

# The Theoretical Defenders of White Chauvinism in the Labor Movement

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THE correctness of the program of the Communist International on the Negro Question is conclusively proven in the present crisis by the response of the Negro masses to the slogans of the Party, and by their increasing participation together with the white workers in joint struggles against the capitalist offensive. It is likewise proven by the vicious repressive measures of the ruling classes against the activities of the Communist Party and other revolutionary organizations among Negroes.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the revolutionary program of the Communist Party is meeting the sharpest attacks, particularly at the present time, on the part of all chauvinist forces from the Fish Committee down to the Lovestone renegades.

It is precisely in this light, then, that we must regard the vicious attacks of the Lovestoneites upon the line of the Party and the C. I. as contained in recent numbers of the (counter) *Revolutionary Age*, organ of these renegades.

## ARE THE NEGROES A NATION?

The author of these articles, one Will Herberg, armed with pseudo-Marxian phrases, deliberately distorts quotations, confuses formulations, and with a profound air of Marxian "learning" launches a "devastating" attack upon the recent C. I. resolution.

According to this "theoretician," the Negroes in the Black Belt have no *right* to aspire to national liberation because they do not constitute a nation. Herberg asks, "Do the Negroes constitute a nation in the same sense in which the Croatians, Ukrainians, or Greeks do?" Our "learned" theoretician then proceeds to answer this by quoting the Leninist definition given by Stalin who, Herberg sneeringly admits, "writes quite well on this question." Stalin's quotation reads as follows:

"A nation is an historically developed community of people with

a common language, territory, economic life, and an historical tradition reflecting itself in a common culture.”

Herberg then proceeds to make a very non-Leninist, schematic application of this correct formula to the situation of the Negroes in the U. S. A., consequently arriving at the conclusion that “to maintain such a position (*i. e.*, that the Negroes are a nation) is possible only for those who know absolutely nothing of the situation of the Negro masses in this country.” Let us examine more closely the premise for this false conclusion. This is to be seen in the following quotation from Herberg’s article:

“Have the American Negroes a community of language, territory, economic life, psychic structure, as *distinct* from the white peoples? . . . Even the most enthusiastic of the official theoreticians will not insist upon a special Negro language.”

We find that our theoretician has made a little amendment to the correct Leninist definition of Stalin’s by adding the words “special” and “distinct.” It is obviously in these two words that the crux of his confusion lies. It is clear that Herberg confuses common language, common culture, and common economic ties with *separate and distinct* language, cultural and economic ties.

On the question of language: If Herberg had read Stalin a little further, he would have found that “a common language for every nation is necessary, but a *different* language for every nation is not necessary.” (Emphasis mine—H. H. From a pamphlet, *Marxism and the National Question*, Russian edition.) For example, it is quite clear that Great Britain and the United States are two distinct nations, and yet both Englishmen and Americans speak one and the same language. It is also clear that the Negroes have a common language, despite the fact that their language, English, is the same as that of their oppressors.

On the question of economic life and culture: Can it be seriously maintained that the Ukrainians had a distinct economic life from that of the Great Russians? Our Leninism teaches us that the epoch of imperialism or finance capitalism is distinguished, among other things, by the penetration of capitalist relations into the most remote corners of the earth, and also the drawing in of the most backward peoples into the sphere of world market relations, *i. e.*, into the general imperialist system. It is therefore absurd, in the epoch of imperialism, *i. e.*, in the period of world market relations, to speak about economic ties among an oppressed people as “distinct” in the sense of separate, from those of the oppressing nation. Common economic ties, as used, mean market relations between

the bourgeoisie and the toilers of a given nation. Can it be maintained that such relations are absent among Negroes? True, the Negro bourgeoisie is not an industrial bourgeoisie. On the contrary, it is a weak and parasitic bourgeoisie, consisting principally of "Negro intellectuals (mainly in the 'free' professions) and of a thin layer of small capitalists, business people." (Resolution of the C. I., October, 1930.)

