the 1920's. Socialism was forcibly and vividly brought to the attention of millions upon millions of workers throughout the world. Within socialist circles, Leninism galvanized the split between revolutionary Marxism and the opportunist marsh which the socialist movements had fallen. The formation of the Comintern in particular allowed for the regroupment and training of scattered revolutionary elements in the U.S. and elsewhere around the advanced general line that had guided the Bolsheviks to victory. It was in this historical context that the CPUSA was formed, and in close cooperation with the comintern, spent the largest part of the 1920's attempting to eliminate factionalism and consolidate a party core, hammer out the elements of the revolutionary general line (in opposition to the Socialist party's) and lay the foundation for a Leninist party freed from the opportunism and anarcho syndicalism which had previously dominated the U.S. socialist movement.

The "Negro question" was not given top priority in these early years of the struggle for party formation. Yet still, the young C.P. carried on in the best tradition of the IWW - in particular they incorporated into their program and practice the struggle for the democratic rights of Blacks - fighting against racial discrimination in the trade unions and pushing for the active organizing in areas of Black concentrations. The Trade Union Education League (TUEL) advanced the demand that "Negroes be given the same social, political and industrial rights as whites"; the International Labor Defense also incorporated into its statement of purpose the legal defense of Blacks, as well as radicals and communists. However, the C.P. also took a step beyond the Wobblies, it actively championed the specific demands of the Black community (i.e. against Jim Crow, Klan terror, etc.) and attempted to gain influence among Black mass organizations (ie. Garveyites) as well as initiate party mass organizations internal to the Black community. The American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) was formed by the C.P. in this period as a separate, Black mass organization. Its purpose was to influence the policies of unions towards the admission and equal treatment of Black craftsmen and laborers as well as to promote among Blacks acceptance of trade unions.

In spite of the fact that the first years of the CPUSA showed positive attempts to take up the struggle of the Black masses and even organize within the Black community itself, still the

C.P. line on Black oppression remained undeveloped and pragmatic. The Black Liberation struggle was still not central to the C.P.'s general strategy for socialist revolution in the U.S. This problem in political line inevitably reflected itself in practice. The ANLC was too narrowly focused on trade union questions, consequently it failed to become an organized force central to the political life of the Black community; its membership remained relatively small compared to the number of progressive and revolutionary minded Blacks around its periphery. At times the C.P. also surrendered the struggle for Black equal rights in the cause of its main thrust of organizing the workers (white/European) into unions. In addition, due to its stress on gaining a base among mass manufacturing and industrial workers, the C.P. had practically no work in the economically undeveloped South (where the vast majority Blacks were still located). It mainly stressed work directly with Black workers in the North and maintained an openly hostile posture to all religious and reformist Black leaders.

In short, the C.P. in this early period had not made a qualitative, clear cut break with the earlier liquidationist line of the Socialist Party. It reduced the oppression of Black people simply to class oppression and viewed the struggle for Black democratic rights within that context. Neither the particularity of Black racial oppression nor the centrality of that struggle for the U.S. revolution was recognized.

## 2. The Decisive Break with the Liquidationist Line - 1928-1935

The period of 1928-1930 marked a profound breakthrough in the development of the general line for the U.S. revolution in the rejection of the liquidationist line on the Black liberation struggle which, up until that point, had dominated the U.S. Socialist movement. Again the relationship with the Comintern proved decisive in encouraging and prodding the U.S. party to look more deeply into the nature and significance of the Black struggle. As well, the Comintern helped initiate concentrated theoretical work on the "Negro question" and made the collective resources and experiences of the International Communist Movement available to the U.S. party.

Internationally, the most developed and diverse theoretical framework utilized to examine such questions was the framework of nations and national oppression. As is well known, this was also the general theoretical framework applied to the Black question in the U.S. From its inception the Black nation thesis contained theoretical inconsistencies and left a number of essential features vague (ie. common economy). In addition, already by 1930, the empirical evidence for the Black Belt Nation was rapidly deteriorating as the Black population continued to stream out of the rural south into the major urban areas throughout the country.

Nevertheless, despite the theoretical muddle, the new line represented a breakthrough and a great leap forward. For the

first time the Black question was taken up as a form of oppression distinct from class oppression. It was also recognized as having special significance in the particularities of the U.S. and central to the advancement of the overall socialist revolution. Herein lay the essence of the repudiation of the previous liquidationist line which the comintern resolutions represented. This was subsequently verified in the conspicuous transformation of the C.P.'s practice and influence among Blacks and other minorities.

The alteration of the CP's line coincided with dramatic changes in the objective conditions. The Great Depression was the most severe overproduction crisis (on a world-wide scale) yet experienced by imperialism. Even the U.S. was rocked to its foundations. Widespread unemployment, discontent and struggle marked the U.S. proletariat, which by this time included a conspicuous concentration of Black and other minority workers in agriculture, manufacturing, the ranks of the unemployed, bread lines and urban ghettos.

In the span of seven years (1928 to 1935), the CP rapidly moved to the center of a number of key struggles of Blacks. The thrust of the CP's program stressed drawing the widest masses of Black workers and tenant farmers into struggle for equality and in defense of their immediate needs. Emphasis was placed on boldly projecting the party in the Black community and in exposing and criticizing "reformist and bourgeois" Black leaders. Although the line was a bit "left", the times were tough and the harsh conditions facing the Black masses were extreme - the CP's line became a substantial material force.

With the new view of the Negro question the party embarked on the establishment of several political organizations in the South. First, was the Sharecroppers Union, established in Tallapoosa, Alabama in 1931. The political struggle taken up by this union of mainly Blacks included the relief of destitute farmers, sharecroppers and day laborers, struggle for written contracts, revision of the credit system, and the confiscation and redistribution of large plantations among landless Negroes and whites. Unemployed councils were organized throughout the South, in particular in Black neighborhoods, to fight for relief and other needs of the unemployed. This was the first attempt by the Party to organize in the South. Scores of cadre were relocated and based in the southern states to help initiate and consolidate this work and to expand the Communist Party itself.

Also, during this period, the Party launched several political organizations in the North. The Party set up the League of Struggle for Negro Rights in order to develop a wider anti-racist movement and bring various classes of Negroes under the Party's influence. The League's program was an all out attack against racism. The main points of it's program were: 1) Correct all wrongs to Negroes - abolish Jim Crow and all forms of forced labor, 2) Outlaw the Ku Klux Klan, 3) Give Negroes full rights in the Trade Union movement, 4) Abolish segregation of all forms, 5) Boycott papers depicting Negroes in a derogatory



way, 6) End discrimination in employment and 7) Demand equal protection of Negroes in all walks of life with the guarantee freedom of speech, press, assembly and petition. Such a program allowed communists to begin work among unorganized blacks and bring some moderate blacks under the party's influence. The League also formally adopted the self-determination line for the Black Belt South theory and openly referred to it in meetings, however, was never able to incorporate it into the concrete political campaigns of the Party. The League purposefully did not make Alliances with moderate Black organizations. Due to this left error, from the outset, the LSNR found it impossible to incorporate the recognized leadership of the black community or to gain the confidence of the unorganized forces in the community.

Of major significance in this period was the development of the Scottsboro case by the ILD into a national and international mass struggle that came to symbolize the struggle for Black equal rights. Though there was not the immediate release of the eight convicted Black men, in the cause of this struggle the Party gained a good reputation in the black community for their relentless fight and support.

Blacks were attracted in large numbers to these CP led organizations and movements. The Party began to be viewed as a reliable force in attempting to do something immediately about jobs, relief, general welfare, equality, etc. Criticism of the party by the moderates (e.g. the NAACP) made little sense to the unemployed Black worker or to the family facing eviction. These party led organizations were a vehicle for the political development of Black leadership and the integration of this leadership into the larger Party apparatus. This Black communist leadership had a significant impact and influence on the Black population especially in the South. For many Black workers and tenant farmers the CP was the only racially integrated organization of which they were aware.

The net impact on the recruitment of Blacks into the CP was spectacular. The percentage of Black membership went from less than 1% in 1928 to over 10% in 1934; from around 100 to over 2,500. In addition, Blacks active in the TUEL grew to several hundreds; in the sharecroppers union to 6,000; in the unemployed councils 10,000 or more.

To summarize, in the period from 1928 to 1935 the CP broke with the liquidationist line on Black oppression and the Black struggle. The organizing efforts among Blacks and other minorities became top priority. The CP conspicuously opened up work in the South and became widely recognized in the forefront of the struggle against racial inequality.

### 3. The Struggle Against Racism Internal to the Party - Yokinen Trials

Throughout the country, north and south, the communist movement was growing among Blacks.

