

Panel on the Nature of Black Oppression

Presentation #2 - Critique of the Black Nation Thesis (BNT)

I Critique of the Black Nation Thesis

- A. Distortion of the category nation through the imposition of a racial criteria on nationality.
- B. Inability of BNT to account for the source or dynamic of the oppression of Blacks prior to the development of the nation or of non-Black Belt Blacks at any historical juncture.
- C. Critique of the BNT view of U.S. history
 - 1. Rests on idealist conception of the bourgeois democratic revolution. The failure to extend bourgeois-democratic rights to Blacks after the Civil War is not synonymous with their exclusion from the national and class formation of the U.S.
 - 2. Notion that the bourgeoisie betrayed its class interests in neglecting to break up the plantations and extend bourgeois democratic rights to the freedmen rests on profound illusions about the nature of the bourgeoisie. Implies that after the Civil War the interests of the bourgeoisie were against racism.
 - 3. Analysis of the Civil War incorrectly identifies it as a struggle between pre-capitalist planters and the northern bourgeoisie rather than as a struggle between two sectors (agricultural and industrial) of the bourgeoisie of one nation which resulted in the hegemony of the industrial sector.
- D. Critique of the conception of the Black Belt as the common territory of the Black nation
 - 1. Incorrect method of determining national territory through identification of areas of Black majority population.
- E. Critique of the line that a common economy developed among Blacks based on the plantation system
 - 1. Confusion of common conditions of existence with common economic life.
 - 2. Class differentiation of Blacks analyzed in the nationhood line is part of the overall class formation of the U.S., not that of a separate Black nation.
 - 3. Racial criteria of nationality obscures the central aspect of class polarization based on the plantation system -- that between agricultural capitalists and first slaves, later sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

4. Semi-slave/semi-feudal plantation system is mistaken analysis of relations of production in post-Civil War South. Emphasizes secondary features such as forms of labor and obscures central question of property relations and production of surplus-value as the driving force of cotton production.
5. The confusion of a regional economy for that of the nation. Period identified as period of Black nation's formation was actually time when the Black Belt and the South generally were becoming more thoroughly integrated in U.S. national economy.

F. The political program of the Black Nation Thesis

1. The struggle for science on the question of the right of nations to self-determination. Popular vs. M-L usage. Material basis for asserting the right of nations to self-determination and not that of other forms of social organization.
2. Line misdirects the communist movement on the question of the relationship between the anti-racist movement and the struggle for socialism. Retards the struggle for the unification of the U.S. proletariat by posing fundamentally different tasks based on race.
3. Line of equal rights for Blacks in the North is reformist.
4. Lack of basis for the line in material reality leads to sharp swings both left and right in implementation.