But this bourgeoisie depends chiefly upon the masses of Negroes in the Jim Crow districts for its market. It also has industrial aspirations, such as the Garvey movement, Pan-African Congress, etc., revealed. On the basis of struggle for this original market, the Negro bourgeoisie has developed a peculiar nationalism—a nationalism of the ghettos. With the development of the Negro bourgeoisie, the C. I. Resolution clearly states that "there has appeared lately not only definite efforts for developing a national culture but also outspoken bourgeois tendencies toward Negro nationalism." Its culture reflects the peculiar environment of national oppression of the Negroes in the United States. For example, who would be so naive as to deny that Negro spirituals and the so-called *new* Negro literature and art are elements of this culture, reflecting the whole environment of the Negro peoples? The Negroes have their separate social institutions, churches, secret societies, clubs. The Negro bourgeoisie has, in the strata of teachers, professors, ministers, doctors, etc., its ideologists. True, this Negro culture plays the same role as all national cultures, whether of oppressed or oppressing nations, namely, that of mobilizing the masses of the particular nation under the ideological influence of their bourgeoisie. But this is quite another question.

Our theoretician, having "defeated" the C. I. and the Communist Party on the question of language, economic ties, and culture, now proceeds to "tear down" the last and most basic premise for the right of the Negroes to national liberation, *i. e.*, common territory. "The first prerequisite," he says, "for a nation is certainly a 'community of territory' . . . here they [the Communists—H. H.] appeal to the Black Belt." But not so our theoretician. He rejects the Black Belt as the basis for a Negro nation on the grounds "that only 25 per cent of the Negroes in the United States live in this Negro land." But by this rejection he not only fails to prove that the line of the Party is incorrect, but he unwittingly reveals the real counter-revolutionary face of the Lovestoneites on the Negro question. Herberg, together with the Wall Street financiers and their government, while denying the right of self-determination for the Negroes, *recognizes the right of the handful of white slave-driving*

*landowners and usurers in the Black Belt* to monopolize the land in this district and subject the Negro masses to the most shameless oppression.

To any class conscious worker, the question is clear. To reject the right of the oppressed Negro majority in the Black Belt to set up their own government, means simply to accept the domination of the white slave-drivers in this territory, or in other words, to be (together with the imperialists and their allies, the slave-driving landowners) in favor of *white supremacy*. Truly, the Lovestone renegades have won their spurs as the theoretical spokesmen of white chauvinism in the labor movement. To reject the right of the Negroes to self-determination is even a step backward from bourgeois democracy, as self-determination is a bourgeois democratic right. But what is obvious to any class conscious worker becomes an impenetrable mystery to these fakers who are literally steeped in bourgeois prejudices and legalism.

Having denied the right of self-determination to the oppressed Negroes, it is quite logical that Herberg should also deny that the "Black Belt has any real economic, historical or social unity." In this connection, he deliberately twists the meaning of the C. I. Resolution on this question to imply that the "Black Belt was once a political unity, and that its political unity was deliberately destroyed by the *artificial* division into states." Of course this glaring distortion has nothing in common with the Resolution of the C. I. and merely displays the depths of rottenness and treachery to which the Lovestoneites have resorted in their efforts to discredit the line of the Party and the C. I. in the eyes of unsuspecting workers.

The C. I. Resolution points out clearly in a dialectical manner that "on the one hand the Black Belt is not in itself, either economically or politically, such a united whole as to warrant its being called a special colony of the United States. But on the other hand this zone is *not, either economically or politically, such an integral part of the whole United States as any other part of the country.*" (Emphasis mine—H. H.) Herberg should know (if he were as interested in a real revolutionary formulation of the Negro question as he is in supporting white chauvinism), that the Black Belt is identical with the old cotton belt of the South. It is precisely here that the plantation system and the survivals of slavery have remained most intact, and consequently, where the national question is the sharpest. Hence it is clear that the Black Belt has its own peculiar economic and historical development which distinguishes it from the rest of the country. In order to deny the

Black Belt as a basis for a Negro nation, Herberg accepts the bourgeois administrative divisions which, in the interests of maintaining national oppression of the Negro majority in the Black Belt, divide the naturally contiguous Negro territories into artificial state and county divisions. In this manner Herberg gives direct support to the imperialists and the landowners.