Once members of the Party, Black cadre were given training and promising Blacks were placed in responsible organizational positions. Several Black cadre were given special advanced training, some were sent to Moscow. However, it is difficult to gauge how conscious and how successful this training was and there is little written information concerning this important issue. It is our speculation however that the black and class questions were extremely intermeshed. Blacks were certainly not discriminated against. In some instances, they were given special attention, trained to develop skills in language, writing and the basics of Marxism. However, the quality and consistency of this training was a problem party-wide, rather than a conspicuous problem in the training of Blacks and other minorities. Working class cadre in general were not consciously trained and promoted into the center of the Party's theoretical and education work. And as the pace and size of the Party's membership among the working class grew, even the quality of the basics training declined and failed to keep pace. However, to be fair in assessing the CP throughout this whole period it is important to recognize that the scale of the cadre training task was truly massive. Tens of thousands of workers were drawn into party circles, and for whatever the shortcomings, were effectively schooled in key elements of Marxism to the point where communism began to become a material force within the advanced strata of the U.S. proletariat -- a degree of fusion yet to be reproduced subsequently by the CPUSA or contending communist trends.

In addition, the substantial transformation of the racial composition of the CP brought with it a new awareness and struggle over incidents of racism internal to the Party. Many of these incidents by today's standards seem thoroughly outrageous, however they reflected the dominant racist ideology and practices of the period. For example, in the Needle and Trades industry, where there were a significant number of Blacks (about 8,000 in 1930), there was an unequal pay scale so that Blacks were paid less than whites for the same work. However, the union leaders, many of whom were communist party members, displayed conservatism in challenging this inequality. Other examples were seen in the language clubs. A Lithuanian restaurant owned by the Lithuanian Club in Chicago (CP led) refused to serve Blacks saying that it would hurt their business. And the most famous incident was at the New York Finnish Hall in central Harlem where Blacks were not allowed to participate in a dance. They were ejected by a Finnish Party member, Joseph Yokinen, who was the caretaker of Finnish Hall. His comment was, "They may want to also take baths and I am against that." The progressive communist of Harlem (around the periphery of the Party) was in an uproar over the incident.

The manner in which the CP responded illustrated that the Black liberation struggle had in fact become a centerpiece of the party's general line. Conduct which could have easily been tolerated or gone by unnoticed just a few years earlier, now could no longer be tolerated within the CP despite the fact it was widely accepted within the broader society. The party center took up the struggle in a principled way, chose the Yokinen incident as a model example and embarked on a systematic political campaign around it.

Yokinen had already been brought up on charges within the Party, and the decision was made to broaden it to the periphery of the Party. The stages of the case were carefully summed up in party journals and a campaign to study and discuss it was unfolded throughout the party. A public trial was held in Harlem where the CP had already begun to develop an important base. 2,000 people were in attendance, party members and residents of Harlem. The trial was used to dramatize the anti-racist standards the CP would expect from its membership as well as the significance it placed upon advancing the Black struggle. Yokinen was suspended from the Party and given a trial assignment related to the Black struggle as the basis for his rectification. (He was later readmitted to the party ranks.)

The impact of this campaign was tremendous. It marked a significant turning point in the CP's work, heightened the consciousness of the cadre and by and large succeeded in putting a stop to blatant racist practices on the part of party members. In addition, it vividly illustrated for the Black masses on the periphery of the Party the standards which the communists would struggle for among themselves as well as within the class.

#### 4. The United Front Period and Its Impact on the CP's Anti-Racist Work: 1935 - 1939

In 1935 the Comintern put forward a new line for the period, which brought about conspicuous changes in the practice of the whole international communist movement, including the U.S. party. The United Front line was principally a response to the rise of fascism as an international phenomenon, intensification of inter-imperialist contradictions and mounting dangers of a new imperialist attack upon the USSR. In addition, the line served as a corrective for the impulse toward "left" errors which characterized the previous period. This alteration in the general line impacted all aspects of the CPUSA's practice. Guided by the United Front line, the party began to stress more joint action with "reformist" elements with whom they had previously disdained to work. The CP was now more prepared to work in unions and mass organizations in which it did not have dominant political influence or control.

This period marked the high point of communist activity among Blacks and within the Black community. Although there was no formal alteration of the "Negro Nation" line and the slogan for self-determination, it was increasingly relegated to a backseat in party propaganda as the struggle for equal rights moved increasingly to

the forefront. In a theoretically pragmatic sleight of hand, the argument was advanced that there was no contradiction between the demand for self-determination for the Negro nation while simultaneously struggling for the full integration and equality of Blacks within U.S. society. More concretely, the CP's line highlighted the struggle against racism. The new political demands included:

- 1) repeal of the poll tax
- 2) abolition of lynching through legislation
- 3) abolition of discrimination in public services
- 4) enactment of a comprehensive civil rights program
- 5) equal treatment of Negroes by government administrative agencies
- 6) equitable admission of Negroes into the trade unions
- 7) equal treatment of Negroes in the armed services
- 8) equality of colored peoples before the law
- 9) relief to sharecroppers and destitute city dwellers
- 10) equal educational opportunities.

These new demands reflected in the United Front strategy allowed for the broadening of the influence of the Party among Blacks. Along with this, political work with the "moderate" Black leadership was encouraged, as well as the establishment of broad political formations. The CP also dropped its sharp criticism of religion and began to view the Black churches as potentially part of the united front movement. Cooperation with the NAACP and the National Urban League was initiated at a tactical level. The Congress of Industrial Organizations which grew in the same period became a valuable resource in the struggle for Black rights, largely due to communist agitation and leadership. Funds from CIO organizing were used in the Black struggles of anti-lynching, anti-poll tax, and housing, etc. Black communists holding responsible positions in the CIO in turn enjoyed substantial prestige and influence in the Black community.

There were two principal race organizations through which the Party attempted to carry out its Negro program during this period. These were the National Negro Congress (NNC) and the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC). The NNC developed as an instrument through which to pursue larger United Front programs among segments of Black America. The primary purpose was the unification of Black organizations around a progressive, democratic program. This attempt succeeded, reflected in the fact that an impressive number of Black community groups and organizations affiliated with it:

Churches and Religious Organizations	81
Fraternal Societies	71
Trade Unions	83
Farm Organizations	2
Youth Organizations	26
Civic Groups and Societies	226
Political Groups and Parties	46
Women's Organizations	23
Educational Organizations	14
Professional Groups	6
Business Organizations	2
Newspaper Groups	5

The SNYC was organized specifically to organize Black youth into active struggle, working for crime reduction, health projects, vocational guidance, etc. Both the NNC and the SNYC were all-Black formations.

However, toward the end of this period, under the right opportunist Browder line, there began to be a serious and conspicuous mishandling of the United Front line. The vanguard role of the Party in representing the long-range interests of the class was surrendered to the initiative of the right forces in the front, especially the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

The negative impact of this in the CP's anti-racist work was the increased tendency to unnecessarily subordinate the Black struggle to the immediate requirements of maintaining and expanding the United Front. By 1938 the Party's policy on work amongst Blacks in the South began to drastically change. The sharecroppers unions were disbanded and the regional party paper for the South was discontinued. By 1940 the Party had almost totally surrendered the anti-racist struggle as manifested by its opposition to a March on Washington, led by A. Philip Randolph, which had the slogans of "equal opportunities" and "desegregation in the defense industry". The Party justified this position at that time saying that such slogans would be detrimental to the war effort of the U.S. and put undue strains on the United Front. These opportunist errors were objectively racist and created substantial disillusionment about the Party in the eyes of forces in the Black community.

Despite these right opportunist errors, the general line of the United Front Against Fascism and the period taken as a whole represented an important advance for the political maturation of the communist movement. By 1938 the CP's membership had increased dramatically. The total membership by 1938 was in the neighborhood of 100,000 with close to 15% being Black and minority members.

##### 5. The War Years: 1940 - 1945

During these years the right opportunism of the Browder line reached its high point, overtaking many of the gains of the previous period and seriously disorienting the Party. Reformist and economist errors became conspicuous in every aspect of the CP's work. Its responsibility to keep the strategic revolutionary tasks before itself and the advanced sections of the working class became blurred -- to the point that the Party itself was allowed to be dismantled for about a year in 1944. The ideological and political deterioration of the CPUSA during this period occurred when the objective conditions of the international class struggle were sharpening quickly and were extremely complicated. This placed tremendous strains on communist parties everywhere (especially during the actual Nazi invasion of the USSR) to struggle to maintain their bearings internally as well as effectively explain the twists and turns and shifting tactics of the class struggle to their respective working classes. The CPUSA was

only one of many parties that did poorly in this difficult task, lost its bearings and failed to creatively apply appropriate tactics to the U.S. conditions.

In general, the political contradiction lay in the fact that the line on the United Front Against Fascism stressed the real and important distinction between fascism and bourgeois democracies and the international proletariat's immediate interest in the defeat of fascism. On the other hand, the question of the defense of the USSR against joint imperialist intrigue and manipulation showed that fundamentally the fascist powers and bourgeois democracies were united in their hostility to socialism, and that the long range interests of the international proletariat rested first and foremost in the defense of the USSR. Lacking a firm grasp of the overall political framework, the leadership of the CPUSA was ill-prepared to bring the Party (much less the broader class) through the difficult twists and turns of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, followed by the Soviet-Allies pact, while grasping the underlying logic of the international class struggle beneath this apparent contradiction.

