

RACIAL OPPRESSION AND NATIONAL OPPRESSION:
THEIR PARTICULARITIES AND THEIR INTERSECTION

Working Paper I

Parts I & II

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Introduction

The exploitation and oppression of racially and nationally oppressed peoples has been key to the development of capitalism in the U.S. From the plunder and genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement, peonage and proletarianization of Blacks, the annexation of Mexican lands and the use of Bracero labor, the coerced labor of Asians, to the colonialization of Puerto Rico, racial and national oppression has been central to the class formation and struggle in the U.S.

Unraveling the nature of racial and national oppression and their relation to class struggle is key to forging a communist vanguard to give leadership to the struggles against racial and national oppression. For the anti-revisionist, anti-left opportunist trend, political and theoretical work has begun, building on the prior experience and theoretical breakthroughs and struggling to avoid the errors of the communist movement. In order to push the work forward, Marxist-Leninists must struggle to grasp the stand and method of dialectical and historical materialism. But this stand and method must be applied to the particularities of the distinction and intersection of class struggle, racial oppression and national oppression in the U.S.

The purpose of this working paper is to set a theoretical framework for understanding the nature of both national and racial oppression in the U.S., and their interpenetration. In section I, we take up the national question and draw out a materialist approach to the concepts of "nation," and "national minority," delineating the stages of development of the national question in relation to capitalism and summarizing the main political demands bound up with the struggle against national oppression.

In section II we put forward an initial theoretical framework and analysis of racial oppression (racism) in the U.S. and its relation to the class struggle. In the process we contrast racism with national oppression and assert our opinion that the question of black liberation is a racial, not a national, question while the oppression of other minority peoples involves both of these forms of oppression.

We discuss the interconnection of the racial and national questions in the U.S. in the final section of the working paper. First we touch on the complex issue of the formation of the U.S. into a nation, and then we take up the issue of what we call the 'racialization' of national minority oppression in this country. We also outline some of the theoretical issues we must confront in analyzing the various national questions (Mexican, Puerto Rican, the various Asian questions, the Native peoples) in the U.S.

I. A MATERIALIST APPROACH TO THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The struggle for proletarian revolution centrally involves the

class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for state power. But many other questions impact the class struggle and are key to understanding its unfolding. The woman question is one of these, and so are the racial and national questions. Since the past twenty years have been conspicuously marked by revolutionary national liberation struggles against imperialism around the world, the national question has been particularly recognized as being key to proletarian revolution.

In the the U.S., the 'national question' has become prominent as a framework most often used by Marxist Leninists to understand the oppression of black and other minority peoples. However confusion and eclecticism have characterized the U.S. communist movements' understanding of the national question and its application. To help remedy this situation we first discuss the question of nations and the oppression of nations. We then turn to a discussion of national minorities. Our purpose is to reconstruct the Marxist-Leninist understanding of these questions. In later sections we will make initial applications of these theoretical understanding to the U.S.

A. What is a Nation?

The concept of "nation" is a subject of great unclarity within our movement. But a full understanding of the concept of "nation" is the foundation of clarity on the national question, as this seemingly simple concept is packed political significance.

Stalin's famous definition is a useful starting point.. "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." (Marxism and the National Question)

Many have focused on the four common features of a nation, thinking that any entity that shares them constitutes a nation. This kind of thinking mistakes the phenomena for the essence and leads to error. In fact, nations are not the only entities that share these four features: for examples many pre-capitalist tribes do, yet they are not nations. We must grasp what distinguishes a nation from other communities of people, be they tribes, racial groups, classes, or city-states.

As Stalin put it, "A nation is not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations." ("Marxism and the National Question.") More specifically, the nation is the unit of the formation/organization of classes under capitalism and, therefore, is the terrain of the class struggle in the capitalist epoch. It is precisely this particularity that makes nations and the national question central to the Marxist-Leninist understanding of proletarian revolution.

In primitive communism the unit of the mode of production is the "commune"; in ancient slavery it is the "estate"; under feudalism it is

the "domain" or "fief." Under capitalism it is, generally speaking, the "nation." "Capitalism's broad and rapid development of the productive forces calls for large, politically compact and united territories, since only here can the bourgeois class--together with its inevitable antipode, the proletarian class--unite and sweep away all the old, medieval, caste, parochial, petty-national, religious and other barriers." (Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question").

B. Stages of the National Question.

The national question takes on different form and content according to the stage of development of capitalism and the class struggle. Following Stalin, we here outline the development of the national question in three historical periods: (1) the triumph of capitalism over feudalism, (2) the stage of monopoly capitalism/imperialism, and (3) the rise of socialism.

1. Capitalism's Triumph over Feudalism: the Formation of Nations

The feudal system is characterized by the exploitation of the peasantry by a landowning class in small communities. Production is limited by the primitive means of production and is chiefly agricultural and handicrafts. Exchange of commodities is not widespread, as most production is for immediate use, not for sale on the market.

The bourgeoisie qualitatively transforms this scene. It employs a propertyless proletariat in large-scale commodity production. A vast commodity market is thus created that dissolves the small self-sufficient feudal communities. "For the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speaks a single language... Therein is the economic foundation of national movements." (Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination")

Thus the national movement is led by the bourgeoisie in the first period. It is the rise of capitalist social relations that creates a new community with a common territory, language, culture, and economy.

However, the transition from feudalism to capitalism was uneven throughout Europe. As a result, the more advanced national bourgeoisies were able to subjugate less developed nations in their proximity, especially in Eastern Europe. This was the origin of national oppression, of the oppression of one nation by another. Thus, while in Western Europe most nations established their own nation-states, Eastern Europe was characterized by multi-national states in which the more developed nation oppressed the less developed. Such oppressed nations were thereby held back in their development, (though by no means frozen in to capitalist underdevelopment as are colonies in the era of imperialism).