In the above arguments presented by Herberg, it can be seen that he has "forgotten" one little "detail" which happens to be an implacable demand of Marxism-Leninism, *i. e.*, an historical approach. Herberg "overlooked" the first part of Stalin's definition, which reads "a nation is an historically formed community of people. . . ." This obviously means that nations, like all social phenomena, must be considered historically, *i. e.*, in the process of birth, growth, and decline. Stalin emphasizes this further in the same chapter of his brochure. He says "it is self-understood [but not by the renegade Herberg—H. H.] that a nation as well as all other social phenomena is subject to the law of change; it has its beginning and also its end." For example, there are declining nations, like the Scotch and Welsh in Great Britain. These have become almost assimilated into the stronger English nation; they have lost their prerequisites for independent national existence. Among these people, the bourgeois democratic revolution occurred long ago. On the other hand, there exist nations which are now in the process of becoming, but this process is now being retarded by imperialism, such, for example, is the case with the colonial peoples and subject nations, including the Negroes in the United States. It is obvious that the Negroes in the United States reveal among themselves all the characteristics of a nation.

#### AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

In order to correctly understand the Marxian-Leninist approach to the national question at the present time, it is necessary to differentiate between two historical periods in the development of nationalist movements. The first period, the classic period of the formation of nations, dates roughly from 1789 (the Great French Revolution) to the year 1871 (the Franco-Prussian War), which marks the final consolidation of the German empire. The second period marks the epoch of imperialism.

The first period saw the formation of the big capitalist states of Europe and America. In our time, national movements are a thing of the past for these nations. They have become imperialist states, thriving upon the exploitation of numerous small, weaker nations which, because of the law of "unequal development of capi-

talism" had not succeeded in developing into capitalist states by the beginning of the epoch of imperialism. Hence, struggle for national liberation on the part of these nations which have not completed their bourgeois democratic transformation, is now taking place against imperialism, which, as Lenin observed, is a "denial of democracy and all its demands, including the right of self-determination." The bourgeoisie of the great imperialist states, who in the first epoch led humanity forward in the struggle against the feudal yoke and toward cultural and political freedom, have now entered a "holy alliance" with pre-capitalist classes for the preservation of semi-slave forms of oppression of the masses in the subject nations.

In the most important colonial countries even the national bourgeoisie have no longer the significance of a revolutionary force. With the development of revolutionary mass movements, they are deserting or have already deserted, as in the cases of China, India, Egypt, etc., to the camp of imperialist counter-revolution. Stalin admirably formulates the changed status of the national question today in his polemic against Semich, in the Yugo-Slavic Commission of the Fifth Congress of the C. I.:

"This quintessence of the national problem *now* is the struggle of the *popular mass* in the colonies and of the subjugated nationalities against finance capitalism, against political enslavement and the cultural retention of these colonies and nationalities by the imperialist bourgeoisie of the ruling nations. *Of what significance can the competitive struggle of the bourgeoisie of the various nationalities be in this formulation of the national problem? Of course, not of decisive importance, and in some cases of no importance at all.* It is quite obvious that it is chiefly a question here not as to whether the bourgeoisie of one nationality beats or can beat in the competitive struggle the bourgeoisie of another nationality, but rather that the imperialist group of the ruling nationality exploits and oppresses *the basic masses and first of all the peasants* of the colonial and subjugated nationalities, and in oppressing and exploiting them, draws them into the struggle against imperialism, making them our allies in the proletarian revolution." (Emphasis mine—H. H.)