In the midst of the ensuing confusion, disillusionment and vacillation gripped large sections of party membership, resulting in a significant decline of CP membership from 1939 to 1941, including probably half of the Black membership.

Abandoning the attempt to train the advanced sector of the U.S. working class in the complexities of the international class struggle, the CP tried to reduce its politics to the simplest, most palpable explanations. Naturally, the most advanced elements from the masses could see through the shallow and unconvincing party propaganda of the period. For example, among Blacks the CP argued first (during the Hitler-Stalin Pact) that the democratic rights of Blacks could best be secured by "getting out and staying out of the imperialist war," only to later argue (after the imperialist "Allies" had been forced into an alliance with the USSR) that the advancement of Blacks lay in the war effort. Although it was generally correct to subordinate secondary manifestations of the class struggle (i.e., the internal contradiction between the U.S. proletariat and bourgeoisie) to the sharper international class struggle (the defeat of fascism and defense of the USSR) the CP mechanically surrendered most everything to the support of the U.S. war effort, in the process making numerous opportunist errors and negative concessions to the U.S. bourgeoisie.

In the anti-racist struggle in particular the situation was complicated and the line was too undeveloped for the Party to be able to maintain its political bearings. The war brought a tremendous upswing and expansion to the U.S. economy. For the first time, jobs in industry and government opened up for Blacks and other minorities. In that sense, the relative impact of economic and social conditions was substantial. More importantly, the momentum for this "trend" of improvement seemed overpowering and the optimism in the potential of continued U.S. growth was given a "moral stamp of approval" by the fact that it was linked to the "defense of democracy

world-wide." In addition, the rural-based economy of the Black Belt South had qualitatively broken up; the supposed material foundation of the party's national line on Black oppression was disintegrating. In a class pragmatist fashion, Browder announced in 1944 that "Negroes had exercised their self-determination and had opted for integration."

It was in this overall context that the CP's opportunist and racist errors of the period were made. The struggle for racial equality was surrendered in most instances. This included the struggle for the principle of equal pay for equal work, integration of the armed forces, etc. However, probably the most dramatic racist blunder of the CP during the war years was its political vacillation and paralysis in the face of the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII, which it dubiously rationalized as ultimately in the interests of the defense of the USSR.

6. Post-War Confusion and an All Sided Collapse into Revisionism: 1946-1956

Post-war years were extraordinarily difficult ones politically. They would have proven to be a challenge even to a party with far stronger ideological and political foundations. However, the CPUSA emerged from the war years with the task of regrouping throwing off the right opportunism of the Browder line, only to face a sustained attack from the bourgeoisie, and in the course of this situation was never able to successfully regain its bearings.

US imperialism emerged from World War II, on one hand, stronger and more powerful than ever before, standing head and shoulders above its devastated imperialist rivals. Yet, by the same token this also represented its principal weakness; it now shouldered the huge task of saving the capitalist mode of production from the world wide revolutionary assault, by and large led by the international communist movement centered in Moscow. Consequently, the US giant was in an extremely defensive position internationally. In order to respond effectively a political and ideological consensus needed to be created, especially at home. Thus US imperialists with the posture of "defending democracy", had to shift the principal target from fascism to communism and the USSR in short order (ie, the Cold War, Marshall Plan, Korean War). Domestically, the economic and class contradictions sharpened quickly/ A downswing from the wartime economy coincided with the release of an army of workers from military service. A political means had to be devised to check the growing militancy and economic demands of the working class, and effect as smoothly as possible the forced expansion of the indispensable Reserve Army of Labor which had shrunk considerably during the War. Naturally the most politically and socially vulnerable sectors of the class were pushed or prodded back into the Reserve Army - minorities and women workers. This ambitious social maneuver required a sophisticated campaign of mass propaganda and "persuasion" combined with the mailed fist approach; the touchstones of the campaign being patriotism and anti-communism (ie. Taft-Harley, Smith Trials, McCarthyism). The scale and intensity of the assault on communism, in general, and the

CPUSA in particular during this period was not at all commensurate to the revolutionary development of the US proletariat nor the influence of the CPUSA, but rather principally the domestic expression of the international contention between imperialism and socialism. Any assessment of the mistakes and shortcoming of the CP which fails to duly consider these objective conditions is bound to lapse into subjectivism.

Once again, attempts to reset the course of the US communist movement were initiated and taken up in cooperation with the international communist movement (ie. Duclose letter). The campaign against Browderism unfolds immediately after the War, along with efforts to regroup and reevaluate the party's work in light of the rapidly changing, negative conditions shaping up. However, in the main, the campaign was too shallow to successfully and thoroughly break with the right opportunism which had come to dominate the line and practice of the CP. This shortcoming however was framed by the fact that the process itself was seriously disrupted, the party center was split up and forced underground by the state. By the time the smoke of the Korean War and McCarthyism had begun to settle, the international ideological moorings of the US party (on which it had often relied upon heavily) were dramatically broken up by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the opportunist revisions in the general line of the CPSU. The US party was obviously neither in a position, nor particularly inclined or capable of independently maintaining its ML bearings, much less challenge the international consolidation of modern revisionism. It submitted to this right opportunist trend and has steadily degenerated in an all sided fashion since then.

In the midst of this more general contradiction and crisis, the CP's line and practice in the anti-racist struggle also deteriorated rapidly. In July 1945 the party formed a special Negro Commission to reexamine the line on Black oppression in light of the mounting criticism of Browderism. However, the work of the Commission was mechanical and pragmatic - resulting in the reassertion of the Black Nation line (due in large part to the fact that Browder had dropped it) with no convincing elaboration as to reasons why nor any coherent explanation of the painfully conspicuous transformation of the Black community as an integral part of the urban proletariat throughout the country. The Commission was aware that the main political slogan which flows from the Black Nation line was untenable and showed little promise of becoming a material force among Blacks who appeared dead set on equal rights and integration. In a classic opportunist "refinement", the Commission argued that the Negro nation was still immature so it was not yet ready to fully appreciate and embrace the slogan of self-determination. However, the demand should be kept until the Blacks were ready. As had already been the established practice in the past, there was again a vast discrepancy between the nation line and the more concrete political demands and practice of the CP.

More importantly, the party's practical organizing efforts in the South and among Blacks generally declines conspicuously in this



period. In the late 40's the Southern operations of the CP are suspended for all practical purposes, in addition party led mass organizations in the Black community, like the National Negro Congress, are dismantled. Increasingly, the CP stressed cooperation with the "moderate" formations like the NAACP and Urban League. However, the right errors reemerge as strong as ever since "cooperation" clearly meant tailing the petty bourgeois reformists and surrendering all political initiative to them.

It was in this period of ideological and political disarray that the party becomes embroiled in its second major internal campaign against racism within its own ranks. This campaign was to last for four years from 1949 to 1953. The 1st line party center was in prison or underground; the functioning party center was divided on the campaign, the course of the campaign was largely spontaneous with little central guidance and control. The party's mass work among minorities was in retreat and therefore the prevailing dynamic of the campaign was divorced from the mass work and quickly took on the character of an internal purification rite.

The thrust and substance of this campaign was very different from the earlier Yokinen campaign. Because it lacked a clear leading line to guide it, the real problems of racism got swallowed up in a sea of subjectivism. White chauvinism came to be considered an isolated and individualized thing in itself; separate from the fight for Black rights and proletarian revolution. From the beginning the struggle emphasized administrative solutions (expulsions, penalties, demotions, etc.). This campaign was a disaster and no one in the CP has ever defended it. It was an unfortunate reflection and accompaniment of the general ideological and political confusion of the period.

## 7. Conclusion

For all its shortcomings, the CPUSA accomplished the first major theoretical and practical breakthrough in moving the struggle against racism as a central feature of the overall strategy for socialist revolution in the US (This is a tradition all subsequent communist trends in the US attempt to build upon, whether they explicitly admit it or not). The CP accumulated rich and advanced experience in creatively linking the Black liberation struggle and the broader working class struggle, in drawing substantial numbers of minorities into the party and the party's mass base. Much is still to be learned by the communist movement today in the more careful study and criticism of this CP experience.

Generally, in terms of the period outlined, the central importance of political line is clearly evident both in terms of recruitment of minorities as well as the correct handling of racism internal to the communist ranks. In the early years the CP's correct general line was flawed by the liquidationist line it maintained on the question of Black and minority oppression. This shortcoming was corrected by 1930 and the next decade saw the most conspicuous verification of this line in practice. Moving into the 1940's shortcomings

in the practice of the CP in the arena of the anti-racist struggle became increasingly evident. However, this was more precisely a reflection of the growth of right opportunism in the implementation of the CP's general line more allsidedly and not merely a problem restricted to the anti-racist work alone. This is also true in the CP line and practice. After 1957, shortcomings in leading the anti-racist struggle is a particular reflection of the general problem of a consolidated revisionist general line. Today, the struggle against racism (the Black liberation struggle in particular) is still a central feature of the revisionist party's general line and strategy--the problem is that the general line itself no longer points to revolution but reformism.