The national movements in the oppressed nations were led by the bourgeoisie and were part not of the socialist revolution but of the further development of world capitalism.

2. The Period of Monopoly Capitalism/Imperialism

With the rise of monopoly capital the monopoly bourgeoisie's struggle for markets, exploitable labor power, energy, and raw materials becomes worldwide. Interimperialist rivalry is intense and typically leads to the carving up of the world into colonies under the dominance of one or another imperialist power. This means the oppression and exploitation of emerging nations. Imperialism exploits the peasantry and small producers (semi-feudalism) while transforming their economic life into that of permanent underdeveloped, subjugated capitalism under the sway of imperialism. Although the struggle of emerging bourgeoisie's to end national oppression within the Eastern European multi-national states continued and in fact gained much success around WWI (Poland, Hungary, etc.), the main character of the national question in this period is the struggle against imperialist subjugation of nations--the national-colonial question. Thus the national question became a worldwide question inherently linked to the struggle against imperialism. Whereas in the first period the national movements were led by the bourgeoisie and were part of the worldwide development of capitalism, in the era of imperialism, the proletariat has matured and plays a leading role in the national liberation struggles making them part of the worldwide proletarian revolution.

World War II marked the turn away from colonialism (in which the imperialists directly control the state apparatus of the oppressed nation) and sem-colonies (in which the imperialists 'share' power with native ruling classes) to neo-colonialism. As Kwame Nkrumah characterized it, "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system is directed from the outside." (Neo Colonialism) Though the political form of imperialist power over the oppressed nations changed, the essence--economic subjugation of a given territory and people by imperialism--did not. This has given rise to the most powerful revolutionary current of modern times: the struggle of the oppressed peoples for national liberation from imperialism and socialism.

3. The Socialist Period

Socialism is the lower stage of the communist mode of production in which the means of production have been nationalized, the forces of production are being powerfully developed to fulfill human needs, and the proletariat is in power. Capital has been qualitatively smashed.

With the elimination of capitalist private property, the driving forces of national oppression has been removed. Contrary to capitalism where national oppression is inherent, the national question under socialism is qualitatively altered and the basis to establish equal rights among nations is laid even though national disputes will undoubtedly continue.

In fact, the forward progress of socialist construction requires

increased international cooperation, division of labor, and solidarity among socialist nations and different nationalities of workers. Imperialism develops the forces of production to the point that production far surpasses the capacity of a single nation to supply raw materials or consume the products. But its private property relations prevent the emergence of international solidarity or equal rights and instead give rise to inter-imperialist rivalry and national oppression. Socialism resolves the property contradiction, develops the productive forces even more, and thereby promotes international proletarian solidarity.

Ultimately, communism will eliminate nations and replace that form of social and economic organization with the single worldwide commune. For only such a worldwide form is consistent with the gigantic forces of production that must be developed in order to establish communism.

C. The Right of Nations to Self-Determination

The oppression of nations is a form of capitalist oppression, and inevitable feature of capitalist rule without which imperialism cannot exist. Thus the elimination of the oppression of nations is integral to the elimination of capitalist rule. This is the proletariat's interest in the national struggle.

The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations also has an interest in the national struggle, however. Its interest is in the domination of its 'own' national market and the exploitation of its 'own' proletariat such that it can accumulate capital and even begin to oppress other nations itself. Consequently the proletariat must fiercely contend with the national bourgeoisie for leadership of the national government.

More specifically, Marxist Leninists demand the right of self-determination for oppressed nations (whether colonies, neo-colonies, or oppressed nations within a multi-national state) and equal rights for oppressed national minorities.

The right of self-determination is a political demand that means that nations have the right to determine their own political future free of outside interference, including the right to secede and form a separate state if they are held in bondage within a multi-national state. While the exercise of the right of self-determination always means the establishment of independence from imperialism for colonies and neo-colonies, such independence is only one of the possible forms of exercising this right by oppressed nations in a multi-national state. The other possible form is to choose to federate, on the basis of national equality, with the former oppressor nation into a single multi-national state that governs both nations. Which of these two paths should be chosen--whether secession (and independence) or federation--can only be determined in the concrete circumstances of the class struggle at the given time and place. In all cases, however, the criteria is according to which choice would best further the class cause of the international proletariat.

The right of self-determination is a democratic political demand. It does not speak directly to the question of which mode of production

would predominate in the liberated nation. In fact, the right of self-determination can be and has been won within the capitalist framework: e.g. Finland, Poland and other formerly Eastern European nations after WWI. On the other hand, insofar as the colonies and neo-colonies oppressed by imperialism go, this right can only be ultimately and decisively exercised through breaking out of the imperialist system and establishing socialism. Anything short of this, for those countries, will inevitably lead sooner or later to the reimposition of imperialist oppression, as in Egypt or Chile.

The right of self-determination applies only to oppressed nations, and not to national minorities, tribes, or any other social grouping. This is because only nations have the material basis to exercise self-determination. Nations have this basis due to their quality of having a distinct capitalist economic structure (meaning class structure) that has produced a common language and culture, and which occupies a distinct common territory. Lacking such an all-sided national life, no social grouping could possibly exist independently and instead would inevitably fall under the sway of some oppressor class or nation. Nation building is an objective process that cannot be accomplished simply because some people have the subjective desire to do so, though it is true that given the blessings (and massive economic, political, military aid) of world imperialism, the state of Israel has been produced and may eventually become a nation should it continue to exist for decades more.

