

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

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More on the path for the black liberation struggle:

The History of the CPUSA and the CI on the Right to Self-Determination

The last issue of *The Workers' Advocate Supplement* was devoted to an important theoretical question concerning the struggle of the black people against the rabid racist oppression by the American capitalist ruling class. This question is whether the black people constitute not just a 'oppressed nationality, but a nation with a definite territory in the black belt South whose right to self-determination (right to decide on secession) should be recognized.

The articles and statistics published in *The Supplement* showed that such a nation existed at one time, but that by the 1960's, if not earlier, it had been dispersed. This dispersal, painful to the extreme due to the racist oppression which accompanied it, nevertheless resulted in strengthening the struggle of the black people and was one of the factors responsible for the power and sweep of the great upsurge of the black people's movement of the 1960's. Far from eliminating the importance of the black people's movement, this dispersal helped increase the power and sweep of the black people's struggle and its role in the revolutionary movement as a whole.

The analysis that a black nation existed in the black belt South, where we refer not just to a nation in the sense of a people, but a nation with a definite territory where the black people were a majority of the population, was put forward by the Communist International in 1928 and upheld by the Communist Party of the USA which at that time was the revolutionary party of the American proletariat.

The CI showed that the brutal oppression of the black people was national oppression, similar to the brutalities that have descended on the backs of other oppressed nations and national minorities elsewhere around the world. It used this to show the importance of the struggle of the black people

to the revolution in the U.S., and it also upheld the right to self-determination of the territory of the black nation, i.e., the right of the people of that territory to decide themselves on whether they wished to form a separate country or continue to live in the U.S. The CI's stand was upheld by the CPUSA, which stepped up its work for black liberation with dramatic success.

But there have been new developments in the half-century since then. The black people have been mainly dispersed from the black belt South to the urban areas of the North or to cities in the South but outside the black belt. The area of black majority in the South has shrunk to scattered, disconnected pockets containing a tiny fraction of the black people in the U.S., hardly 4% if that. The black people now constitute a bitterly oppressed nationality, but not a nation in the strict sense of a nation based on a territory.

The CPUSA Has Become a Corrupt Party Defending the Liberal Bourgeoisie

As well, the CPUSA is now neither a revolutionary party nor a proletarian party. It is a sold-out reformist party, cringing on the outskirts of the Democratic Party, calling on the masses to support the liberal bourgeoisie and also serving as apologists for the Soviet revisionists. As well, it no longer subscribes to the concept of the existence of the black nation in the South. However, it didn't abandon this theory just because the black people had become dispersed, but because the CPUSA no longer wanted to say anything that might offend the reformists or the liberals. Thus the CPUSA denounced this analysis as always wrong.

With the utter degeneration of the CPUSA, it became crucial to rebuild a genuine communist party to replace the hollow, burned-out shell that the

CPUSA had become. The working class needs a revolutionary, Leninist party, not a corrupt revisionist party living on hand-outs from the bourgeoisie.

The Neo-Revisionists and National Fetishism

With the mass upsurge of the 1960's, many activists came forward, threw themselves into the movement, summed up their experience, and began turning to Marxism-Leninism. The tasks of fighting revisionism and building a new communist party began to come to the fore.

But there were many obstacles the new wave of activists faced. One of these obstacles was the rise of the neo-revisionist trend of the 1960's and 1970's. This trend claimed to be independent of the revisionist CPUSA, but it denigrated the important task of party-building, was unable to adopt stable revolutionary positions, and in fact borrowed heavily from the legacy of the CPUSA's liberal-labor politics (i.e. liberal bourgeois politics put forward in the name of the working class and, generally, including a soft attitude towards the labor bureaucrats). This is the trend that gave rise to the social-chauvinists (who gave up the struggle for revolution while joining the American bourgeoisie in directing the "main blow" at the Russian bourgeoisie) and "three worlders" of the mid- and latter- 1970's and the liquidators of today.

A number of these neo-revisionist circles took up the stand that a black nation existed in the black belt South despite the dramatic dispersal of the black population. They did this in order to uphold national fetishism — the abandonment of the Lenin-

ist teachings on revolutionary struggle under the cover of exaggerated rhetoric about the right to self-determination of the oppressed nationalities in the U.S. This national fetishism did not help the black people's struggle (or that of the other nationalities). How could upholding the right to secession of a territory where the black people no longer constituted a majority be of any use? How could abandoning the Leninist teachings on revolution and class struggle be of any help in giving correct guidance to the black activists moving towards communism? And indeed the national fetishism was used not to promote the struggle of the black people, but to justify allying with the black bourgeoisie in particular and with the reformists in general.

The advocates of national fetishism promoted petty-bourgeois nationalism in the movement of the oppressed nationalities, denigrated the role of the revolutionary class struggle, and in general denied the Leninist principles. They tried to make this revolutionary by saying that they were really upholding the lessons of the CI and the CPUSA in its revolutionary period, for didn't the CI and the CPUSA say that a black nation existed in the black belt South and call for upholding its right to self-determination? They presented defense of the reformism of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nationalities as defense of the oppressed nationalities. And they presented denigration of the class struggle and the socialist revolution as upholding the Leninist teachings on the national liberation movement.

In this way the neo-revisionists used national fetishism to make their opportunism look revolutionary and "communist". They distorted the Leninist teachings on self-determination as a cover for their opportunism, and they accused all those in the Marxist-Leninist movement who stood against them of

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being chauvinists and racists who opposed the struggle of the black people.

Thus at the same time as they denounced the revolutionary Marxist-Leninists as racists, they defended the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nationalities and various reformists as fighters against imperialism. In their view, to say that a nation was oppressed meant that the bourgeoisie of that nation was automatically progressive and should be supported. This naturally fit in well with three worldism, which justified the worst oppressors and butchers in the "third world" as allegedly fighters against imperialism and lost sight of the task of supporting the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants. And indeed national fetishism on the black national question was closely related to and part of the problem of three worldism and Maoism, although it spread more widely than just the Maoist circles.

Learn from the History of the Communist Movement!

The attempt of the neo-revisionists to justify their opportunism in the name of the CI and the revolutionary period of the CPUSA adds interest to the question of the history of the CPUSA and the CI on the black national question. But this question is also important in its own right, for the work of the CPUSA in its revolutionary days marked a whole new stage both in the black people's movement and in the relationship between the black people's movement and the general revolutionary movement. Never before had the revolutionary working class movement thrown itself with such force and consciousness into the struggle for the liberation of the black people. And this history also shows the importance of the CI in remolding the communist groups around the world into communist parties and teaching them the Lenin-

ist principles of party-building and revolution.