The consolidation of opportunism in the CP in the course of the 1950's was tremendous setback for the US working class and the communist movement is still attempting to recover from it today--a generation later. More specifically, the revisionist party was neither properly positioned nor capable of moving into the center of the mass spontaneous movements of the 1960's (as it was in the 30's and 40's); in particular the struggle against racism. As a result, the bourgeois and reformist leadership of these movements have been substantially strengthened and consolidated. As well as the fact that many of the revolutionary elements thrown up by these spontaneous struggles were lost to Marxism-Leninism or introduced in a highly unsystematic and distorted fashion. Although much of our trend's political history begins at this juncture, and the shortcomings and opportunist errors are more precisely those of the New Communist Movement and not the CPUSA, ultimately the opportunism of the revisionist party must be largely held accountable for the development of such a sad state of affairs.

D. The Spontaneous Mass Movement of the 1960's and the Failures of the Communist Movement

The long drawn out U.S. defeat in the Korean War had managed to significantly tarnish the U.S. claims of military invincibility and its image as the "protector of democracy". Soon after the armistice the recession of the late 50's began to set in. Hard times returned to the more unprotected sectors of the working class, in particular the Black sector. However, the political expectations and social consciousness of the Black community were substantially higher than they had been in the 20's and 30's, especially after having fought in large numbers in the last two wars. The mounting frustrations of the Black population throughout the whole country were probably most concentrated and symbolized in the blatant persistence in the South of Jim Crow, denial of voting rights, "separate but equal" facilities, etc. This contradiction was a volcano just waiting to explode, which of course it did. Rosa Parks' refusal to yield her seat to a white, and the subsequent organization of the masses of Blacks in Montgomery into unified, direct action politics, sparked a movement that was the beginning of one of the most dramatic and rebellious periods of U.S. history.

The spontaneous emergence of mass boycotts, marches, sit-ins, etc. led by Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) represented a left polarization in the politics of the Black community and the nation as a whole. Previously, the struggle for Black civil rights had been traditionally led by the NAACP which quickly labelled the mass confrontation politics as adventurist and counter-productive -- a conservative position echoed by the CPUSA, which had reduced its political role to tailing after the "moderates" in the NAACP. However, the Civil Rights Movement quickly captured the political determination and imagination of the Black population, who dismissed out of hand such conservative "warnings".

The other point in U.S. society where the deadening political and ideological atmosphere of the 1950's was being pierced was on the nation's campuses. The Civil Rights Movement was a major factor in this development; in fact the most widespread and active support for this struggle among whites was from the student sector. In addition, many of the civil rights activists and organizers were drawn from among Black and white students. Simultaneously the other major contradiction which would serve to politicize the campuses (the war in Vietnam) was ripening in the early 60's; reaching its boiling point in 1964 with major U.S. troop commitments, highlighting the issue of the draft. Again, the revisionist party was unprepared to move to the center of this movement. In addition it was shackled with an impotent and conservative "peace and disarmament" line when the war was posing the question of anti-imperialism sharply to the U.S. masses.

Despite the failure of the communist movement, the mass movement displayed the spontaneous impulse toward the development of a

revolutionary pole as the more advanced elements sought a deeper explanation for why racism and aggressive war was endemic to U.S. society. This impulse was concretely reflected in the emergence and development of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Both left-leaning formations conducted struggle against the inclusion of anti-communist clauses in their founding statements of principle, a significant struggle in that period.

SNCC, in its early years, functioned in direct cooperation with the SCLC, somewhat as a youth/student arm with substantial autonomy. This relationship however increasingly took on a political character with SNCC polarizing the Civil Rights Movement further to the left and the parent organization (SCLS) staking out the more moderate position. (By this time, the CPUSA had worked itself around to supporting the SCLC only to discover that they were still tailing this movement.) Although the SNCC-SCLC tension appeared to be centered around the impulse of the "young people" toward more militant tactics, the basic political tension was over whether the Black liberation struggle could accomplish its goals within the framework of imperialist America. The refusal of the Democratic Party Convention of 1964 to unseat the racist Mississippi delegation served to crystalize and accelerate this political polarization between SNCC and the "moderates", with the bulk of SNCC membership arriving at explicitly revolutionary conclusions. The political evaluation of the SDS was a step behind SNCC, but reflected the same basic process and direction. By the 1968 Tet Offensive, SDS's anti-war sentiments had conspicuously shifted to anti-imperialist politics.

The leftward shift of these broad social movements remained in the main spontaneous. For example, in the 30's and 40's it could be said that no worker or Black revolutionary came to Marxism without meeting (and usually joining) the CP along the way. This is not the case in the 60's, although communist groups and individuals were conducting conscious organizing and propaganda efforts, the majority of revolutionaries were introduced to Marxism in this period without meeting communists or having relatively peripheral ties with them. The CPUSA (as an organized political, not individual members) remained on the outskirts of the civil rights and student movements. The Trotskyists implanted themselves among students and propagated their version of Marxism, but could not capture the center of these struggles.

Other than the CP, probably the only organized group that might be considered (and judged) as a conscious communist force in this period was the Progressive Labor Party (PLP). The rise and decline of the PLP represented the most conspicuous and sustained attempt in the 60's to rebuild a Marxist-Leninist party. Unfortunately the PLP's failure started the whole process off to a bad beginning and in many ways set the tone for the dogmatic and sectarian legacy which has come to dominate the party building efforts -- a negative legacy with which we are still burdened today. The PLP began with a shallow critique of modern revisionism, a simplistic estimate of the ideological and political foundations it would take to actually rebuild a Marxist-

Leninist party, and an infantile overconfidence (fostered by their CPC connection) as to how easily their primitive "correct line" would become a material force among the U.S. masses and "sweep the revisionists into the dust bins of history". Not surprisingly, when the scenario did not unfold so smoothly, PLP consolidated an ultra-left, sectarian posture toward the whole left and even the masses themselves. And as has happened time and again since, the revisionist party enjoyed the last laugh.

The PLP stressed out-organizing the CPUSA, which in its early years was a task not all that difficult to accomplish. The PLP brought a more "militant line" (although often no more qualitatively developed than the CP's) into the labor movement and into a number of Black community struggles -- meeting with some initial success. PLP never established substantial work in the South, however it did move onto the campuses and brought an advanced anti-imperialist line into SDS circles. However, as the struggle in Indochina intensified by the late 60's, PLP's line had already degenerated to a left sectarian denunciation of Vietnam, thereby forfeiting its capacity to lead.

The PLP never fully united around the Black Nation Thesis as such; but it displayed sharp swings back and forth on this central line question. It moved from an early tendency to conciliate narrow nationalism, over to a liquidationist position of denouncing all nationalism as reactionary and a tendency to restrict the struggle against racism to a struggle for equality at the point of production, disregarding racism as a form of oppression distinct from class oppression. As a result, PLP, attempting to come in from the "left", also failed to move the communist movement into a leading and central position in the spontaneous struggles of minority peoples in the 1960's. By the late 60's the PLP is a pariah group within the left/progressive movement. PLP then must share the criticism (along with the CPUSA) of the communist movement's failure to take hold of the truly mass spontaneous movements of the 1960's.

Consequently, although in the latter half of the 60's more and more revolutionary elements were beginning to consider themselves communists (of some sort) and began organizing themselves accordingly, the phenomenon was principally a reflection of the spontaneous impulse of the masses to gravitate towards Marxism and therefore should not be judged by the same criteria one would use to assess communist practice in the period. It is precisely this mistake which blunts the criticism of the revisionist party (which admittedly avoided many of the ultra-left antics of other groups), as well as of the sectarian irresponsibility of the PLP (which is often viewed as merely one more, among many, ultra-left groupings of the period). However, it is the opportunism of these two communist formations that is principally responsible for the severe and qualitative break in the continuity of the U.S. communist movement as it entered the 1970's, which in turn accounts for much of the ideological confusion and weak Marxist-Leninist moorings of what later came to be called the New Communist Movement.

It was in this political and historical context that the basis was set for the spontaneous, yet profound racial separation of the U.S. communist movement. Many revolutionary elements were introduced to Marxism-Leninism mainly through propaganda from Cuba, Vietnam, China, Africa, etc. -- Marxism-Leninism concretely interwoven with the national liberation struggles against U.S. imperialism. As a result, a curious and lopsided version of Marxism-Leninism gained ground in the U.S.; with a prominent stress on the anti-imperialist national liberation struggle yet weak on its links to the struggle for socialism; strong on the revolutionary significance of the "colonial peoples'" struggles yet weak on the role of the proletariat and the revolutionary significance of its unification, etc..