It is precisely upon the basis of such an analysis that we must approach the Negro question in the United States. The Civil War did not complete the liberation of the Negro peoples; "it is only a Yankee bourgeois lie to say that the yoke of Negro slavery has been lifted in the United States. Formally it has been abolished, but in practice the great majority of the Negro masses in the South are living in slavery in the literal sense of the word." (C. I. Resolution.) As far as the Negro people are concerned, the task of completion of the bourgeois democratic and agrarian revolution still

stands first on the order of the day. By leaving unsolved these basic democratic tasks, while at the same time making possible the development of class differentiation among Negroes, the Civil War created the social and economic basis for the present-day Negro national question. The Black Belt with its majority Negro population, constitutes the objective prerequisite for the realization of the struggles of the Negro masses for national liberation. The Negro toilers, once the allies of the Northern bourgeoisie but betrayed by them during the reconstruction period, have now become *the allies of the proletarian revolution*.

DENIAL OF THE RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION UNDER THE  
CLOAK OF FIGHTING AGAINST REACTIONARY SEPARATISM

But the demagogy of the Lovestoneites knows no bounds. Herberg contends that "as a result of its [the Communist Party's—H. H.] fundamentally false estimation of the Negro question, the new course offers the strongest objective support to reactionary-separatist tendencies among the Negro masses in the U. S. A. (Garvey movement, etc.)" (!)

How does the C. I. Resolution approach the question of separatist tendencies among Negroes? It clearly distinguishes between reactionary separatist movements and revolutionary ones, and clearly defines the attitude of the Party towards them. It includes Garveyism under the category of reactionary separatist tendencies, because Garveyism diverted the potential revolutionary movement of the Negro masses into utopian, reactionary channels of "Back to Africa." Garveyism served imperialism by drawing the Negro masses away from the struggle for their rights in the United States, and fostered separation of Negro masses from the white revolutionary workers. Thus Garveyism betrayed the liberation movement of the Negro masses. In contradistinction to the reactionary Utopia of Marcus Garvey, the C. I. and the Communist Party raise the slogan of real right of self-determination for the Negroes in the Black Belt to be achieved through a fighting alliance of Negro masses and revolutionary white workers against imperialism. The Negroes, once fooled by Garveyism, are now rallying to the leadership of the Communist Party, not on the basis of a concession by the Party to Garveyism, as the renegade Lovestoneite implies, but because they see that the Communist Party is the only force that is really fighting for national liberation. The real position of the Lovestoneites, however, is that any movement for the right of self-determination, *i. e.*, the right to separate, is reactionary. They demagogically con-

tend that such a movement would mean separation between Negro and white workers.

Every revolutionary white worker will understand that to demand the right of self-determination, the right to separate, does not mean to advocate the separation of Negro workers from white workers. On the contrary, our aim is complete unity and fusion of Negro and white toilers. Ours is not a general cry for unity on the condition that the Negro toilers "forget" about peonage, lynching, and the system of white supremacy, as the Lovestoneites propose. But inasmuch as American imperialism retains *by force* within its state boundaries the Black Belt with its oppressed majority of Negro population, we stand for their right to separate. We demand the withdrawal of the armed forces of imperialism from the Black Belt. In other words, we understand that any lasting unity between the white and Negro toilers must be voluntary, on the basis of mutual confidence between the toilers of both races, and not upon the basis of force. We demand the right of separation, "certainly not in order to 'recommend' separation, but on the contrary in order to facilitate and accelerate the democratic rapprochement and unification of nations." (Lenin.)