Below we carry the article promised in the last issue of **The Supplement** on the history of the stand of the CI and CPUSA on the black national question. This article is based on a speech given at the Second National Conference of the MLP in fall, 1984. It has been revised and supplemented in line with further research and inner-party discussion and for the purpose of making it more easily understandable by readers not familiar with the subject. <>

**ON THE HISTORY
OF THE CPUSA AND THE CI
ON THE BLACK NATIONAL QUESTION
IN THE U.S.**

Based on a speech at the Second National Conference of the MLP, USA

Comrades,

In this speech I shall go into some of the history of the Communist Party of the USA and the Communist International on the black national question. I will particularly deal with the 1928 and 1930 resolutions of the CI, their valuable role in pushing forward the work of the CPUSA, and also certain weaknesses that appear in the 1930 resolution. As well, I shall trace the historical roots of the problem of the national fetishism that later became so prominent with the neo-revisionists of the late 1960's and 1970's and the liquidators of today.

The First Years of the CPUSA

From its earliest days the CPUSA stood head and shoulders above anything else in the left on the question of struggle against the oppression of the

**On the history of the CPUSA and the CI
on the black national question in the U.S.**

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black masses. At a time when the AFL unions organized on a strict Jim Crow basis and mainly excluded blacks altogether, and in face of the racist traditions of the right and center leaders that had dominated the Socialist Party, the CPUSA stood up from the start to demand equality for blacks and organized the party and the trade unions on a unitary basis. In the early days of the Party, the communists were among the defenders of the black communities against the post-World War I pogroms that were organized against the black people and also to smash the post-war strike wave of the workers.

But the CPUSA had difficulty going very far beyond the stand of the left-wing of the Socialist Party out of which it had been formed. For a number of years the CPUSA continued to be plagued by vestiges of social-democratic thinking on the black people's movement. It seems that the Party, while it worked hard to unite the black and white workers in unitary organizations, did not grasp the revolutionary significance of the struggle against the oppression of the black people, but tended to regard this struggle as simply a complicating factor to the class struggle. The Party had a tendency to reduce the struggle against the oppression of the black people to solely one of its crucial fronts, namely, organizing the black workers into united trade unions. And it seemed that the Party in its early years regarded the struggle against racist oppression as mainly for only one part of the Party. Thus, while the CPUSA did develop a special paper to agitate among the black people and certain special organizations, on the whole the central press appears to have been rather passive on the black people's struggle.

In this situation, the discussions around the 6th Congress of the CI in 1928 and the CI resolutions of 1928 and 1930 played a major role in the Party's work on this front. They eliminated the influence of the view, carried over from the left wing of the Socialist Party, that regarded the struggle of the black people as a secondary issue. These resolu-

tions would orient the CPUSA to regard the liberation struggle of the black masses as a central question of the revolutionary movement, to take it up as a matter for the entire party, and to dramatically step up its work in the black people's movement, which it did with great success.

Let's examine this early history, prior to the CI resolutions of 1928 and 1930, in more detail.

The Emergence of the CPUSA

The Socialist Party, prior to 1919, contained both reformist and revolutionary wings. World War I brought the struggle inside the Socialist Party to the boiling point, and the year after the war ended, in 1919, the Socialist Party split when the reformist leaders nullified the inner-party elections which the left wing had just won and expelled the left wing en masse. The Communist Party then emerged out of the left wing of the Socialist Party. (Until the unity congress in 1921 there were actually two separate communist parties formed out of the left wing of the SP, these two parties originally being called the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party of America.)

The newly-founded Communist Party rallied to its side the advanced elements from the working class movement and also the revolutionary, class-conscious elements of the black people's movement. This, in part, accounts for the fact that the CP's stand toward the black people's movement was, even in its early years, far more advanced than that of any other political force of that time. In this regard, particular note can be taken of many militants of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and of the leaders of the Trade Union Education League (TUEL) and of the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) joining the CP in the early 1920's.

The IWW — The Industrial Workers of the World

The IWW was a militant working class organization founded in 1905 in opposition to the sold-out, reactionary AFL trade union leadership. It sought to build fighting trade unions on an industrial basis (one union for an entire industry) and to organize all workers, not just skilled and better-situated workers. It was supported by the left wing of the SP and was a center for activists opposed to capitalism, the passivity of the SP leadership, and the class collaboration of the AFL. It waged many hard struggles against savage repression by the capitalists.

The IWW organized black workers on the basis of equality, into integrated trade unions; in particular, it succeeded in organizing many black dock workers in Philadelphia and waged hard struggles in western Louisiana and eastern Texas in the lumber woods, when it united several thousands of black workers with white workers. The IWW was also known for its defense of Asian and Mexican workers.

It became attached to anarcho-syndicalist theo-

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Maps and figures on the dispersal of the black people from the black belt South

In the October 15th issue of

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ries. For example, it organized dual unions as a matter of principle, and it opposed all political action as a reaction to the opportunism of the reformist leaders of the Socialist Party. It worshipped spontaneity and had a hard time building durable organization. But it was a genuine proletarian organization which tapped a spirit of revolt among the masses.

Many militants and organizers for the IWW, and some leaders, joined the CPUSA. The majority of the other leaders couldn't transcend the anarcho-syndicalist theories and became rabidly anti-communist. Although the IWW formally lingered on for decades, it dwindled rapidly in the first half of the 1920's and soon became nothing but an empty shell, an empty anarcho-syndicalist sect.

The Trade Union Education League

Another group of revolutionary trade unionists centered on a succession of organizations, first the Syndicalist League of North America, and then the International Trade Union Education League (ITUEL) and later the TUEL. Some of these militants (for example, Foster and Johnstone) had been in the IWW, but rejected dual unionism in favor of "bring-from-within" the conservative unions such as the AFL.

These activists had many years experience in working class organizing, in the course of which they waged a fight against the racial segregation of the unions and for organizing the black and white workers together in unitary unions. The most important example of this work was the organizing drive among the packing house workers in Chicago during 1917 and 1918.

William Z. Foster and Jack W. Johnstone led this drive in which the Chicago Stockyards Labor Council organized 200,000 workers including 20,000 black workers. This was the largest number of black workers organized in one union up to that time.

This union opposed the pogrom organized against the black people in Chicago in 1919. In the tense atmosphere before the racist attacks began, the union organized a demonstration of black and white workers to show solidarity. After racist attacks were launched, the black people waged a most vigorous resistance struggle that lasted a week. During this period the union held a meeting of some 30,000 white workers which protested the racist attacks, called for solidarity of black and white workers, and demanded the withdrawal of the armed forces which were murdering the black people.

The leaders of this union later formed the TUEL which continued the traditions of this struggle.

The African Blood Brotherhood

The African Blood Brotherhood was also important. At the end of the 1910's, the black people's movement grew by leaps and bounds, especially in the North, and a series of organizations emerged. One of most important of the organizations that took a

militant stand in the black people's struggle was centered on the newspaper "The Messenger", and this organization embraced the main section of black leaders associated with the SP. It split over the question of what stand to take towards World War I. Its left wing, which opposed the war, began putting out "The Crusader" and eventually formed the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB).