This was aggravated ten-fold by the powerful racist inertia of U.S. society toward the racial separation of the masses, which was dramatically heightened with the spread of Black urban rebellions and the growth of the Black Power movement. The sheer power of this social contradiction led SNCC to transform itself into an all Black formation with the line that whites could best support the Black struggle by going off and organizing "their own people"; the question of class receded far into the background. (Recognizing the importance of the possibility of mass organizations among Blacks is qualitatively different from this line which was advanced as an organizational principle for the revolutionary forces.) The negative impact of this line can be seen in the fact that it justified the maintenance of SDS as an all-white student grouping -- transforming an obvious shortcoming into a matter of "revolutionary principle". By the time the struggles for Third World Studies erupted on campuses in the last 60's, this line was already firmly established -- revolutionary-minded students must organize along separate racial and national lines and return to their respective "communities" after leaving school. To even suggest organizing otherwise was considered an opportunist scheme to perpetuate white paternalism and racism. The notion of "self-determination" lost all the precision of a scientific Marxist category with which Lenin struggle so hard to invest it.

By the end of the 60's the revolutionary movement was spontaneously dividing into racially distinct movements, each with their own political dynamics and paths to Marxism-Leninism. On one hand there was the phenomena of SNCC, Black Panther Party, Young Lords, Brown Berets, Red Guards, etc., and on the other hand, the phenomenon of SDS among white radical students. In many ways the history of the New Communist Movement is the story of the maturation of these two movements both under general Maoist influence and the unsuccessful attempt to reintegrate them together into a unified Marxist-Leninist party.

### E. The New Communist Movement

The New Communist Movement (NCM) is far too diverse and complicated to analyse in any detail within the scope of this paper, although a more exhaustive study is certainly crucial to understanding the immediate history and development of our own trend. With this qualification, we will attempt to place the NCM in the context of the overall development of the U.S. Communist movement, as well as to examine the line and practice which generally characterized its relation to the struggle against racism.

The NCM did not formally mature until around 1973 when it was explicitly recognized that the anti-revisionist trend had to struggle to forge itself into a unified party. However, its roots can be traced to the preceding few years growing organically out of the movements of the 1960's. By the late 60's, struggles began to break out within the revolutionary wing that had developed, largely spontaneously, within the student and anti-racist movements. This was over the question of what was the material basis for a truly revolutionary transformation of society (ie. socialism) and the scientific basis necessary to guide the revolutionary struggle to victory (ie. Marxism-Leninism). This general line struggle was most clearly reflected in the 1969 SDS split between Weathermen and Revolutionary Youth Movement II (RYM II). RYM II represented the advanced line, placing before the movement the position that revolution in the U.S. could only be accomplished by a unified working class and its goal would have to be socialism. Whereas the Weathermen faction represented the explicit articulation of the spontaneous line which had in fact dominated the previous period. The Weathermen advanced a much less precise notion of the content of revolution and socialism and stressed that the revolution in the U.S. would be accomplished through consistent support for the national liberation struggles and the struggles of Third World people inside the U.S., the working class was rejected as a potential revolutionary formation, much less the decisive one. Although this line struggle was conducted at a relatively primitive level and the polemic was not sustained, still it represented an important turning point and opened up another chapter in the development of the US communist movement. It set the basis to begin to separate the potential communists from the anti-imperialist radicals. Through all the twists and turns, the Revolutionary Union (RU) and the October League (OL) grew out of this Marxist-Leninist tendency within the white student movement.

A similar ideological and political tension emerged and broke into open struggle among the revolutionaries within the anti-racist/minority movements as well. The split took place much more unevenly, more fragmented, and less dramatically than the SDS split, but it essentially took place nonetheless. The line struggle usually reflected itself concretely in the opposition between forces who began to recognize that the struggles of minority communities were objectively linked (and should be more consciously so) to the broader U.S. working class struggle and the worldwide struggle for socialism -- and those community activists who resisted the need to forge such connections for nationalist, and often more immediate opportunist reasons. As this struggle proceeded at varying paces, it

began to reflect itself organizationally in the early 70's with the transformation of the Young Lords into the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, the formation of the League of Black Revolutionary Workers, the transformation of the IWK, etc. into explicitly M-L organizations. Although these formations were built on extremely weak political and ideological foundations, they still represented an important advance in forging a communist pole among revolutionary minded minority activists.

These developments continued along the separate lines inherited from the 60's for a few years, until party building was explicitly placed on the agenda principally at the initiative of the RU, which was the largest of the NCM organizations at the time. While this move also objectively represented an important step forward and new stage in the evolution of the anti-revisionist trend, it threw into sharp highlight once again all the underlying contradictions of attempting to rebuild an anti-revisionist, ML movement upon the weak and opportunist foundations of Maoism. Similar to the earlier PLP approach, the general party building line adopted by the NCM, and encouraged by the CPC, was thoroughly oversimplistic and opportunist, based upon the wrong assessment that the USSR was an imperialist power and based upon a shallow critique of modern revisionism. This was aggravated further by the conspicuous propensity of US Maoism toward sectarian splintering. Despite lip service to the contrary, the initial party building efforts displayed a superficial approach to the struggle to forge a common general line as the foundation for communist unity. In response, partly to the unprincipled RU maneuverings, the process quickly degenerated into sectarian splintering over relatively secondary and petty differences. The contending groups attempting to short-circuit and circumvent the struggle among communists for a correct and unified political line in favor of the opportunist and sectarian solution talk of taking the primitive programs of their respective sects to the "workers" and let "the class decide the real vanguard." This scenario was repeated a number of times in the course of the NCM.

This was the general line and party building orientation upon which the NCM, with all its diversity and all its twists and turns, generally rested. The opportunism and failures of the NCM can be principally traced to this basic contradiction, which sharpened to the breaking point around Angola in 1976. (Since then, the "left" opportunist trend has continued in the same negative tradition -- upholding the opportunist tenets and framework of the CPC line and still plagued with a sectarian and primitive party building orientation.) It is in the context of this general contradiction endemic to the NCM that its dominant line and practice on the struggle against racism should be examined.

Not surprisingly, the NCM failed to distinguish itself for any theoretical breakthroughs in developing a cogent line on the nature of racism and national oppression in the U.S. In fact, the NCM displayed the worse kind of dogmatism and pragmatism in the slipshod fashion in which it pursued the theoretical work on this question, compounding the line confusion which was already existing on this matter. In the main, the NCM reached back to the Comintern resolution on the Black Nation and utilized the "nation/self-determination" framework for the basis of its lines on the current phenomena of racism and



national oppression in the U.S. The different groups tampered here and there with the nation framework, adding and developing a few "creative" variations along the way (like "nations of a new type", etc.) in their frustrated attempts to somehow squeeze the concrete phenomena of racial oppression into the theoretical framework utilized earlier by the CPUSA. However despite the numerous adaptations of this line and all the fanfare over "contending lines on the national question", the whole NCM can be said to have the same fundamental theoretical framework on this question--a framework which obscures racism, one of the central social relations of U.S. society, and thereby even prevents a precise analysis of national oppression as it concretely expresses itself in the U.S.

The political explanation of how the NCM worked itself into such a profound theoretical muddle on this question represents a sobering example of the pragmatic, anti-theoretical bent throughout the history of the U.S. left as well as the simple minded dogmatism which has marred the anti-revisionist movement over the last two decades. Historically, the Black Nation thesis accompanied the CP's essential break with the liquidationist line which had previously dominated the U.S. left, resulting in a conspicuous increase in communist work and influence among Blacks. Likewise, the dropping of the Black Nation thesis was associated with the right opportunism of the Browder period and the subsequent consolidation of revisionism in the CPUSA. Although grossly superficial, this was the main political logic behind the impulse to return uncritically to the nation/self-determination framework. This impulse was further strengthened by the reaction to the PLP's swing to the "left" and its accompanying degeneration; its blanket denunciation of nationalism coinciding with a strong impulse to liquidate the question altogether. The end result was the adoption of a dogmatic formulation which equated defense of nation/self-determination framework with opposition to revisionism and liquidationism. Shackled with these theoretical blinders, the NCM was unable to initiate any serious or original theoretical work on the nature of racism within U.S. capitalist society.

This theoretical confusion in turn reflected itself politically. The overall political line of the NCM on the "national question" served to place a ML cover on the perpetuation of the spontaneous line of bowing to the racial separation of the working class--the line which had emerged and gained dominance in the course of the 60's. This was captured in the formulation "the working class and its allies" which translated into the "working class" as white and the "allies" as colored. The unspoken of racist tension inherent in this formulation was reflected in the various struggles among contending groups as to where the stress was to be placed--either on the centrality of the working class (i.e. white workers) or the central importance of the "oppressed nationalities" (i.e. minority workers). Meanwhile, the overwhelming empirical reality of one, racially stratified proletariat hovered in the background of this ludicrous debate among communists. The whole spectrum of shifting and contradictory political lines associated with the various groupings in the NCM were basically attempts to somehow reconcile the contradictory phenomena of U.S. society while maintaining the formulation "working class and its allies" which flows directly from the nation/self-determination theoretical framework.