Finally a word about 'regional autonomy'. Regional autonomy is not a solution for an oppressed nation though it often intersects with the solution to national minority oppression. It is not a form of exercising the right of self-determination, but instead a solution to a qualitatively different situation. It is a political solution for a part of a country (a "region") that is materially distinct from the rest of the territory and people governed by a state. This material distinctness must have an economic structure distinct from the one that dominates the nation overall. Autonomy is granted to a region and autonomous political bodies are constructed in order that special attention may be given to the economic, political and cultural development of a region with distinct features where such attention would not be given without regional autonomy. Autonomous regions are still subject to the central power of the state, thus autonomy is not equivalent to independence or even to federation.

Autonomous regions do not coincide with nations. The region may cover part of a nation or several different nationalities may live in the region. Sometimes autonomous regions are created for a pre-capitalist economic community inhabited by a single ethnic group. But autonomous regions are definitely not created in nations but rather to resolve the unique problems of development in a particular region of a country. The solution for oppressed nations is not regional autonomy, but the right of self-determination (either secession or federation).

D. National Minorities

If there has been unclarity within the movement over the question of nations, there has been outright confusion over 'national' minorities.

But like the concept of nation, the concept of national minority is scientifically based and corresponds to definite political strategies and demands. It is, however, true that this concept can be correctly applied to various types of historical groupings, as we will show.

A national minority is a nationality that lives within a nation other than the one that they are part of: for example, Haitians that live in the U.S. However, national minorities are not confined to those originating from distinct nations. The concept may also be used to embrace peoples originating from or living in self-sufficient pre-capitalist communities such as native tribes that have (or had) an all-sided historically developed, economic, cultural, territorial, and linguistic life. The term national minority does not apply to religious groups, racial groups or cultural groups that lack a fairly recent history of all-sided national or pre-national communal life. Neither does the concept of national minority simply refer to one's national origins, if those origins no longer shape the cultural character of those people: for example, a person of German ancestry is no longer a German if their psychological makeup and culture is rooted in U.S., not German, national life. Warning should also be made not to confuse legal status (citizenship) with nationality: there are many legal citizens of the U.S. who are still national minorities in this country, Puerto Ricans being the most outstanding example. Law does not always correspond to reality.

The historical development of national minorities is diverse. Some national minorities are formed through immigration from one nation to another. Even within this, however, different dynamics cause such immigration and/or determine the fate of the national minority once settled in the new nation. For example, most immigrants to the U.S. in the 19th century were European peasants (e.g. Irish and Italian) who were driven off their land by the accumulation of capital in their native nations. But in the twentieth century most immigrants coming to the U.S. originate from oppressed nations such as Puerto Rico and Mexico whose economic life is being distorted by imperialism, thus denying masses of working people from the possibility of earning a living at home. Still others such as the Vietnamese immigrate as political exiles.

Other national minorities are formed of indigenous peoples who are able (or forced) to maintain a distinct economic, political, cultural existence in the face of settler colonialism and the subsequent formation of a new nation on the stolen territory. Of course not all indigenous people remain national minorities: some are extinguished completely through genocide, others are amalgamated into a new nationality that is distinct both from that of the indigenous people and that of the settler (Mexico, for example), some become part of a new nationality based principally on the amalgamation of the diverse indigenous tribal or ethnic groupings themselves (e.g. South Africa or Angola), and still others are assimilated into the dominant nationality. In the U.S. native peoples have suffered a variety of historical fates: some tribes were completely wiped out, others completely assimilated into the U.S. nationality, and still others, perhaps the majority of those who survived, are national minorities within the U.S.

A third historical formation of national minorities has been through the annexation of nations or parts of nations by an aggressively expanding nation: e.g. the annexation of Texas, the Southwest and California from Mexico by the U.S. or the frequent annexation of Poland or parts of Poland by various European nations.

The historical destiny of national minorities within a larger nation is also diverse, depending on the concrete conditions. It is not even a foregone conclusion that a national minority is necessarily oppressed. For just as some nations exist in relations of equality (even if they are competitive) to one another, (e.g. France and Germany), some national minorities exist in relations of equality with national majority (e.g. Chinese in Southeast Asia). Not all national minorities are oppressed national minorities. This matter is determined by a number of variables including the political and economic strength of the national minority relative to the majority, the relative degree of political democracy in the nation, etc.

What is common to most national minorities, however, is that the material basis for their reproduction as distinct nationalities has been qualitatively undermined by capitalism. This is based on one of the laws of capitalist development identified by Lenin, the tendency of developing capitalism to amalgamate and assimilate peoples and nationalities. By amalgamation we mean the merging of distinct peoples into a new nationality: for example, the amalgamation of Norman, Britons, and other pre-capitalist groups into a new French nationality. By assimilation we mean the naturalization of one nationality or ethnic group by another: for example the assimilation of German or English immigrants into the U.S. nationality.

While capitalism leads to national oppression (and national liberation movements) and inter-imperialist rivalry in international relations, it produces amalgamation and assimilation internal to each given capitalist formation. The material basis for this tendency is the loss of ties of people to their origin nations and the need of capitalism for linguistically and culturally uniform national markets and labor forces. Even more, the laws of capitalist accumulation propel the capitalists to expand their system of production into every inch of territory under their control thus forcing all people into its cauldron. As diverse nationalities or peoples are severed from their origin nations and integrated into a common economic life, the material bases for their assimilation or amalgamation is set. While this process is usually fraught with difficulty, hardship, and sometimes oppression and exploitation because of the class contradictions of capitalism, it is nonetheless a necessary condition for full participation in the class struggle. The only way this law can be circumvented is by isolating national minorities from the mainstream of economic life such that they maintain some degree of distinctive economic life. Such a path condemns the national minority to economic hardship and political backwardness as it means their isolation from socialized forces of production, the nationwide class struggle and modern culture. In fact, such a distinct economic life becomes increasingly impossible as capitalism develops (it is basically impossible under imperialism). Immigrant communities within large urban centers can certainly provide some basis to slow down

the process of assimilation (and to provide some measure of political power for the immigrant group), but by no means do they constitute a distinct economic life. Perhaps some of the people in such communities work within them, but the overwhelming majority work outside the community and are fully integrated into the national economic life. Therefore the stand of Marxist Leninists toward amalgamation and assimilation is to unite with its progressive aspect while struggling against the national minority oppression that often accompanies the process. The communist task is not to oppose integration into the national life and the consequent national assimilation, but to fight against national privilege and for equal rights for all nationalities, as part of the task of uniting the multi-national proletariat and fighting for democracy.