This group stood for revolutionary struggle against racial discrimination and repression. Eventually it associated itself with the Bolsheviks. (This meant that the majority of the black leaders in the SP had come over to communism — and they eventually joined the CPUSA.) Its organization spread from New York to Baltimore, Chicago, Tulsa, Detroit, and Omaha, and the paper reached a circulation of 37,000. It was especially known for the struggle it led against the 1919 pogrom in Tulsa. It also worked in the Garvey movement, forming its left wing.

After these big struggles, the black people's movement ebbed for much of the 1920's, as did the workers' movement. Despite this, and despite the savage repression against the movement activists and against the CP especially, the CP was able to win over the main leaders from both the TUEL and the ABB and many members and leaders of the IWW. Both the TUEL and the ABB were continued as organizations carrying out important agitation and struggle under the leadership of the CP.

Backward Features of the Left Wing of the Socialist Party

Thus the CP from early on had a militant tradition in support of the black people's struggle. But the CP in the 20's still carried with it certain backward features inherited from the left wing of the Socialist Party. Throughout the 20's, the CP, with the assistance of the CI, step by step sought to throw off these social-democratic influences and build a Leninist party.

The revolutionary wing of the Socialist Party had denounced the racism of the reformist SP leaders: in particular, it opposed the flagrant racist resolutions of the reformist leaders against the Asian immigrants and it sought to organize black workers into united trade unions instead of following the usual practice in the SP of Jim Crow. But the left-wing did not have much to say about the black people's movement in general, and its key documents often failed to mention the black people at all. It certainly didn't understand the role of the struggle against racism and the black people's movement in the revolutionary movement. Instead it accepted the opportunist stand of the SP theoreticians that there was no need for a particular front of struggle against the oppression of the black people.

Thus the SP left wing accepted the general theoretical framework of the SP on this question. The SP did, at its founding congress in 1901, pass a resolution expressing a certain sympathy for the

black people and inviting them to membership. But, although the SP made a big point of its immediate demands, it had no particular demands in favor of the black people and it didn't call for any particular struggles against racist oppression.

The basic theory of the SP was set forward in 1903 by Eugene V. Debs, one of the most popular spokesman of the SP and one with a leftist reputation. (He was the most left of the leaders that later stayed with the SP after it expelled the left wing, and he refused to take part in the subsequent redbaiting.) He wrote in the **International Socialist Review** in Nov. 1903 that:

"For capitalism the negro question is a grave one and will grow more threatening as the contradictions and complications of capitalist society multiply, but this need not worry us. Let them settle the negro question in their way, if they can. We have nothing to do with it, for it is their fight. We have simply to open the eyes of as many negroes as we can and do battle for emancipation from wage slavery, and when the working class have triumphed in the class struggle and stand forth economic as well as political free men, the race problem will disappear." (Cited in Foster's **The Negro People in American History**, pp. 402-3)

And he wrote:

"We have nothing special to offer the Negro and we cannot make separate appeals to all the races. The Socialist party is the Party of the whole working class regardless of color." (*Ibid.*)

Debs also retreated on the question of social equality for blacks, on the pretext that it was an individual matter that did not concern a political party. He wrote:

"Social equality...forsooth...is pure fraud and serves to mask the real issue, which is not social equality, but economic freedom." (*Ibid.*)

Thus Debs counterposed the fight for social equality to the economic emancipation of the working class, and he also approved the fact that the Socialist Party's platform said nothing about social equality. He was blind to the need of the working class to fight against racist oppression if it was to achieve the unity and maturity it needed to carry out a social revolution and obtain economic freedom.

Meanwhile many right and center leaders of the SP were prey to the most virulent racism. For example, the prominent reformist leader Victor Berger, later to be the first SP congressman (in the U.S. House of Representatives), stated in his paper **The Social-Democratic Herald** in 1902 that "There can be no doubt that the negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race." (*Ibid.*, p. 406)

The left wing of the SP, while opposed to the racism of the reformist leaders, never achieved a theoretical standpoint much removed from that of Debs.

Overcoming Social-Democratic Carry-Overs

The stand of the left wing of the SP condemned it to general passivity on the front of the black people's movement. Every step forward of the CPUSA involved overcoming these social-democratic theories and taking up Leninist views. This was a protracted process.

An example of the carry-over of the passive stand of the left wing of the SP to the early CP can be seen in the documents adopted at the 1919 convention of the Communist Party of America (CPA). Section VI of the Program of the Party discussed the black people's struggle, but it was vague and unsatisfactory. It did not appeal for specific struggles to liberate the black people from the many-sided racist oppression, but apparently regarded the problem of overcoming that oppression as simply a complicating factor in the overall proletarian struggle. And it only called for work among the black workers; it is not clear that it even refers to the other oppressed black masses, although the majority of the black people were still in agriculture in that period.

Section VI stated:

"In close connection with the unskilled workers is the problem of the Negro worker. The Negro problem is a political and economic problem. The racial oppression of the Negro is simply the expression of his economic bondage and oppression, each intensifying the other. This complicates the Negro problem, but does not alter its proletarian character. The Communist Party will carry out agitation among the Negro workers to unite them with all class-conscious workers."

The period between 1919 and 1921 was a time of tremendous ferment in the views of the American communists. They sought to build up a genuine revolutionary party; they studied the experience of the Bolsheviks and took part in the work towards building the Communist International; they fought over many questions of revolutionary orientation; and at the same time they faced the infamous Palmer raids and other brutal persecution from the bourgeoisie. Lenin's writings and the example of the Bolsheviks exerted a tremendous influence on the American communists. The declarations and manifestoes they left behind show a constant progress in their views.

By the time of the unification in 1921 of the United Communist Party (itself the merger of the CP of America and a section of the CLP) and the Communist Labor Party into a single party, the CP had already begun improving its stand towards the black people's movement. In December 1921 the Workers' Party was formed as a tool for legal work (the CP was then underground) and its founding convention declared:

"The Workers Party will support the Negroes in their struggle for liberation, and will help them in their fight for economic, political, and social equality. It will

point out to them that the interests of the Negro workers are identical with those of the whites. It will seek to end the policy of discrimination followed by organized labor. Its task will be to destroy altogether the barrier of race discrimination that has been used to keep apart the black and white workers, and weld them into a solid union of revolutionary forces for the overthrow of the common enemy." (Cited in Foster's **History of the CPUSA** pp. 192-3)

The 3rd Convention of the Workers Party (which by this time was a merger of the Workers' Party and the CP of America) met in December 1923 and January 1924, and it passed a resolution on the Negro question that included the following:

"The twelve million negroes in the United States constitute an oppressed race, and as such they require and demand special attention. ...

"The Workers' Party pledges itself to strive, both in the processes of its regular work and also by the creation of special organs of press and organization, for the following ends:

"1. Equal right of Negroes to membership in trade unions.

"2. Equal wages to Negroes.

"3. Complete restoration of the right of the ballot, the right to hold political office, the right to assemble and to organize, in the South as well as the North.

"4. Drastic action to punish and suppress lynching of Negroes in the South and elsewhere, depriving local and state authorities of jurisdiction in this matter which must become a national responsibility.