On a more politically programatic level this general line problem has resulted in more particular opportunist lines of every imaginable

variety. In hopes of gaining influence among the racially oppressed, national minority communities, "self-determination" promises (most often vague or outlandish) have been extended by the NCM; lines which opportunistically pander to the more backward and metaphysical political sentiments in minority communities. On the other side of the coin, racism has been shamelessly conciliated in the name of the working class (whose "interests" were often mistakenly equated to the immediate "interests of white workers"). Sections of the NCM vacillated on affirmative action/super-seniority struggles, etc. Probably the most notorious example was RU's opposition to the struggle to integrate the Boston schools as a means of fighting the conspicuous racial inequalities in education. RU opposed the busing using the dubious reasoning that the bourgeoisie (i.e. Kennedy) was supporting it, while the "working class" (i.e. the majority of backward and racist white workers in the Irish districts) was not. Begging the question--who the hell was the Black community if not the more progressive sector of the working class fighting for racial equality?

On the question of the struggle against racism and national oppression, the NCM had a fundamentally incorrect political line which placed a limitation on its long range capacity to move central to this key arena of the class struggle. However, in the short run, the successes and shortcomings of the organizing efforts of the contending groups in the NCM was extremely varied and uneven. And it is beyond the scope of this paper to begin to analyze it in any detail through its various twists and turns. However, a few general characteristics on different identifiable tendencies within the NCM are worth noting, since our trend, by and large, shares the same history and displays similar impulses as the NCM.

The NCM never matured to the point where it qualitatively transcended the two distinct political currents from the 60's which constituted it. This was generally reflected in two broad impulses on different orientations toward party-building and the struggle against racism.

One impulse was characterized in the practice of the RU/RCP. The formation of the RU was framed by two key polemics--to get the movement directed off the campuses into the working class and to oppose fragmenting the movement along national lines. The result was a conspicuous workerism and "point of production" fetish where "uniting the class" often meant conciliating racism and backwardness. Short of drawing significant grouping of Chinese community activists in the Bay Area and activists in Hawaii, the RU/RCP remained principally a white organization in composition and orientation. In particular struggles against racism in the internal dynamics of the organization were viewed with suspicion as an expression of a "nationalist deviation" and the policy of "color blindness" was expected to legislate the relations among communists.

On the other hand, the IWK/LRS displayed the general impulse toward narrow nationalism with a thin Marxist-Leninist cover. The "community organizing" efforts consistently reflected the tendency to conciliate backward nationalist sentiments in order to gain and maintain influence. The political links between the struggle against national oppression and the broader class struggle remains shallow, inconsistent and mechanical in their practice. In party building, there has been the conspicuous opportunist tendency to utilize their "base in minority communities"

as "bargaining leverage" in party building maneuvers and substitute such petty maneuvers for thorough-going line struggle. The formation of the LRS itself represented a conspicuous extension and strengthening of this negative impulse--a federationist approach to link together Chinese, Chicano, and Black groupings based upon an eclectic and opportunist unity in which each of the respective "nationalist" interests are represented and protected.

Between these two extremes, there was a whole complex spectrum of lines and practice associated with the NCM. However, in general, the NCM failed in both its attempts to regroup the U.S. communist movement on a firm ML foundation or to qualitatively advance the line and practice of the communist movement in the struggle against racism and national oppression. The benefits of this period for the ML movements rests principally in the realm of negative example and our capacity to accurately summarize and critique the dominant lines and mistakes which characterized the NCM.

### III. THE TREND AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

#### A. The Legacy of the New Communist Movement

Our trend, in the main, grows out of the New Communist Movement of the 1960s/70s. Consequently, many of the characteristic features and shortcomings in its racial composition, ability to handle internal racial contradictions, and its capacity to lead the mass anti-racist struggle can be traced to this particular legacy. The revisionist CP has a relatively distinct set of problems in its internal racial dynamics as well as in its attempts to take the lead in the anti-racist struggle. However, our trend's links to the CPUSA are relatively weak; the continuity with this broader tradition has been qualitatively broken.

A profound sharpening of the class contradictions fundamental to U.S. imperialism brought about the social turmoil and mass struggles of the 1960s, independent of the consciousness and activity of the communists. In the course of the spontaneous upsurge, tens of thousands arrived at some form of revolutionary consciousness and were attracted to Marxism. Marxism became a material force largely due to the impact of the national liberation struggles and socialist revolutions in the underdeveloped world. A substantial portion of the advanced elements attracted to Marxism were minorities. However, the U.S. communist movement at this historic juncture was dominated by an opportunist line (modern revisionism), disoriented and divided. Consequently, while many were introduced to Marxism-Leninism, relatively few were qualitatively consolidated as communists. As a result, the progressive strata of many minority communities consists of a number of forces familiar with Marxist literature, holding socialist sympathies of various sorts, but never fully consolidated as communists. This political formation is extremely diverse ideologically, but is often described as "revolutionary nationalist." Additionally many of the elements introduced to Marxism in the 1960s were lost to reformism.

However, despite this tremendous loss to the communist movement, a couple of thousand minority activists of the 60s managed to qualitatively grasp hold of Marxism-Leninism and become communists. Some found their way into the ranks of the revisionist party, but the majority became part of the politically amorphous and primitive new communist movement. Along with their white counterparts, the minority Marxist-Leninists suffered the same shallow and unsystematic training as communists which has become the hallmark of this "left"-opportunist trend--not only in the U.S. but internationally as well. The New Communist Movement failed to mature as a Marxist-Leninist trend. It remained a mere caricature alternative to modern revisionism, shackled with ill-defined and primitive political goals and an endemic impulse toward sectarian splintering.

One of the most conspicuous political and theoretical shortcomings of the New Communist Movement, especially relevant to our discussion was the tendency to conciliate the fragmentation of com-

unist practice along narrow nationalist lines. This conciliation was closely linked to the adoption of the national framework of analysis as the theoretical basis for understanding minority oppression. Most groups in the new communist movement saw the struggle for socialism as a struggle of the working class (white) and its allies (national minorities). The organization of the various minority communities towards national liberation struggles was seen as the province of minority Marxist-Leninists.

The common phenomena of the period was organizations, collectives or informal groupings of minority Marxist-Leninists attempting to forge their communist practice within the confines of political work restricted to certain minority communities--often in only one city or neighborhood. This was qualitatively different than in the 30s when the work of minorities drawn into the communist movement was centered in a party whose political orientation was to take responsibility for leading the class struggle society-wide, in all its multifarious forms. In addition, this party was an integral part of an international network embracing communists worldwide. It was in this broad arena that the advanced workers and students of that period learned about communism, even though, in the case of many minority cadre, their mass work and party assignments may have been concentrated in certain minority communities, neighborhoods, or shops with large proportions of minority workers. This crucial difference cannot be stressed enough because the relatively restricted field of political practice resulting in narrow and lopsided political visions characterized the whole New Communist Movement, minority and white communists alike, and severely stunted the ideological development of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement in the process.

The fragmentation of minority Marxist-Leninists from the mainstream of the communist movement was aggravated tenfold by the manner in which it was challenged, when it was challenged at all. The ultra-left assault of the PL against "reactionary nationalism" as well as the various charges of "Bundism" which circulated in the early 70s were some of the grossest examples. All too often such charges were part of the pettiest sectarian intrigues around some party-building scheme. And the opposition was universally marked by sterile dogmatism and quotation mongering accompanied by very little original theoretical work which might illuminate the particular nature of racial and national oppression in the U.S. and how the communists might take the lead in mounting a struggle against it. Consequently, a fairly widespread suspicion emerged, especially among minority communists, associated concerted campaigns against "narrow nationalism" with a line and practice that would effectively liquidate serious communist work in minority communities and the struggle against racism. This served to reinforce the phenomena of minority Marxist-Leninists organized into separate groupings concentrating their work in particular minority communities and this remained a conspicuous feature of the New Communist Movement right up until its demise. As a result the racial separation of communists into distinct organizations and collectives was a phenomena which also greeted the formation and development of our trend.

## B. The Racial Composition of the Trend

A substantial number of the minority Marxist-Leninists forged over the last decade or so have in fact made it through the twists and turns of the New Communist Movement and find themselves objectively within our trend or on its periphery. The development and practice of the majority of these comrades have been concentrated principally within particular minority communities. Consequently, the struggle to take up party building entails being prepared to substantially broaden their sense of political responsibility as well as to integrate with white communists in a common effort to rebuild a Marxist-Leninist trend and party. A process easier said than done. But, a large number of minority comrades have in fact taken up party building as the central task of this period, broadening their theoretical and practical work, and joined with white communists in grappling with the major questions that face the trend. It is not surprising that in the course of this important and necessary effort contradictions around racism internal to the communist ranks would emerge.

In addition to the minority comrades who have taken up the task of building the Marxist-Leninist trend and party building, there are significant numbers of minority Marxist-Leninists who are within our trend, but who hesitate to take responsibility for its development. As has become the common parlance, they "stand outside the party building movement." Many minority Marxist-Leninists, individuals as well as those organized in collectives, unite with the political demarcations of our trend but fail to actively participate in its political life. The line advanced by the OCIC to explain this situation is it is principally the result of white chauvinism so prevalent within the trend. However, this OCIC line grossly oversimplifies the history which accounts for this phenomena, as well as, the complexity of the task to actually realign the groups and individual Marxist-Leninists who "stand outside the party building movement."