What, then, is national minority oppression? It is the exploitation and oppression of people based on their distinct nationality. Such oppression and discrimination centrally involve language, culture, citizenship, and restrictions on immigration. This--not low wages, working conditions, etc. per se--is the particularity of national minority oppression, that which distinguishes it from other forms of oppression.

National minority oppression impacts all members of the minority, but unevenly due to the class distinctions within the oppressed nationality. On the other side, national privilege is extended to all members of the oppressor nationality, again unevenly due to the class distinctions among them.

The solution to the oppression of national minorities falls into two distinct categories. The first involves those national minorities, mainly Native and indigenous peoples in the Americas or tribes in Africa, that still have a material basis (land, economy, etc.) to reproduce themselves as distinct peoples, even though they are not nations. While each of these situations must be studied in their particularity, it is likely that most of them call for regional autonomy solutions. We spoke to the regional autonomy question earlier in this paper.

The other category involves those national minorities, mainly immigrants, that are integrated more or less completely into the economy of the nation that they now live within. Such national minority political struggles center on the impact of this oppression on the whole national minority community. The principal contradiction of national minority oppression is between the national majority bourgeoisie and the national minority working class. Impacted by the restriction of language, culture and immigration as well as lower wages, higher unemployment, occupational segregation, etc. this stratum of the working class objectively must struggle for democratic rights as well as against the capitalist exploitation of labor. Within the national minority community there is unity of all strata in the struggle against national oppression and for democratic rights. But there are contradictions between working class and the national minority petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie over private property and profit.

The struggle for democratic rights centers on the inequalities suffered by the national minorities and the privileges falling to the

national majority. Marxist-Leninists put forward the demand for equal rights between national minorities and the national majority as the key to this democratic struggle. Equality of language, culture, immigration as well as wages and working conditions are the concrete issues these struggles revolve around. (But in view of the particularity of the forging of a white national majority in the U.S. this struggle is not only for equal rights of nationally oppressed peoples, but also against racial oppression. This intersection of the political struggles against racial and national minority oppression further sharpens the objective basis for the transformation of the struggles of the nationally oppressed from democratic into revolutionary struggles. But this intersection also highlights the secondary contradictions between the national minority working class and the national majority working class: the struggle against racial and national oppression within the class as a whole is key to forging revolutionary politics in the U.S.) Mishandling this relationship leads to viewing the contradictions between national minority and national majority members of the working class as principal. For example, the demand to stop immigration of Mexican national into the U.S. as away to protect jobs of "us" workers. The enemy of national majority workers is not national minorities; rather it is the bourgeoisie and to push forwards the struggle against the bourgeoisie, struggle within the class against racial and national oppression is key.

The demand for the right to self-determination is often advanced as key to the struggle against national minority oppression. But Marxist-Leninists view this as incorrect. Only nations can exercise the right to self determination. In the struggle between oppressor and oppressed nations, the demand for the right to self determination and the end of colonial, neo-colonial and semi-colonial relations is key. National minorities from oppressed nations struggle for the right for these nations but national minorities do not have this right. This distinction is collapsed by theories of national minority oppression such as those of "nations within nations" and "internal colonies". These theories collapse the distinction between national minorities and nations and lead to collapsing the distinction between equal rights and the right to self-determination. A nation, from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, is a historically evolved community of people exhibiting the characteristics of common language, culture, territory and economy. An oppressed national minority is not a nation, but a grouping of people who originate from a nation who are oppressed within another nation by an oppressor national majority. The analogies to internal colonies and internal nations captures the oppression of language and culture which oppressed national minorities and oppressed nations share, but they liquidate the crucial materialist distinctions. Oppressed nations possess a national territory and economy as well as culture and language.

II. RACIAL OPPRESSION IN THE UNITED STATES

So far we have reconstructed the Marxist Leninist theory of the national question. But internal to the development of U.S. capitalism and the U.S. nation a distinct form of oppression remains to be analyzed, that of racism.

The task of developing a Marxist analysis of racism in the U.S. is a prerequisite to forge a revolutionary vanguard. Historically most communists have sidestepped this challenge by using the already developed national question framework to analyze minority oppression. While we think this is partially valid as regards certain national minorities in the U.S. (Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Asian and Native peoples), we believe that black oppression is not a national question. Moreover, the analysis of the oppression of national minorities in the U.S. is incomplete if analyzed solely as national questions, for they also suffer from racial oppression. This section of the paper addresses racial oppression (and therefore principally the oppression of black people), leaving the intersection of racial and national oppression to section three.

Most communists have held that black people became a nation in the "Black Belt South" in the late 19th century since the Comintern advanced that view in 1928. While the CPUSA dropped the Black Nation Thesis in 1959, almost all of the new communist groups resurrected it in the 1970's. This view also holds great currency within the anti-revisionist, anti-left opportunist trend, though usually with the qualification that the Black Nation dissolved in the 1950's and no longer exists. This point of view, articulated most forcefully by the Philadelphia Worker's Organizing Committee, considers black people in the U.S. today to be an oppressed national minority and the appropriate program to confront that oppression to be equal rights. The Communist Labor Party, on the other hand, thinks that a Negro colony in the Black Belt persists, for which they demand independence.