"5. National legal measures for the abolition, under severe penalty, of all discrimination against Negroes in every form of public service.

"6. Abolition of all discrimination against Negroes in housing."

Then in 1924, according to his account, Foster took the communist presidential campaign to the South during which he carried out propaganda for demands in defense of the black people. (**History of the CPUSA**, p. 233)

At the 4th Convention, in 1925, the Workers (Communist) Party passed a detailed resolution on the black people. This included some analysis of the history of the black people, of the struggle of the black industrial workers and of the agricultural workers and tenant farmers in the South, and of a whole range of other questions dealing with equal rights for the black people. This resolution was apparently part of an attempt to push forward the work among the black people, especially through the formation of the American Negro Labor Congress later in 1925.

The Party was also militantly opposed to imperialism and colonialism, and to a certain extent con-

nected the struggle of the black people in the U.S. to the world struggle of the oppressed peoples. William Dunne, for example, who was among those of the Party's leaders who laid stress on the struggle against the oppression of the black people, expressed this connection eloquently and wrote that

"Every attempt to make the struggles of the negro masses in the United States a purely national [i.e. internal to the U.S.] question, to isolate it from the struggle of the Negro race in all of imperialism's colonies and spheres of influence, or even isolate it from the struggles of ALL the darker-skinned peoples is to play into the hands of the ruling class. Equally true it is to say that any misunderstanding of the common interest in, or attempt to draw a line of separation between, the world proletarian revolutionary struggle and the liberation movements of colonial peoples and racial minorities, leads straight to disaster." ("The Negroes as an Oppressed People," **Workers Monthly**, IV, No. 9, July 1925, p. 295.)

Through the ANLC (which the African Blood Brotherhood was merged into) the CP tried to extend its work among the black people and especially to push forward the organization of the black workers. The TUEL also carried campaigns against the segregation of the unions and to mobilize the white workers in support of full equal rights for the black people.

According to Cyril Briggs (the founder of the ABB and a CP leader) the CP led, prior to the 6th Congress of the CI in 1928, the Negro fig and date workers strike in Chicago, the laundry strike in Carterette, NJ, the Colored Motion Picture Operators strike in NY, the Negro Miners Relief Committee, the Harlem Tenants League, and other struggles and campaigns. ("Our Negro Work," **The Communist** #9, 1929.)

From this brief history, some idea can be gained of the great significance of the formation and work of the CP on the front of breaking with the backward traditions of the old SP. The founding of the CP marked a new stage in the relationship of the revolutionary movement in the U.S. to the black people's movement. But the CP still had further to go on this question.

The CP, However, Didn't Yet Grasp the Revolutionary Role of the Black People's Movement

Despite the early advances, prior to the C.I. resolutions of 1928 and 1930 the CP still didn't understand the revolutionary role of the black people's movement. And the result of this lack of understanding was a failure of the CP to throw itself with the necessary force and vigor into the struggle against the oppression of the black people, a failure to ensure that the whole party — and not just special organizations for work among the black people — forcefully took up this question, and the failure to ensure that sufficient anti-racist work

was done among all the workers who gravitated to the party.

For example, our examination of the central press of the CP (and unfortunately our examination of the early CP press is still rather cursory and far from complete) shows that it had definite problems in its attitude to the black people's struggle. While the CP had special press organs for the black people's movement, its central agitational press displayed remarkable passivity on this front, only occasionally dealing with it. (Here we are not comparing the CP press to the press of other political groups of that time, but to what should have been done.) And while the central press does contain some denunciations of the outrages against the black people (and these denunciations intensify and become more frequent from the end of 1924 after the ANLC is founded), it seemed to have some fear of posing the question of a specific front of struggle against the racist and national oppression of the black people. A particularly striking example is the series of articles that, in denouncing the activation of the KKK by the bourgeoisie in those days, argue that the KKK's racism is really just a pretext for attacking the working class movement.

The denunciation of the reformist and opportunist black leaders in the CP's central press had some strange features. When dealing with particular examples, it did contain various exposures of how the misleaders betrayed the fight against lynching and other struggles. But it generally summed the problem up by saying things along the lines that: "the social problem (of blacks) cannot be fought out on race lines... it must be a class fight in which all workers unite against all employers". This type of ambiguous statement focused attention only on the attempts of the misleaders to divide the working class, and the conclusion of such articles would generally lack an appeal to step up the struggle against racist oppression.

It seems that the CP was still, in its theorizing, under the influence of the social-democratic counterposition of the particular struggle (against the oppression of the black people) to the general class struggle. And it still displayed a tendency to reduce the struggle against the oppression of the black workers to one of its crucial fronts: it would stress the organizing of black and white workers into the common fight against the capitalists. Thus the CP would stress the inclusion of the black workers in common unions with the white workers, and it would work to mobilize the black workers behind socialist revolution. This is important work, requiring persistence and enthusiasm. But the CP did not appreciate the revolutionary potential of the struggle against the all-around national and racial oppression of the black masses. This all-round struggle is both important in itself and essential if the other front, that of mobilizing the workers into common unions and common communist party organization, is to move forward.

Thus it seems that the central agitational press

of the CP — and this presumably reflects the work of much of the party — failed to vigorously organize and agitate on the struggle of the black people against the hideous discrimination they faced in every aspect of life. The Party mainly ignored the fight of the rural black masses in the South who constituted the majority of the black masses in the country at the time. The Party also seems in its work to have repeatedly made concessions — sometimes very gross concessions — to the racist prejudices among the backward white workers in the name of uniting the workers. Apparently the social-democratic view that taking up the fight of the black masses against various forms of national oppression was a diversion from the class struggle and the socialist revolution had influence inside the Party. Thus, in its early days, and into the latter 20's, the Communist Party still did not grasp what Lenin meant when he pointed out:

"The socialist revolution is not a single act, it is not one battle on one front, but a whole epoch of acute class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of politics and economics, battles that only end in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy (which incidentally includes the struggle against the oppression of nations and nationalities) was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding or overshadowing it. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practice full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-around and consistent revolutionary struggle for democracy." (from Section 2, "The Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Democracy" of **The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination**, Collected Works, vol. 22, p. 144)

Lenin further pointed out that the fact that imperialism negates democracy, that it intensifies national oppression, and that "not only the right of nations to self-determination, but all fundamental demands of political democracy are only partially 'practicable' under imperialism" should not be used as an excuse for giving up a determined struggle on this front. Instead, he said:

"...it follows that these demands must be formulated and put through in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle over every democratic demand up to a direct proletarian onslaught on the bourgeoisie, i.e., up to the socialist revolution that expropriates

the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution may flare up not only through some big strike, street demonstration or hunger riot or a military insurrection or colonial revolt, but also as a result of a political crisis such as the Dreyfus affair [a notorious frame-up case against the Jewish officer Dreyfus by the French royalists and militarists] or the Zabern incident [unrest throughout the former French province of Alsace triggered by a Prussian military officer in the Alsatian town of Zabern using an insulting term towards the Alsatian people, Alsace at the time being incorporated into Germany], or in connection with a referendum on the secession of an oppressed nation, etc." (Ibid. p. 145)

Far from regarding the question of fighting national oppression, or of fighting on any of the questions of democracy, as a diversion or complicating factor of the class struggle, Lenin showed how these struggles were one of the fronts of the proletarian revolutionary movement. He called instead for the use of revolutionary methods with regard to these questions.