Another "annihilating" argument of Herberg's against the C. I. Resolution is the contention that "so thorough-going" is the new official course on the Negro question, that it leads "of course against the will of its champions—to Jim Crowism. . . . The Communist must give support to the 'Negroes' right to their own special schools.'" "And," exclaims our theoretician, "that is exactly what the white rulers of the South want." Let us see what the exact wording of the C. I. Resolution on this question is:

"The struggle for equal rights of the Negroes does not in any way exclude recognition and support for the Negroes' right to their own special schools, government organs, etc., *wherever the Negro masses put forward such national demands of their own accord.*"  
(Emphasis mine—H. H.)

But is it correct, as Herberg exclaims, that this is precisely what the white ruling class want? It is quite clear that the slave-driving plantation owners of the South do not want any kind of schools for the Negroes, special or otherwise. On the contrary, they are interested in keeping the Negro masses in cultural darkness and illiteracy as an essential condition for their continued slavery. Herberg would answer the desire of the down-trodden Negro masses for cultural enlightenment by telling them they could not get any education until such time as the white ruling classes see fit to establish mixed schools. (!!!) Thus by demagogic calls to struggle



against the presumed Jim Crow line of the Communist Party, Herberg actually helps the white ruling classes to keep the Negroes in ignorance. Yes, Mr. Herberg, the Communist Party will support the right of the Negroes to set up their own schools, "*wherever the Negro masses put forth such national demands of their own accord.*"

Having denied the right of self-determination to the Negroes and their right to secure education, Herberg, with "biting sarcasm," profoundly remarks that "if the Negroes are given the right of self-determination in the Black Belt, why not in the contiguous wards of Harlem?" One can only shrug one's shoulders at the sheer stupidity of this "wise-crack," which reveals a profound confusion on the national question in general. One might equally wonder why the C. I. supports the right of self-determination for the Croats in Jugo-Slavia, but does not advocate the right to separate for the Croats in the Croatian quarter of Belgrade!!! It is quite clear that this slogan is a slogan for rallying the masses of toilers, and especially the farmers in the Black Belt, to the struggle against imperialism. Herberg "forgets" that at the present time the national question is essentially a peasant question.

In the south, because of the existence of the Black Belt where national oppression is the sharpest, being directly connected with semi-slave exploitation and oppression of the Negro peasantry, the path of solution of the Negro question must necessarily proceed through the struggle for their right to separate. In the North the Negro question is also a national question, having its roots, in the final analysis in the position of the Negro masses in Southern agriculture. But owing to the objective conditions of the Negro masses in the North, who are in the main workers, the main historical path of development is towards assimilation. Hence our main slogan here is "Social Equality!"

#### RACE, NATION, OR CLASS?

Herberg concludes his "analysis" of the Negro question and lengthy tirade against the line of the Party with the contention that the "Negro question is not a national question but a *racial and class* question." (Emphasis mine—H. H.) We have pointed out in other places the bourgeois liberal essence of the race question theory. Suf-  
fice it to remark that to contend that the Negro question in the United States is a race question in contradistinction to a national question, is to contend that the Negroes are oppressed because they are black!! The real economic and social essence of the Negro

question consists in the difference between the economic and cultural development of Negro and white peoples in this country under a capitalist imperialist social order. The policy of national oppression of American imperialism in regard to the Negroes is expressed in efforts artificially to keep the Negroes backward, as a condition for their continued special exploitation. Therefore, the struggle of the Negro masses for liberation, for reasons enumerated above, must take the form of a movement for national liberation. Race is merely a factor in the oppression of the Negroes. The difference in color of skin and texture of hair between the two races is utilized by bourgeois theoreticians to found false racial theories for the purpose of justifying and facilitating the oppression of the Negroes.

Therefore, to maintain that the Negro question is a race question is to reduce this problem to one of its factors, to blur over its social economic essence; in other words to capitulate before bourgeois racial theories. Moreover, it is to justify a chauvinist lack of faith in the Negro masses by presenting the movement of the Negro toilers *not* as directed at the very foundations of American imperialism, but as a feeble bourgeois liberal opposition against race prejudice, or race ideology, as divorced from their economic and social roots. On the other hand, the denial of the national revolutionary character of the Negro question leads to the isolation of the revolutionary proletariat from a most important ally in the struggle against imperialism and the desertion of this ally, thus leaving it to the tender mercies of the Negro reformists and white liberals.