We will not attempt to make a full critique of the Black Nation Thesis in this paper. That debate will be addressed in the panel on black oppression. Instead, we will focus our attention on developing a beginning theoretical analysis of racism. (In the course of this essay, the terms racism, racial oppression, racial polarization and racist social relation will be used interchangeably.)

A. The Particularity of Racial Oppression.

The first problem in the analysis of any social question is to grasp its particularity, what distinguishes it from other similar forms of oppression. From there the theoretical challenge becomes grasping its interrelationship with other social questions, especially the development of capital-

ism and the class struggle. First we will tack the problem of the particularity of racism.

In our view, the particularity of racial oppression is the forcible and systematic separation of people on the basis of color or "race". This is highlighted by an analysis of racial groups in the U.S.

What is a racial group?

The necessary starting point for this discussion is the analysis of the racial categories that define racial groups--the categories of white and black (or non-white).

One of the most pernicious myths that justifies and perpetuates racism is that racial groups are inherent in nature and that black and white folks have been at each other's throats from time immemorial. The familiar argument goes that black and white folks are biologically different with whites, of course, inherently superior. Sometimes the choice of the superior group is reversed. What concerns us here, however, is that according to both versions, racism is seen as biologically determined. At best it can only be lessened.

But in fact racial groups in the U.S. are socially determined and have little to do with biology or the continent of one's ancestry. The myth of biological or genealogical races is exploded by the fact that, in the U.S. (and the U.S. alone) anyone is considered to be "black" who has the slightest, visibly perceptible hint of African origins, even if that person is 9/10 of European ancestry. And a person is considered "white" if no such "African traces" can be seen, even if in fact they are partially of African ancestry. In fact, the great majority of "black people" in the U.S. are part European, and studies suggest that some 20% of "white people" are part African.

There is obviously nothing biological or scientific about such racial classifications. In fact, racial categorization in the U.S. actually harbors a racist logic: one is white only if one is "racially pure", while one is black if one is "contaminated" by the slightest "tinge of black blood." The very categories used to define racial groups are racist! And, unlike in Latin America or South Africa, there is no middle ground between white and black.

Our point should be clear by now: racial categories in the U.S. are socially and historically determined, not biologically or genealogically determined. That is to say, racial categories and racial groups are the product of social and historical contradictions, not natural-biological imperatives that transcend history. Neither are they socially innocent categories, merely used to describe what people look like. Were that the case we would expect to have different categories for different shades of color, combinations of eye color and skin color, hair, etc. In fact this is pre-

cisely what exists in most of Latin America (which is itself an indication that racial relations are not as socially important there as in the U.S.). Racial categories in the U.S. are a product of social practice, not biological laws beyond our control.

B. Racism and Capitalism

Having established that racial groups in the U.S. are socially and historically determined, the question is posed: what are the social contradictions that gave rise to them? Put another way, what is the historical origin of racism in the U.S.? And what is the basis for the reproduction of racism in this country?

In our view, racial oppression is a specifically capitalist form of oppression, born of the bourgeoisie's historic efforts to forge and expand the exploitation of labor by capital "by any means necessary" in the New World. Racism is an oppressive social relation produced and reproduced within the U.S. capitalist mode of production. In essence, the development of capitalism in this country involved a racially differentiated process of proletarianization. The "colored" section of the laboring masses was reduced to a coerced labor reserve stripped of the bourgeois rights enjoyed by whites. The formation of this grouping, a racially oppressed section of the working people, opened up new possibilities for capitalist development that qualitatively affected the history and shape of capitalism in this country. Racism has not just widened the profit margin of capitalists, it is part of the foundation of the whole capitalist social order in the U.S.

The historical origins of racism serve as the most dramatic case in point. In the colonies the bourgeoisie faced the dilemma that there was no wage labor force that it could employ in the production of surplus-value. This was a result of the vast abundance of land relative to the population, such that most free persons were able to obtain land rather than work for others. To resolve this important problem, the emerging bourgeoisie first resorted to indentured servitude, both of Africans and Europeans, but this proved unreliable as servants retired to their own land upon fulfillment of their temporary servitude contract.

The planter bourgeoisie then resorted to slavery. However, given the anti-feudal, bourgeois emancipation of labor then underway in Europe, such unfree labor had to be confined to blacks. To ensure the largest and most stable slave labor force possible, the peculiarly chauvinistic logic that anyone with even a trace of perceptible African ancestry was "Negro" and therefore enslavable was developed and codified into law. This also ensured that black/white offspring could not escape slavery.

The capitalist mode of production in the North American colonies thus produced a racial polarization within it from its very origins. In the process intense national rivals such as the Irish, Scotch, German, English etc. and militant religious combatants such as Protestant and Catholic were eventually united into "whites", and the dazzling array of African tribal groups together with African/European offspring became "Negroes" within the same class structure and incipient national formation in the New World.

Without the development of the system of racial oppression there could have been no capitalist plantation system and the whole history and shape of this country would have been different. Capitalist development would have been qualitatively slower, as slave labor was responsible for almost all of the surplus-value produced in the colonies. It is likely that the U.S. capitalist system would never have exploded across the entire continent and its economy might well have resembled that of, say, Brazil or, at best, Australia. The impact of racism on U.S. capitalist development has been qualitative, not quantitative.