The 6th Congress of the Communist International on the Black National Question

The C.I. took a great interest in the struggle of the oppressed nationalities worldwide, and even at the earliest World Congresses of the CI the struggle of the black people in the U.S. was discussed. At the 2nd World Congress of the C.I. in 1920 Lenin mentioned the black people in the U.S. in his famous theses on the national and colonial questions. At the 4th Congress in 1922 a Negro Commission was set up to study the struggles of the black people worldwide. And at the 4th Congress, and also the 5th Congress of 1924, the importance of the black people's struggle in the U.S. to the struggles in the West Indies and Africa was discussed.

Over the years, the C.I. assisted the CPUSA to move its work forward on this front. The CI also paid attention to the training of American black cadre and to their inclusion in important work of the CI apparatus. As well, the C.I. eventually took up the question of whether or not the black people formed a nation in the black belt of the South.

At the 6th Congress in 1928 both criticism of the CPUSA's sluggishness in developing all-round work among the black people and the question of the black nation were put squarely on the agenda. The preparations for this began earlier when, in late 1927, the leadership of the C.I. began a series of discussions on these questions with the leadership of the CPUSA, as well as with the American students at the Lenin school in Moscow.

In the beginning of 1928 a subcommittee was set up of C.I. representatives and a number of American students in Moscow to prepare a resolution on the question for the 6th Congress. This resolution was

passed after heated debate in the Negro Commission at the 6th Congress. (The thesis of the black people forming a nation in the South caused much of this debate. It can be noted that this was not a debate between the white and black leaders of the CPUSA -- all the black leaders of the CPUSA, when first presented with the thesis of the black people forming a nation in the black belt South, opposed it, although by this time some had been won over.) The analysis of the 6th Congress on this question appears in point 39, "The Negro Question [around the world]", of the **Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semicolonies**.

The 6th Congress theses described the semi-feudal semi-slave conditions of the blacks on the plantations, the gross inequality throughout the country, and the growth of a black proletariat.

The theses then stated:

"One of the most important tasks of the Communist Party consists in the struggle for a complete and real equality of the Negroes, for the abolition of all kinds of racial, social and political inequalities." And further it stated, "In those regions of the South in which compact Negro masses are living, it is essential to put forward the slogan of 'Right of Self-determination for the Negroes!'" And it went on to say "...a radical transformation of the agrarian structure in the southern states is one of the basic tasks of the revolution."

At the same time it stated "Negro communists must explain to the Negro workers and peasants that only their close union with the white proletariat and joint struggle with them against the American bourgeoisie can lead to their liberation from barbarous exploitation, and that only the victorious proletarian revolution will completely and permanently solve the agrarian and national questions in the southern United States in the interests of the overwhelming majority of the Negro population of the country."

The 1928 Resolution of the CI on the Negro Question in the U.S.

The section of the theses of the 6th Congress devoted to this question was relatively brief. It was further amplified by a resolution approved by the Political Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) and published in October 1928. This was the famous 1928 Resolution of the ECCI on the black national question.

It states that the conditions of blacks in the black belt area of concentration provide the conditions for a national revolutionary movement. It again states that the agrarian problem lies at the root of the national movement. And it calls on the CPUSA to become the champion of the black masses North and South.

The resolution stresses that the "existence of a

Negro industrial proletariat of almost two million workers makes it imperative that the main emphasis should be placed on these new proletarian forces." It emphasizes the organization of the black workers into trade unions, the fight against segregated unions, work in the then-existing black workers organizations, and so forth. It also calls on the CP to take up systematic work in the South in both the cities and the countryside, and to organize sharecroppers and tenant farmers. It calls for intensifying the work of developing a core of black leaders and cadres in the Party. And it called for stepping up the fight against white chauvinism inside and outside the Party. In other words, it gives an all-around orientation for the Party to carry out work among the black masses as one of the central tasks of the revolutionary movement.

With regards to the slogan of the right to self-determination the resolution states:

"While continuing and intensifying the struggle under the slogan of full political and social equality for the Negroes, which must remain the central slogan of our party work among the masses, the Party must come out openly for the right of Negroes to national self-determination in the southern states where Negroes form the majority of the population."

It refers to "the struggle for equal rights and the propaganda for the slogan of self-determination". Later in the resolution it emphasizes that this propaganda for the defense of the right to self-determination must center chiefly among the white workers who must be drawn into revolutionary struggle in defense of the black masses.

It calls for recruiting black proletarians into the Party. It says the CP should organize the black workers to play an important part in the class struggle of the U.S. proletariat and also to lead the oppressed masses of the black people. At the same time it calls for a fight against bourgeois nationalism and separatist tendencies among the black masses.

The basic content of this resolution is correct; it called for the kind of struggle that was needed. While defending the right to self-determination most vigorously, the CI is not advocating secession. Rather, while preparing the CP to defend the right to agitate for secession, should a secessionist movement come up, it provides the orientation of developing the black people's movement as part of the proletarian revolution in the U.S.

The Work of the CPUSA Moves Forward

The decisions of the 6th Congress of the CI, the Resolution of the ECCI, and the discussions in the Party around these events helped to push forward the work of the CP among the black masses.

The CP began to pay more attention to recruiting black workers into the Party and to organizing the unorganized black workers into common unions with

the white workers. A campaign against white chauvinism was launched, and there was an intensification of the criticism of concessions to racism that at times cropped up in the Party. And systematic work was launched in the South.

The work in the South was particularly heroic and pioneering work. In this work the communists faced the severest repression from the police and reactionary gangs like the KKK. This repression was all the more severe as the communists carried the banner of uniting together the white and black workers and breaking down the disgusting Jim Crow practices. They had to combine a great deal of underground work with a struggle for public work and often had to wage armed resistance to savage attacks.

Despite the repressive atmosphere, in the presidential elections of 1928 the CPUSA's candidate Foster carried the CPUSA's campaign into the South and used this occasion to attempt to establish Party organizations there. During this campaign, in October, Foster was arrested on riot charges in Wilmington, Delaware for giving a speech against the oppression of the black people, and the CPUSA's main national newspaper, the **Daily Worker**, campaigned ardently on this and stressed the defense of the black people.

Early in 1929 CP organizers and organizers for the CP-led National Textile Workers Union went into North Carolina, defied the Jim Crow laws and practices, and began organizing the unorganized textile workers on an integrated basis. This organizing drive was a major event among the heavily oppressed textile workers, both white and black. It awakened a movement that spread to South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia, bringing out over ten thousand textile workers in several strikes.