As to the chatter about a class question, the opportunists have always mechanically opposed class struggles to the struggles of oppressed peoples for the purpose of rejecting the latter. It is under this false slogan that the social traitors have for decades tried to cover up their denial of the peasant and national question, and their support of chauvinism. While recognizing and emphasizing the national character of the Negro question and rejecting the menshevik deception about "pure" proletarian class struggles, the Communist Party formulates the Negro question thus: The struggle of the Negroes for liberation is a phase of the class struggle of the American working class against imperialism, or in other words, as a class struggle which assumes a nationalist form.

#### CAN WE OPPOSE SOCIAL EQUALITY TO THE RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION?

Logically consistent with his chauvinistic premise, Herberg raises the slogan of social equality as opposed to the right of self-determi-

nation. Can we oppose social equality to the right of self-determination? A concrete historical analysis conclusively shows that social equality without a consistent struggle for the right of self-determination for the Negroes in the Black Belt is but a lying liberal phrase. The Negro toilers themselves in this district will justifiably regard it as such. The Negro farmer for ages has suffered under the most brutal oppressive yoke; his attitude is one of rancour and distrust towards the white people as a whole, regarding them as the incarnation of his misery; he sees even the white worker misguided, participating in lynch mobs and terror against the Negro. Is it conceivable, then, that this Negro farmer will believe in any promises of social equality? He will want to know, and justly, who is going to protect his equality from the lynch mobs and the organized terror of the white slave-drivers. The Lovestoneites would undoubtedly say that this proves the reactionary nature of the Negro farmer, who "won't believe a white man's word."

But the white revolutionary workers, who understand the powerful revolutionary potentialities inherent in the struggles of the Negro masses, would answer in the following manner: "This land on which you and your ancestors have slaved for centuries rightfully belongs to you. The bosses' government in this territory is a government of foreign slave-drivers; it is our enemy as well as yours. We recognize and support your right to organize your own government, to elect your officials, to organize your own militia, and your unqualified right to separate from the United States. Moreover, we, the white revolutionary workers, will prove our sincerity right now, at the present time, by actively supporting and helping to organize a struggle to bring about those conditions in which you will be able to exercise your right to self-determination." On the other hand, the class conscious Negro workers will say: "The class conscious white workers are your friends. Their enemies are the same as yours, the white bosses and landlords, and their agents, the A. F. of L. and Socialist fakers. The Negro misleaders of the type of Garvey and others are actually betraying you and are concluding reactionary agreements with the white slave-drivers behind your backs. Your only road to freedom and possession of the land you till, lies through a fighting alliance with the revolutionary white and Negro workers against imperialism and for the right of self-determination."

#### UNITED FRONT OF WHITE CHAUVINISTS

In conclusion, an analysis of class relations at the present time will reveal the following line-up in opposition to the right of the

Negroes to self-determination: The southern landlords and usurers backed by Wall Street finance capitalism and the United States government; their agents, the Klu Klux Klan, Black Shirts, etc., who are engaged in organizing lynching parties and mob violence against Negroes all over the country; Southern politicians who at the present time are raising the bogey of black domination more strenuously than ever before; the Fish Committee which contends that the Communist Party is attempting to stir up a revolt among the Negroes in the South; Norman Thomas, the "Socialist," who demagogically contends that the slogan of self-determination is an attempt to Jim-Crow the Negroes, while he characteristically remains silent in regard to the Jim-Crow locals of the Socialist Party in the South; and finally, the Lovestone renegades. No major reactionary force is missing from this line-up.

Thus the united front of chauvinism against the revolutionary program of the Communist Party is complete.