The intersection of racism and U.S. capitalist development took a different form and content in the post-slavery 19th century. In the century of the development of industrial capitalism and its transition to monopoly capitalism, the system of racism was again reproduced. On one hand the petty-bourgeois occupations--rural independent farmer, urban skilled trades--both north and south were whitened. This was also true of the more stable and well-paid sections of the working class proper. And on the other hand the vast masses of black people were held captive within the racism-based sharecropping system of cotton production. In this barely improved capacity of semi-proletarian, blacks played the crucial role of allowing the U.S. to dominate the world market in this valuable raw material. And, by keeping the South hard under the heels of the planters and the KKK, the industrial bourgeoisie was able to concentrate on forging an advanced and powerful capitalist expansion in the North, Midwest and West that made it a serious contender for top world producer.

In the twentieth century, the intersection of race and class is more complicated. Unlike previous centuries, there is no longer a distinct class status reserved more or less for blacks only. Instead, the racist social relation has produced a division within the working class proper (and within the petty-bourgeoisie). We can identify two key dynamics of the accumulation of capital under imperialism that the racial system impacted: the production of the reserve army of labor (unemployment) and the stratification of the working class. We will dwell principally on the former in this paper.

The qualitative significance of the reserve army of labor for capitalist accumulation cannot be underestimated.

As Marx said,

"The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army... The relative mass of the industrial reserve army increases therefore with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus-population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working-class, and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation." (emphasis in the original, Capital, Vol. 1, p. 644.)

In the U.S., this "absolute general law of capitalist accumulation" has been racialized, and thereby both facilitated and masked. The existence of the racist social relation made it "natural" that black people would be "chosen" to play this role in disproportionate numbers due to their "natural inferiority and laziness". Unemployment is seen as a biological affliction of black people, not an inherent general law of capitalism. Only those white folks who are not up to normal white standards might fall into this "black condition", or so the bourgeoisie tells us.

The racial polarization even invades the category of the unemployed. Marx distinguished three categories of the reserve army of labor--the floating, the latent, and the stagnant. The floating unemployed are those temporarily thrown out of work due to fluctuations in the "centres of modern industry". The latent unemployed consist principally of a surplus agricultural population who are not formally unemployed, but whose labor is unnecessary to maintain production in the countryside. This latent unemployment becomes apparent when the demand for labor in the cities draws them out. "The agricultural labourer is therefore reduced to the minimum of wages, and always stands with one foot already in the swamp of pauperism." (Capital, p. 642.) It takes little genius to see that this was precisely the position of the mass of black people until the great waves of migration to the north and to the cities starting in World War I and the break-up of the southern plantation system in the 1950's.

"The third category of the relative surplus-population, the stagnant, forms a part of the active labour army, but with extremely irregular employment. Hence it furnishes to capital an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour-power. Its conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working class; this makes it at once the

broad basis of special branches of capitalist exploitation. It is characterized by maximum of working-time, and minimum of wages." (Capital, p. 643.)

A more apt description of the life of racial minorities would be hard to find. While by no means is this economic depravity confined only to minorities, racism has condemned a highly disproportionate number of black people to this "stagnant" status. The dynamic of "last hired and first fired" is at the center of the black condition.

Undoubtedly the vast expansion of the reserve army of labor is one of the elements of stratification of the working class in advanced capitalism. This stratification also includes imperialist bribery, a subject that merits in-depth theoretical work, together with the associated question of the "aristocracy of labor". At any rate, this stratification has a material basis in imperialism and the development of technology and "scientific management" as well as a political basis in the bourgeoisie's increasingly urgent need to divide a working class that is the overwhelming majority of the population. This stratification has occurred in all imperialist countries, latching onto whatever national particularities might facilitate it. In the U.S., it comes as no surprise that the stratification has been highly color-conscious. Minority workers are heavily concentrated in unstable, low paying, dangerous jobs. They are crowded into urban ghettos, where the conditions of reproduction of their labor power are even more miserable than the conditions of work. In the best of economic times minority people suffer from conditions equivalent to the situation of the entire working class during the Great Depression.

C. Blacks Are a Racially Oppressed People

So far we have dwelt on the view that black people are a qualitatively distinct section of the laboring masses because they suffer from racial oppression. But blacks are also a people--not a nation, but a distinct, racially oppressed people. This peoplehood is a product of the distinct social position and history of black people in this country.

All black people in the U.S. have faced racial oppression. Not just slaves, but also the freemen and freewomen. Not just the sharecroppers, but also other tenants and farmers. Not just the workers, but also the petty-bourgeoisie, and even the few handfuls of black capitalists. Certainly racial oppression impacts different classes among black people differently. But racial oppression impacts all black people, regardless of class. This commonality of racial oppression is one of the bases for their formation into a people.

Black people have not always been a distinct people. Originally they were a diverse set of African ethnic and tribal

groups. It was their integration into the U.S. economy as a racially oppressed labor force that forged them into a people.

Concretely it seems that black peoplehood emerged sometime in the early 19th century. Under slavery black people were distinctive not only in suffering from racial oppression, but also because they occupied a unique class position--as slaves--shared by no one else.

This material basis for peoplehood has been strengthened all the more by the virulent racist conception of the U.S. nationality, a virulence which corresponds to the centrality of slavery in the U.S. national formation. While black people objectively were central to the capitalist development which produced the U.S. nation, they have been subjectively excluded from the concept of "American". "American" was and still is practically synonymous with, or limited to, "white". Blacks have been reduced to "strangers in their own homeland."

Finally, the lack of anti-racist consciousness on the part of the white laboring masses has politically, culturally and psychologically intensified the need for solidarity and sense of distinctiveness among black people.

Blacks have never been a nation in that they have never had a distinct capitalist economy, territory, etc. But they are a people whose common conditions of life in a racist system have produced a cultural distinctness and political/psychological solidarity that is a material force in the class struggle.

D. The White Racial Group

The basic contradiction of racism is between the white bourgeoisie and racial minorities. Consequently, the racial contradiction is part of the broader contradiction between the bourgeoisie and all other classes, especially the proletariat, within the U.S. capitalist mode of production.