Of course, the struggle to fully integrate these minority Marxist-Leninists into the political life of our trend must be taken up on a case by case basis. Still, a few generalizations concerning the major obstacles we'll face can be made:

1) A number of collectives and informal groupings of minority Marxist-Leninists have not yet fully and firmly broken with "left" opportunism, the theoretical framework and assumptions of the international line of the CPC. In this sense, they display the same pragmatist tendency general to the U.S. left--their break with this incorrect line is due to "common sense," and is thus left at a fairly shallow level. As a result, these comrades move into the periphery of our trend but vacillate on decisively determining their relationship to it.

2) Even when the decisive demarcation with "left" opportunism is made, it does not automatically guarantee the full integration of these minority Marxist-Leninists into the center of our trend--

the struggle over whether party-building is the central task of communists moves to the forefront. It is common to find some skepticism concerning the prospects of uniting U.S. Marxist-Leninists into a party. Though this viewpoint may be accompanied by lip service as to the importance of building the party, eventually it amounts to an anti-party building line. The refusal to assume responsibility for the direction and future of the whole Marxist-Leninist movement will keep these comrades peripheral to our trend, for the development of our trend has absolutely no historical significance apart from the struggle to reestablish a genuine Marxist-Leninist party.

3) Some collectives of minority Marxist-Leninists have not made a complete break with nationalism. This essentially expresses itself in a refusal to take responsibility for the revolutionary transformation of the whole class. Instead, comrades focus on work within a particular sector of the class and leave the more general theoretical and practical questions that face the U.S. revolution to others.

4) This orientation is reinforced by the fact that the practical political work of many of these comrades is concentrated in minority communities and the struggles against racism in which the presence, much less leading influence, of the broader communist movement is negligible. This more than anything else fosters skepticism and makes the party building efforts appear to be the distant and irrelevant activity of "white leftists," doomed to failure. Of course, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy which harms the development of the party building movement as well as the development of the minority comrades in question.

5) Differences over party-building line also lead some individuals and collectives of minority Marxist-Leninists to view the development of the trend as a secondary or even unimportant aspect of party-building. Party-building lines which see the relationship of communists to the masses as the main dynamic of the party-building process do not concern themselves with the development of the political life of the trend and the struggle for unity among Marxist-Leninists. Thus, though these comrades unite with the view that party building is the central task of U.S. Marxist-Leninists, they do not interact with the political activities and line struggles of the trend because of differences over the content of that process.

6) An additional reason for the phenomenon of minority Marxist-Leninists remaining outside the party-building movement is that, in some cases, the struggle with these comrades to place party-building at the top of the agenda has not been actively pursued. Unevenness in the level of interaction and struggle means that some comrades do not yet have the political basis to fully participate in the party-building movement. This unevenness may be due to the absence of an active trend life in a given city or to some failing on the part of trend forces in engaging comrades in struggle over the central task and direction for the Marxist-Leninist movement.

We can see, then, that the reasons for some minority Marxist-Leninists to "stand outside the party building movement" are many and complex. Individual incidents of racist practices and attitudes on the part of white communists may certainly be a factor, but in no way can such a complicated phenomenon be reduced to this one dynamic. If we are serious about the struggle to realign minority Marxist-Leninists into our trend and party building efforts then we must understand that the forces at work encouraging a backward orientation towards party building among minority Marxist-Leninists in the U.S. are powerful, complex, and deeply rooted in the particular history of our communist movement over the past 25 years or so.

Another conspicuous feature of our trend, inherited in large part from the New Communist Movement, is the large proportion of our trend organized into relatively small, local collectives which are completely or overwhelmingly white. The scope of the political work of these collectives is often narrowly restricted to one or two areas, usually with a stress on "point of production" trade union work or propaganda work. In many cases, these local formations are objectively "survival collectives"--their main function is to provide a means to keep individual comrades politically active but they have no basis to develop a strategic perspective on the main tasks of the Marxist-Leninist movement as a whole or to make such a perspective a material force. These collectives consist of individual activists who were spun off any one of a number of major "party formations" of the New Communist Movement or less experienced comrades who intuitively never got fully involved in the politics of the New Communist Movement. At any rate, they tend to cohere largely by virtue of the accident of being located in the same city or other similarly tenuous circumstances as opposed to a developed sense of political unity and strategic direction. The white comrades in these local collectives are not to be held individually responsible in a moralistic fashion for the composition and lack of direction of their grouplets. Rather the task is to illuminate the actual historical process which accounts for why the U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement finds itself so fragmented and racially separated at this juncture of history.

The proportion of our trend in relatively isolated, local collectives composed completely of white communists has a profoundly negative impact on the development of our trend in general and our struggle against racism in particular. The localist fragmentation alone serves to stunt the political and ideological maturation of our trend and reinforces a backward and primitive approach to politics on the part of individual activists. The circumscribed political horizons of small, local collectives prevents them from taking up any question--including the struggle against racism--on a scale which would impart to it any historical significance whatsoever. Grappling with the question of racism trendwide is further aggravated by the fact that many of these groupings of white comrades are neither oriented towards nor experienced enough to be able to sustain on-going political work in the anti-racist struggle. Additionally many white comrades come from life and class experiences which rarely, if ever, put them in any social proximity to



colored people. Many comrades have not yet broken with the racism and elitism that are part and parcel of the narrow life experience of the white petit bourgeoisie. This certainly compounds the problem of transforming the racial composition of the trend. However, in no way can the problem be simplistically reduced to this last point. The principal target must be the fragmented and primitive political state of our trend overall must be overcome in order to provide white comrades from such sheltered backgrounds the actual opportunities to break with these shortcomings in the midst of their practice and development as communists.

These then are the broad contours of the difficulties which our trend must take careful account of and overcome in addressing the struggle against racism. Our legacy from the New Communist Movement leaves us with a relatively fragmented and racially separated movement. The success of the struggle to unite and develop a Marxist-Leninist trend depends in no small part on our capacity to thoroughly integrate the life of the communist movement on all levels and struggle for the realignment of minority Marxist-Leninists who are objectively in our trend, but thus far remain peripheral to it. This in turn principally entails a struggle over the necessity and possibility of taking up the party building question. Also key to the political maturation of our trend is the manner in which the question of racism and national oppression gets placed on our collective agenda, and the orientation which guides the struggle to hammer out a correct line and practice on the struggle against racism--in the broader society as well as internal to the communist ranks.

### C. The Practical Intervention and Theoretical Work of the Trend

The process of winning advanced revolutionary elements to Marxism-Leninism from among minority workers and students has a distinct dynamic from the process of realigning minority activists who have already been forged as communists in the struggles of the 60s and 70s. Collapsing these distinct tasks into one muddle prevents us from grasping how either one might be accomplished.

Winning advanced minorities to Marxism-Leninism is principally linked to our trend's capacity to intervene and lead in the spontaneous class struggles of the working class, and, in particular, in the struggles against racism. This in turn is ultimately determined by the clarity and correctness of our political line. The ability of communists to win advanced elements to Marxism-Leninism is also impacted by the level of spontaneously developed class consciousness in particular minority communities and the level of activity of the mass anti-racist movement.

To obscure this point in the slightest degree, reduces the task of winning advanced minorities to communism to the ridiculous level of winning people one by one and results in a fetishization of improving individual "styles of work."

The process of winning advanced minority workers and students is complicated by the fact that the overall U.S. communist movement is in such a state of disunity and disarray. There are at least a dozen organizations and parties all claiming to be the true upholders of Marxism-Leninism and each claiming to have the only viable strategy for advancing the anti-racist struggle. The presence of the opportunist trends of revisionism and left opportunism in the anti-racist struggle (not to mention the wide variety of Trotskyist sects) makes for a crowded and confusing field of would-be vanguard elements.

The result is that the advanced elements from among the masses have a difficult time discerning exactly who the communists are, what they stand for and on what basis they are demarcated from each other.

Taken as a whole, there are numerous communist individuals and groups who are deeply involved in the various fronts of the struggle against racism, often with substantial influence in the immediate sense. However, the U.S. communist movement is so rife with opportunism and sectarianism that it does not stand as a coherent political and organizational force in relationship to the mass struggle against racism. Consequently, it is a safe generalization that the U.S. communist movement enjoys neither dominant influence nor initiative in the spontaneous struggle against racism. Reformist lines and adventurist illusions hold sway.

The revisionist party displays neither the determination nor the capacity to move central to the struggle against racism. Outside of a few campaigns (e.g., Wilmington 10) the CPUSA has proven unable to keep up with the pace of events and shows little initiative whatsoever. The CP and its periphery of sympathizers still have a number of fairly experienced and influential organizers in this field. They attempt to position themselves in many of the major spontaneous anti-racist struggles that erupt. However, the CP's consistent tailism in relation to the mass movement and profound sectarianism towards the rest of the left prevents it from taking the lead in this arena.