The hardest fought strike was in Gastonia, N.C. and was led by the CP. The governor called in several companies of militia, the American Legion organized vigilantes, and several times lynch mobs were unleashed. Several attacks took place against the union headquarters and the workers' tent city. Eventually, the workers met these attacks with armed resistance. The chief of police was killed and three deputies were wounded. One hundred strikers were arrested; eventually seven were sentenced to 20-year prison terms. As well, several strikers were killed in some of the actions.

In the course of this strike a CP member conciliated to pressure and allowed a wire to be extended across a meeting room to segregate the blacks on one side and the whites on another. Some CP leaders tried to excuse him. But this concession to racism and any defense of it was criticized in the sharpest terms in the Party press, and the Central Committee of the CP sent representatives to correct the matter and to launch a strong ideological campaign against white chauvinism. As a result the white workers were mobilized to defend their black comrades. In one case white workers risked their lives to head off a lynch mob and to sneak a black CP organizer out of the area.

With struggles like these the CP unleashed a powerful trend for unity among the black and white workers, and the CP's influence among the black workers grew quickly. It is reported that, while in March of 1929 the CP had only 200 black members, by March of 1930 it had 1500 black members. (In this period the CP recruited a total of 6,167 members.)

The 1928 Resolution Found Fertile Ground in the CPUSA

The Sixth World Congress of the CI took place from July 17 to September 1, 1928. And the famous 1928 resolution of the ECCI is dated Oct. 26, 1928. As we have seen, these events, and the discussions preparing for them, resulted in improvements in the work of the CPUSA already at the end of 1928 and in 1929. (Indeed the 1928 presidential campaign of the CPUSA, which already showed a stepping up of the work against the oppression of the black people, took place mainly prior to the 1928 Resolution.)

This was only possible because the C.I. found fertile soil in the CPUSA when it called for stepping up the struggle against the national oppression of the black people. Contrary to the views expressed by various of the neo-revisionists of the 1970's, it does not appear that the CPUSA was dragged kicking and screaming and resisting to the bitter end into the discussion of the need to take up the black liberation struggle as one of the central questions of its work. On the contrary, it appears that the CPUSA showed a certain enthusiasm to get down to serious work on this question. This reflected that it was a revolutionary proletarian party and also its earlier work against the oppression of the black people.

The 6th Congress theses and 1928 resolution (and the struggle to implement them) thus were able to mark a new phase in the history of the CPUSA. They also came at a time when the CPUSA had the conditions needed to step up its work, both because of the development of a deep crisis of capitalism and of the results of a decade of work to consolidate the CPUSA.

In much of the 1920's, the CPUSA faced the situation of a general ebb in the revolutionary movement, including the black liberation struggle. The severe repression that the CP faced in the early 1920's, and the general ebb in the mass movements, set back the CP's work and reduced its forces on a whole series of fronts. As well, the CP faced a complicated, many-sided task of consolidating itself, including both the struggle to rid itself of social-democratic traditions and a perplexing, serious factional fight that extended over many years.

At the end of the 1920's the political and economic crisis of capitalism intensified. And the Great Depression would begin in the U.S. in 1929. A new period in the mass struggle was approaching. As well, by the Sixth Congress, the CP, although still facing difficult work to consolidate itself on a revolutionary basis, had achieved a number of things

on the organizational front and was about to emerge from the period of paralyzing factional struggle.

In these conditions, the assistance of the CI on the black national question could have dramatic, immediate results. This period, in which the CPUSA made major strides forward in its work among the black people, corresponds to the period when the contradictions in the U.S. began to greatly intensify and when the CP advanced its work over a whole range of different mass fronts. In judging the earlier work of the CP, one has to bear in mind the conditions this work faced rather than simply attributing every difficulty in the work to wrong views of the CP.

This however does not detract from the importance of the 6th Congress, for without the assistance of the CI many of the possibilities opening up to the CPUSA would undoubtedly have been missed. It was the CI that ensured that the Party and all its members would throw themselves with redoubled fervor into the struggle against the oppression of the black people; that ensured that the whole CP would regard this struggle not as a secondary task or mere complicating factor, but as a major motive force of the revolution; and that the CP would not just take up the correct analysis about the importance of the struggle but would translate this analysis into revolutionary practice.

Resistance to the CI's Analysis of the Black National Question

These advances in the work of the CPUSA did not take place without resistance. This seems to have come from two sides. On one hand, scepticism towards the revolutionary potentialities of the black liberation struggle had to be overcome — this scepticism apparently ended up concentrated in the faction associated with the "American exceptionalist" Lovestone, who believed that American capitalism was an exception and would not for many years be subject to the crises and class struggle that was inseparable from capitalism everywhere else in the world. And on the other hand, there was resistance to the analysis of the existence of a black nation in the South.

The debates of the time are therefore complicated.

It seemed that the Lovestoneites had previously sought repeatedly to denigrate the prospects of the black people's movement. One of their arguments was that industrialization was dispersing the black people, making them industrial workers, and this allegedly eliminated the black people's struggle. This argument overestimated the degree of dispersal at the time, thus denigrating the importance of the analysis of the black nation in the black belt South. It also missed the point that industrialization was, in fact, intensifying the black people's struggle and reinforcing a black proletariat that could lead the black people's movement in a powerful, revolutionary direction. The tremendous power

of the black people's movement of the 1960's, which took place at a time when dispersal and proletarianization was far more advanced than at the end of the 1920's, provides the final historical verdict against this fallacious argument.

The Lovestoneites also apparently denigrated the rural black toilers, if not all black toilers, by calling them a "possible reserve of capitalist reaction". This phrase crept into some Party documents earlier, and was still upheld in 1928 by John Pepper, who was associated with Lovestone's faction, in an article where he tries to associate himself with the CI's analysis of the black national question. It can be noted that Pepper, and presumably others that defended the former talk of blacks in the South being a "possible reserve of capitalist reaction", tried to present it as simply a general theoretical statement, much like Stalin's remark that the rise of the revolutionary movement in the colonies and dependent countries converted "the colonies and dependent countries from reserves of imperialism into reserves of the proletarian revolution." (Foundations of Leninism, Sec. I) Pepper wrote that "It is the basic duty of the Communist Party to develop all revolutionary possibilities of the Negro race, to transform the 'solid south' and the 'black belt' from 'reserves of forces for the bourgeoisie into reserves of forces for the proletariat' (Stalin)." But this talk about "possible reserves of the bourgeoisie" or of "reaction" appears to have been reserved by the Lovestoneites for the black people, as well as ignoring the actual situation of the black people at the time.

As well, there were those who argued directly against the idea that there was a black nation in the South. It was argued that the blacks in the U.S., as opposed to those in the West Indies or Africa, faced oppression as a racial minority, not national oppression. (Logically speaking, there is another possible position, that the black people in America constitute a national minority, and suffer national oppression, but are not a nation. This is correct today, but was not completely so back in 1928, when the black people did constitute a nation in a section of the South. But, in the debates around the stands of the 6th Congress and the 1928 Resolution of the ECCI, the question is generally formulated as whether the black people suffered racial or national oppression. The stand of the CI in 1928 was crucial in establishing the analysis of the national character of the oppression of the black people.)