But secondarily there is also a contradiction between the white racial group and the black racial group (actually, all non-whites). Within the racist system, there is a "white interest" in maintaining minorities at the bottom of the heap in order to improve the opportunities available to whites. That this is a reality is reflected in the economic and social gap between whites and blacks.

However, the fact that there is a white community of interest does not mean that all white people share in it equally, nor is it equivalent to the class interests of all the individuals who happen to be white. In fact, the white racial interest runs directly counter to the class interests of those white people who are part of the working class. Racial interest and class interest completely coincide only for the white bourgeoisie.

The situation of white workers needs a closer look. White workers, like all white people, are extended certain racial privileges. Certain jobs, mainly high-paying and skilled, are virtually reserved for whites only. White workers are also given an edge due to racial discrimination in hiring, promotions, and layoffs. Their housing, educational and health opportunities are considerably better than those of blacks. White workers, as a distinct interest group within the working class, benefit from racism and are privileged.

Among white workers, however, there is a definite gradation of the extension and realization of racial privilege. There is a significant and powerful strata of stable, skilled and well-paid folks whose position is highly dependent on racism. On the other hand, it is key that the majority of U.S. white workers, unlike their counterparts in South Africa, materially benefit relatively little from racism. Even those who benefit more substantially are still unable to escape the working class. Racial benefits serve principally to make white workers slightly better-off wage slaves.

By contrast, the working class as a class has no interest in racism. For racism only means increased exploitation and oppression of the whole class, and it produces a division within the class that undermines its fighting capacity. The class interests of white workers, as opposed to their racial interests or their interests as a special section of workers, are therefore counter to racism.

This brings us to the heart of the matter. The white racial group as a special interest group is a reactionary conception that obscures the class struggle and serves to unite white people across class lines under the leadership of the white bourgeoisie. The class rule of the bourgeoisie hinges critically on this "white united front" and has since the Founding Fathers based their class rule on racial slavery.

Just as racism is a cornerstone of the U.S. capitalist economy, it is strategic to the political rule of the bourgeoisie. A sophisticated racist political apparatus has been constructed that ensures the political control, isolation and exploitation of racial minorities and that works to construct unity among white people. Until the 1960's this racist political system was codified in law. It works equally well informally.

In summation, there is a white racial interest opposed to that of blacks and other minorities and which is not the same as the class interests of whites. The political rule of the bourgeoisie depends on whites putting their racial interests above their class interest. The interest of minorities and the multi-racial working class is in white workers taking up their class interests and rejecting this white racial interest. The objective class basis for this

to take place has existed since the majority of blacks and whites became part of the working class (WWII) although this has been obscured by the long wave of U.S. prosperity after WWI. But that prosperity has ended. Consequently, whether, or more accurately, to what degree this is accomplished will largely be determined by the capacity of communists to take up this task.

E. The Struggle Against Racism

The principal content of the day-to-day struggle against racism is the struggle against racial inequality. Concretely this means the struggle against all forms of racist discrimination and racial privilege in the economic, social and political realms. This is the heart and soul of the reform struggle, and it is the communists' task to give revolutionary leadership to this fight.

However, the struggle for equality and democratic rights is a reform struggle. This is because inequality and denial of democratic rights are only aspects of racism, not the essence of it. Thus while this struggle is crucial to making revolution in the U.S., it is not a real solution to racial oppression.

The essence of racial oppression is the formation of a specially oppressed group of laboring people on the basis of "race" or color that is politically and economically vulnerable to do special duty for capitalism. The denial of democratic rights is one aspect of this special oppression, and inequality is a manifestation of it. But its essence, its material basis, is the aggressively expansive and exploitative character of capital itself. Until the socio-economic basis for the system of racial oppression is eliminated, racism will only intensify. The struggle against racism requires the elimination of the capitalist system which produced it, nourishes it, and replenishes it. The struggle against racism is directly part of the struggle for socialism, it is a particularly sharp edge in the class struggle against capital. As racism is a pillar of U.S. capitalism and bourgeois rule, the struggle against it necessarily goes to the heart of the essential nature of U.S. society.

An assessment of forces explains this from a different angle. The principal contradiction of racism is between the white bourgeoisie and racial minorities. The resolution of that contradiction therefore requires the elimination of the white bourgeoisie as it is the main enemy in the struggle against racism.

The secondary contradiction of racism is between the white racial group and the black (or non-white) racial group. The extension of racial privilege to white people is based on its opposite, racial oppression of minorities.

The unity of the white racial group behind the bourgeoisie is the critical support for racism and bourgeois rule in the U.S. generally. That unity and those priveleges must therefore be smashed. Specifically, this means that white workers must reject this white racial group interest and instead take the stand of the multi-racial working class and the oppressed racial group against racist exploitation.

In essence, the white racial group must be eliminated as a cohesive social force. Concretely, this means winning white workers to the struggle against racism, neutralizing the white petty-bourgeoisie, and crushing the white bourgeoisie.

For this struggle to be successful, minorities must take up the struggle against racism as part of the working class struggle against capital. Not all minorities have the material basis to do so. The miniscule minority bourgeoisie may unite with the struggle against inequality and the denial of democratic rights because they are obstacles to their class advancement. But their class interests stand fully in favor of capitalist private property, and even with racism in that they, too, can unite with the usefulness of a specially exploitable workforce. In addition, certain black bourgeois depend on a racially distinct market for their existence. They are not allies in the revolutionary struggle against racism.

The black petty-bourgeoisie is in a contradictory position. Their class interest is vacillatory, and many of them depend on the continuation of racism to maintain their petty-bourgeois status as merchants, servicers, ministers, or professionals for the oppressed black community. Yet, racial oppression renders them the most vulnerable section of the petty-bourgeoisie. Their contradiction with the white bourgeoisie as part of a racially oppressed people makes them important allies in the struggle against inequality and is likely to impel many of them to stand with black workers to carry the struggle against racism through to the end.