The remnant of Maoist groupings are splintered and in the process of disintegrating as a coherent political trend. Their decline is due principally to a class collaborationist international line, however, this general crisis is also have a negative impact on the practice of left-opportunists in the anti-racist struggle. In the early years of the new communist movement serious commitments were made to move organizing efforts into the South and concentrate on the struggle against racism. Consequently, today we still find individuals within the left opportunist camp who are relatively experienced and competent organizers. The trend as a whole, however has no future. The left opportunist groupings are sharply divided among themselves and each is internally wracked with vacillation and dissension. In addition, the new communist movement has failed to break with the dogmatism that marked it from its beginnings. Virtually every left opportunist group held to the Black Nation

thesis associated with the Comintern and applied it, with eclectic variations, to all other minority groups. The end result is a medley of inaccurate theoretical formulations and shallow political lines on the precise nature of racism and national oppression in the U.S. today. (Our trend by and large shares with the left opportunists a high degree of confusion on this question.)

Lastly, the impulse to left sectarian and adventurist errors are still evidenced among some Maoist forces, most graphically illustrated by the line and practice of the CWP. Consequently they often isolate themselves in the midst of broader united fronts.

It is within this overall context of communist practice in the anti-racist struggle that we can attempt an objective assessment of our particular trend's relationship to the mass anti-racist struggle. Relative to the mounting demands of the class struggle the political line of our trend remains primitive and our organizational capacities amateurish. However, relative to the opportunist trends to our right and left, there are the beginning signs of encouraging developments in the trend's practice in this area.

Our trend, although only a few years old, has its roots in the new communist movement and many activists trace their political roots back to the mass anti-racist and minority consciousness movements of the 60s. Consequently, there are a number of relatively experienced trend activists and groupings that have been concentrated principally in the anti-racist struggles, in organizing in different minority communities, and in Southern organizing for a number of years. But, taking our trend as a whole, the main features of our work in the anti-racist struggle are an underdeveloped and uneven practice, a lack of systematic nationwide coordination of efforts, and a relatively weak grasp of the main theoretical questions involved in understanding either the dynamics of minority oppression or the development of the anti-racist movement. The practice and influence of our trend in the struggle against racism is highly uneven from one locality or area of work to the next depending a lot on the particular political histories of different individuals and groupings. For example, while activists in our trend have developed long standing work and substantial influence in the Puerto Rican and Filipino communities, work in the Black, Chicano, and other Asian communities is conspicuously underdeveloped. And, while nearly all trend groupings give political recognition to the centrality of the struggle against racism, many have no ongoing work in this arena and little previous experience. Our practical experience in this arena of struggle will remain primitive without concerted efforts to break with local isolation and encourage the closest cooperation, coordination, and struggle of trend forces involved in anti-racist work. The development of our immediate political lines and tactics is closely linked to the degree and quality of collective practice and summation.

The first significant attempt of our trend to intervene nationwide in the anti-racist struggle was around the Bakke and Weber struggles. Successful efforts were made together with trend forces for the purpose of line development and national coordination of effort.

The NCOBD network managed to establish itself as a key political force at the center of this struggle. It was also widely identified as a political initiative of our trend and thus drew contention from the left opportunist groups ATM and IWK and mass initiative influenced by them--ABDC. Since then, the trend's intervention on a nationwide scale has been sustained principally by the NAROC which has concentrated its work mainly in the struggle against the rise of the KKK and racist violence. The continuity has been successfully maintained and the trend's presence is by and large recognized in the broad anti-racist forces--non-communist and communist alike.

So, although trend activists have accumulated some experience in intervention in local anti-racist struggles, have sustained organizing in particular minority communities and have taken some initial steps to politically coordinate our intervention nation-wide in this area of class struggle, we are still a long way from enjoying leading initiative or influence on any substantial scale. To the extent that the political and organizational contours of the trend remain weak and undeveloped we will be incapable of superceding this state of affairs.

In that sense, whether our trend can successfully take the lead in this critical arena of class struggle is completely bound up with our overall party-building efforts to unite and mature our trend around an advanced political line and practice. As it is this vanguard role in the mass spontaneous struggle against racism that sets the principal basis on which the recruitment of advanced minority workers and students can proceed on a scale worth mentioning, a discussion of the qualitative, long-term integration of the communist ranks makes no sense without addressing what is probably the key stumbling block to the development of an advanced communist practice--confusion, disunity and outright ignorance in the area of political line. In short, success in the task of taking the lead in the anti-racist struggle and, as a consequence of this, winning advanced minorities to Marxism-Leninism, depends upon the thorough going quality of the Marxist-Leninist line and practice on the nature of racial and national oppression and the struggle against it.

In light of this, some brief assessment of our trend's theoretical work on this question is in order. Many of the major groupings within the trend have produced theoretical work on racism and the national question. PWOC's Against Dogmatism on the National Question and DMLO's Position Paper are two major examples of trend efforts to develop a political line on Black oppression, in particular. Unfortunately, in the main, our trend has not yet distinguished itself by breaking the negative legacy of the communist movement for slipshod and unconvincing theoretical work on this question.

The key theoretical and political questions have not been sharply posed and focused nor presented before the trend systematically to encourage broad participation in the discussion and

debate. The Race/National Question Study Project has organized a large number of trend activists nationwide to study the question of Black oppression as well as several other particular minority questions. This work has the potential for raising the level of the whole trend but it has not yet been popularized in a thoroughgoing and organized fashion. Hopefully this conference and the reportbacks will also serve to begin to break through the theoretical muddle that has surrounded this issue for so long.

Undoubtedly, the central theoretical question to be taken up is the nation thesis and framework which has dominated communist theory and practice for 50 years. The nation thesis, concentrated on the pivotal Black question but extended and permeating all related questions, has served to disorient the communist movement and prevent any theoretical breakthroughs in illuminating the precise nature of racism and racial inequality in its links to the class structure of U.S. capitalism. The revisionist party, in its classical pragmatist fashion, has dropped the nation thesis framework quietly with no coherent critique or summation. The new communist movement dogmatically revived it with a vengeance, resulting in some of the most absurd political lines. Those left opportunist groups that attempted to adapt the thesis to present-day reality conducted the most shallow critiques and failed to break out of the overall theoretical framework. This resulted in an eclectic hodge-podge of theoretical formulations concerning nations of "new types" or racial minorities stemming from dissolved nations, etc., etc.

Our trend has thus far displayed the conspicuous tendency to repeat a similar error of pragmatically dropping the thesis that a Black nation exists today with only a shallow critique and no compelling and theoretically rigorous alternative framework. The future of our trend's work in this arena is tied to our collective efforts to place this question squarely on our agenda and struggle to break with the slipshod theoretical legacy which has shrouded it once and for all.

D. The Campaign Against White Chauvinism -- A Negative Example of the Struggle Against Racism Internal to the Communist Ranks

Given the theoretical and political immaturity of our trend and its relatively racially separated character, it is not surprising we would find ourselves ill-equipped to deal with racist contradictions within our ranks.

This helps account for the overwhelmingly negative example of the OCIC's campaign against white chauvinism, as well as the widespread disunity and disorientation it has managed to cause within our trend -- both in and outside the OCIC. Although the campaign has been hailed by the OCIC as a milestone in the struggle against racism in the communist ranks, it in fact represents a step backwards and has caused far more damage than good. The political line, orientation and methods of the Campaign Against White Chauvinism are bankrupt. Must struggle and criticism over this campaign has

already transpired within our movement. For the purpose of this paper we will identify only a few of the major errors associated with it.

1) The campaign grossly oversimplifies the political and racial features of our trend and the basis for their historical development. This is a crucial mistake because it prevents us from gaining an objective understanding of the context in which we encounter problems of racism, as well as the more all-sided reasons why a number of minority Marxist-Leninists still remain peripheral to the trend and the party building efforts.

2) The campaign hopelessly collapses the distinction between realigning minority Marxist-Leninists into our trend and winning advanced minority workers to Marxism-Leninism, while making not the slightest reference to the revolutionary energy and potential among minority youth and students.

3) The campaign has effectively reduced the success or failure of this latter task to a question of improving the style of work of individual white activists. The campaign has fostered the view that racism is an attitudinal problem. Attempts to seriously advance our trend's political line development, theoretical tasks and practice in the broader anti-racist struggle have been entirely neglected in favor of the purification of the communist ranks. Racism within the communist movement has been disassociated from the material basis of racist relations in the broader society and the resolution of racial contradictions has been disassociated from the line and practice of the communist movement in the anti-racist struggle.

4) The campaign has consistently utilized the most despicable demagogic methods to attack and isolate activists, often for the pettiest and most arbitrary of reasons. The campaign has created a complete parody of an ideological and political struggle among communists.

5) In conclusion, the Campaign Against White Chauvinism has served to principally foster disunity not unity; confusion not clarity; and has worsened rather than improved the racial dynamics within our trend--substantially straining the relations between many white and minority comrades both inside and outside the OCIC. The only positive aspect of this experience can mature in the course of our trend's collective efforts to criticize the failures of the Campaign Against White Chauvinism, draw the appropriate lessons from it, reunite all who can be reunited on this basis and move forward.