It may have been that those who opposed the analysis of the existence of a black nation in the South also tended to underrate the need for the CPUSA to undertake a many-sided struggle for black liberation and to see mainly the aspect of trade union activities and general actions against the exploiters. This seems to be reflected, for example, by Otto Huiswood, a leading black cadre, in his article "World Aspects of the Negro Question" in the Feb. 1930 issue of *The Communist*. This article

openly opposes the analysis of the CI on blacks constituting a nation in the South.

In this article, Huiswood maintained that, while blacks in Africa and West Indies suffer national and colonial oppression, in the U.S. they suffer oppression as a racial minority. Although Huiswood describes in great detail the ruthless superexploitation and bestial oppression of blacks in the North and South, he seems to have a restricted idea of the activities the CPUSA should carry out. He correctly points to the great significance of the Gastonia textile strike where black and white workers broke down the Jim Crow barriers that blocked the strike and waged a united struggle and where white workers came to the defense of their black comrades against the attacks of the police and Klan. But he fails to point clearly to the other types of activity necessary for leading the black liberation struggle.

The Debate Leading up to the 1930 CI Resolution

Whether the black people constitute a nation, a national minority, or a racial minority, the struggle for their emancipation in the U.S. is and was necessarily a revolutionary question which must be taken seriously and must be organized as a definite front of the class struggle. One might think that the question of nation, national minority, or racial minority might affect only certain, important aspects of that struggle. But in the debate inside the CPUSA of the late 20's and early 30's the recognition of the need for making the work against oppression of the black people a central part of all the Party's work appears to have been linked up with arguing in favor of the existence of a black nation in the South.

Furthermore, as the debate sharpened, the tendency appeared in the CI leadership to push the right to self-determination slogan in a fetishist way in the course of opposing attempts in the CPUSA to downplay the black people's movement. This means a tendency to elevate the question of the right to self-determination above the overall questions of the black people's struggle and of the tasks of communist work. This would lead the ECCI to the point of essentially advocating a secessionist struggle. And inside the CPUSA it would lead the advocates of national fetishism to regard the right to self-determination not just as part of the black national question, but as something to be counterposed to every other aspect of the question.

In January of 1930, encouraged by the C.I. leaders in Moscow who were dealing with American questions, Canadian and American students at the Lenin school in Moscow wrote an open letter to *The Communist*, which was the theoretical journal of the CPUSA. This letter criticizes the Party's failure to take up work among the black tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the South, and the CP's tendency to reduce the black question to simply one of its major fronts, the trade union question.

However, it then goes on to make a real fetish

out of the slogan of the right to self-determination, saying such things as

"social equality and other similar slogans have no revolutionary meaning unless they are viewed in light of an accessory to the slogan of self-determination."

Thus, the analysis of a black nation in the South, from a spur to the revolutionary work, is turned into a way to deprecate the protracted, difficult and essential struggles for equality.

The letter adds, further, that:

"Without a constant and persistent struggle for the self-determination of Negroes in the South the slogan of social equality becomes an empty liberal phrase."

Now, if the movement at that time in the black belt South had been a separatist movement and the various class forces were fighting over the question of the right of self-determination, then to be talking about equality while avoiding the issue of the right to self-determination would be empty liberal phrasemongering. It would mean avoiding the issue on which the black people were currently being suppressed under cover of phrases about being willing to fight for anything else.

But since there was no such movement at the time and the sharp class battles were currently being fought over social, political and economic equality (and over various forms of exploitation, etc.), it was utterly wrong to denigrate the ongoing struggle in the name of "self-determination". The Leninist stand on the right to self-determination never leads one to denigrate the actual mass struggles against oppression and has nothing to do with counterposing these struggles against the right to self-determination. The letter thus falls into fetishism, into elevating the phrase "the right to self-determination" above the revolutionary struggle. If this fetishism were taken seriously and applied, it would be a prescription for moralistic sidelineism towards the revolutionary struggle for equality, a prescription for converting struggle into an "empty liberal phrase".

At this time, in the debates of the late 20's and early 30's, the sidelineism that is inherent in this national fetishism did not clearly emerge. But in the inner-party debates, national fetishism was identified with fervor on behalf of calling for the CPUSA to step up all fronts of its work in the black people's movement. This masked, for the time being, the appearance of sidelineism from the theoretical arguments being supplied by the advocates of national fetishism.

The tendency to pervert the analysis of the existence of a black nation in the South into fetishism over the slogan of the right to self-determination became more pronounced as the debate proceeded. And the tendency to slip into essentially advocating a secessionist movement — or giving theoretical arguments whose logical conclusion could only be advocacy of building a secessionist movement — soon manifested itself.

Thus, for example, we can see how Harry Haywood, a CPUSA member who was then still a student at the Lenin School in Russia and a member of the CI's Negro Commission, argued in August, 1930. Haywood says:

"Thus the Negro liberation movement is deprived of all revolutionary content and becomes a struggle for equality **not in the revolutionary sense which in the South can only mean independence and right of self-determination**, but **social equality in the liberal reformist conception of the term, i.e., a 'struggle against' race prejudices and artificial racial divisions....** It is they, the liberals and reformists, who foster illusions that the struggle for social equality is not a struggle directed at the very base of imperialism, not a struggle, **the implications of which are national independence for the Negroes in the Black Belt**, but a struggle against the superstructure of race ideology and race prejudice. They entirely divorce it from its economic roots." (Emphasis added.)

Here Haywood badmouths as liberal reformist illusion-mongering any struggle for equality which doesn't raise the issue of the right to self-determination. Not only that, but he goes further and states that the struggle must lead to (must have as its implication) the national independence of black people in the black belt South. In essence, he claims that, to be equal, blacks must have an independent country.

Now, since the black people constituted a nation in the black belt at that time, they must have had the **right** to form an independent country if their nation was to be considered equal. But that does not mean that they had to actually form an independent country. Haywood's argument turns the defense of the right of self-determination into actual advocacy of secession.

The 1930 Resolution of the CI

In October 1930 the Political Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Communist International issued a second resolution on the Negro question in the U.S., with the declared purpose of clearing up the confusion on the question of the right to self-determination.

The resolution in most sharp and graphic language emphasized the necessity of an all-around and bold struggle in defense of the black masses. It talks about the role that the white workers and the black workers must play in this struggle. And it correctly points to the importance of organizing black sharecroppers and tenant farmers and the need for agrarian revolution in the South as part of the liberation of the black masses.

However, on the question of the right to self-determination, it not only didn't clarify matters, but it reinforced the national fetishist confusion.

It made the slogan of the right to self-determination the main slogan in the black belt South. Thus the resolution says:

"6. Owing to the peculiar situation in the Black Belt (the fact that the majority of the resident Negro population are farmers, and agricultural laborers and that the capitalist economic system as well as political class rule there is not only of a special kind, but to a great extent still has pre-capitalist and semi-colonial features), the right of self-determination as the **main slogan** of the Communist Party in the Black Belt is appropriate." (Emphasis as in the original.)