Black workers are objectively in the best position to grasp the class basis of racial oppression and to lead the struggle against it. As is the case with the white bourgeoisie, the class and racial interests of black workers coincide, but from the other end of the stick. It is a prerequisite to progress in the revolutionary struggle to defeat racism that black workers grasp their historic role of driving this struggle forward and placing it on a solid class foundation.

Like everything else in the U.S., the class struggle has been segmented along racial lines. As a result, there is a distinct black politics in this country centered in the black community that is a crucial arena of class struggle and especially the struggle against racism in the U.S. Historically

the communist movement has either failed to identify this arena or downplayed its significance (with the possible exception of certain parts of the 1930's). The analysis of the nature and dynamics of the black community, and of the minority communities generally, then, remains an outstanding theoretical question before our movement. This analysis will be crucial to deepen the strategy and tactics of the struggle against racism.

F. The Distinction Between National and Racial Oppression

We are now in a position to distinguish racial from national oppression. First we will compare racial groups to national groups. Then we will discuss how each has a different relationship to capitalism. And finally we will take up the distinct political strategies required to eliminate each.

A racial group is different than either a nation or a national minority. A racial group is identified on the basis of skin color while a nation is the unity of class formation and struggle under capitalism that has its own economy, culture, language and territory. A racial group need have none of these attributes.

National minorities are identified on the basis of their national origins, language and culture. A racial group is not distinguished by any of these features.

In fact, a racial group may consist of people from several different nationalities or nations. Among black people there are people of Jamaican, Puerto Rican, Latin American and African as well as U.S. origins. Similarly, a nation or nationality may consist of people from several different racial groups. The U.S. nationality includes blacks and whites, as well as other people of color of Asian and Latin American ancestry. The South African nationality includes whites, blacks, Asians and "coloureds". Almost all of the Latin American nations are racially diverse.

The main point, however, is that racial and national groups are identified by qualitatively different criteria that do not even overlap.

Another difference between national and racial groups is that racial groups always exist in antagonism with one another, while national groups do not. As we showed above, the very categories that determine racial groups harbor the chauvinistic logic of "pure white" versus "contaminated black" which reflects the contradiction between the white and black racial groups. In the U.S. to be "white" also means "not black" and vice versa. Racial groups do not exist in isolation from one

another, but only as interconnected poles of the oppressive social relation of racism. This is similar to classes, where for example, there can be no bourgeoisie without the proletariat or landlords without peasants.

This is not true of nations or national minorities. Many nations (e.g. France and Germany of United States and Canada) and national minorities (e.g. the Chinese in the Philippines) do not oppress one another but rather have relations of equality. In fact, it is possible for nations to develop various types of relations with one another: they can be completely ignorant of each other's existence, there can be a relationship of equality, a relationship of oppression, or a relationship of dependence that is not necessarily oppressive. But there can be only one kind of relationship between racial groups, that of oppression.

Racial and national oppression are related to capitalism in different ways. Both racial and national oppression are inherently tied to the capitalist era. But the similarity ends there.

The source of the oppression of one nation by another consists in the subjugation of one economy by another; the oppression is located in the relation between distinct class structures. It is otherwise with racial oppression. Racial oppression occurs within a single capitalist class structure; it is a polarization within capitalist society, not between two different ones.

National minority oppression is a form of oppression within a single capitalist society. But this must be qualified. The existence of the national minority is dependent upon the existence of an origin nation (or a distinct indigenous economic formation). This distinct origin nation is the basis of their existence as a national minority when they immigrate. Unlike racial groups, national minorities are not produced within a single capitalist society. More importantly, capitalism tends to assimilate, to denationalize national minorities as we analyzed above. Consequently national minorities tend to disappear after a couple of generations in the U.S. unless, of course, there is continued immigration from the origin nation. (The exception to this is the indigenous peoples which have their own land base, economy, etc. as a material basis to reproduce themselves rather than be assimilated. However, such peoples are also not a product of the internal development of capitalism. And their oppression, like that of nations, is located in the relation of an oppressor capitalist nation to their distinct tribal community; it does not occur within a single capitalist society.)

It is quite the opposite with racial oppression. Racial oppression is produced and reproduced within U.S. capitalist

society. Racial groups are not assimiated. To the contrary, they are viciously reproduced as outcast, stigmatized groups. This is why, for example, people of Japanese or Mexican origins whose families have long since ceased to speak their origin language and who know life only in the U.S. continue to be oppressed. Even though they may be nationally assimilated, they are racially oppressed and distinct. Capitalism continually reproduces and even intensifies racially oppressed groups, whereas it dissolves national minorities.

The political strategy to defeat racial oppression is also different from the one required to end national oppression. The liberation of an oppressed nation from an oppressor nation means winning the right of self-determination and either becoming an independent nation or an equal partner within a federated multi-national state. Neither of these solutions is correct for racial oppression. Racially oppressed people make up only a portion of the class structure of the U.S. and therefore have no basis either to win or to exercise the right of self-determination. In fact, such demands are harmful in the struggle against racism. On the one hand such demands would place the burden of the struggle against racism solely upon black people with others reduced to supporting them and working for revolution in their "own" country (much as we do in relation to national liberation struggles in other parts of the world). On the other hand, these demands strengthen narrow nationalism and utopian illusions among black people.

The solution to national minority oppression is equal rights. As noted above, equal rights is an important reform demand in the struggle against racism, but it does not speak to the essence of the matter. Therefore it is no solution to racial oppression. The overthrow of capitalism, not equality of language and culture or the right of self-determination, is the strategic program of the struggle against racism.