Then, after pointing out that the struggle actually developing at the time was over questions of equality within the U.S., the resolution goes on to state that it is important to

"concentrate the attention of the Negro masses not so much to the general demands of mere equality but much more to some of the revolutionary **basic demands** arising from the concrete situation. ...

"1) Confiscation of the landed property of the white landowners and capitalists...

"2) Establishment of the State Unity of the Black Belt...

"3) Right of self-determination."

This correctly includes the important question of agrarian reform as a major priority. But there is a change from the 1928 resolution on the question of the right to self-determination.

The 1928 resolution held that "the slogan of full social and political equality for the Negroes must remain the central slogan of our Party for work among the masses" while calling for the CPUSA to come out openly and boldly for the right of self-determination. But now the right of self-determination is made the **main slogan** among the black masses in the black belt. And this is done at a time when the resolution itself admits that it is impossible to win mass support among the blacks in the black belt for a separatist struggle, i.e., no mass separatist sentiment exists.

There is a section of the resolution which explains that fighting for the right to self-determination is not the same as advocating secession. It says that when the proletariat has seized power in the U.S. it will, while guaranteeing the right of secession, advocate the Negro republic remain federated with the proletarian republic. But it then goes on to say:

"As long as capitalism rules in the U.S. the Communists can not come out against government separation of the Negro zone from the U.S. They recognize this separation from the imperialist U.S. would be preferable from the standpoint of the national interests of the Negro population, to their present oppressed state and therefore the Communists are ready at any time to offer

all their support if only the working masses of the Negro population are ready to take up the struggle for governmental independence of the Black Belt. At the present time, however, the situation in the national struggle in the South is not such as to win mass support of the working Negroes for this separatist struggle, and it is not the task of the communist to call on them to separate without taking into consideration the existing situation and desires of the Negro masses."

It is wrong to make the categorical statement that communists can not come out against separation as long as capitalism rules in the U.S. This is a schematic view which lands the authors in national fetishism. It is impossible to tell in advance how a separatist movement would come up and how it would relate to the proletarian revolutionary movement. (And the principle of the right to self-determination does not, in itself, answer whether the communists should advocate or oppose secession: the communists may advocate or oppose secession and still be upholders of the right to self-determination provided they hold that it is the people inhabiting the territory of the black nation who must have the right to make the decision on secession.)

In fact the resolution opens the door to tailing after petty-bourgeois nationalism. The thrust of this section, and some preceding sections, is that the communists should work to arouse in the masses the sentiment to build a revolutionary separatist movement. It appears to oppose openly advocating secession only because that would isolate the CP from the black masses. No thought seems to have been given to the fact that the desire of the black masses in the black belt to win equality within the confines of the given country was progressive; that it corresponded to the most effective way, in the circumstances, for them to fight; and that it facilitated a powerful revolutionary onslaught of the united proletariat. But the resolution seems to have viewed this progressive desire of the black masses in the South as a hangup that they would soon be forced to give up.

There is one point I would like to make here. The idea of making the right to self-determination the main slogan for the black masses in those particular circumstances actually meant to advocate some particular solution to the national question, such as secession. But advocating secession in the conditions of the black belt was wrong. Wrongly putting the emphasis on calling for secession among the black masses also meant misunderstanding the role of defense of the right of self-determination in the class struggle.

Lenin said that, in the internationalist education of the workers, it is the duty of the communists of the oppressor nation to defend the right of self-determination and that this propaganda must be concentrated among the proletariat of the oppressor nation, i.e., in this case, among the whites. While

among the workers and the toiling masses of the oppressed nation the communists must make the center of internationalist education unity with the toilers of the oppressor nation.

At one point Lenin stressed this point by putting it in simplified and blunt words, saying essentially that it is the duty of the communists of the oppressor nation to defend the "freedom to secede" while it is the duty of the communists of the oppressed nation to defend the "freedom to integrate". Lenin went on to point out that whether or not the communist of the oppressed nation was for the political independence of his or her nation or its integration with a neighboring state, "in all cases he must fight against small-nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation..." (See The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up, Collected Works, Vol. 22, end of Sec. 7, p.347)

So we have here, in making the slogan of the right to self-determination the main slogan for work among the black toilers in the black belt South, the appearance of national fetishism in the 1930 resolution.

Apparently a Scheme for a Secessionist Revolt

The 1930 resolution was written at a time when the CI was expecting, with considerable justification, a revolutionary upsurge in the U.S. generally and in the black belt South particularly.

The South was the section of the country hardest hit by the depression. Cotton farming was in terrible shape. Sharecroppers were starving. There were demonstrations for food. And so there was definite potential for outbreaks of revolutionary struggle among the black masses in the South. In fact, this was also true among the white agrarian masses in the South.

However in this period of time some of the decisions of the CI suffered from a certain oneness and rigidity. There was a tendency to conceive of the coming revolutionary storms as developing in a straight line. And it would seem this rigidity came up in the analysis of the 1930 resolution of the black people's movement. The fact that contradictions were intensifying in the South and that the black people in the black belt South constituted a nation seems to have led the ECCI to, in effect, argue for the communists to work for a revolutionary movement for independence.

The CI leaders seem to have expected that, based perhaps on the experience with the Garvey movement (which, however, did not penetrate the South), the black people's movement in the South would take a separatist direction. It appears to have reasoned that a secessionist movement in the Black Belt would be a big crisis for U.S. imperialism and would hasten the proletarian revolution. Thus it departed from a sober analysis of how the actual struggle was developing and the immediate tasks to push it forward and instead put forward a preconceived scheme for bringing about a nationalist revolt.

Thus the 1930 resolution directly links the development of struggle in the South with the rise of a secessionist movement. It talks about

"...a great advance of this movement ['the national revolutionary Negro movement'] and the rapid approach of a revolutionary crisis in the Black Belt". (Pt. 5) It apparently identified this with the development of a powerful struggle for secession, stating that "It is even probable that the separatist efforts to obtain complete State independence [i.e. independence as a separate country] of the South in the near future. ... In this sharpening of the situation in the South, Negro separatism will presumably increase, and the question of the independence of the Black Belt will become the question of the day. Then the Communist Party must also face this question and, if the circumstances seem favorable, must stand up with all its strength and courage for the struggle to win independence and for the establishment of a Negro republic in the Black Belt." (Pt. 8)

And the reason 1930 resolution makes the slogan of the right to self-determination the main slogan is out of the perspective of such a secessionist struggle. The resolution says:

"Even if the situation does not yet warrant the raising of the question of uprising, one should not limit oneself at present to propaganda for the demand: 'Right to self-determination,' but should organize mass actions, such as demonstrations, strikes, tax-boycott-movements, etc." (Pt. 7)

This passages advises the CPUSA to look towards the perspective of an uprising for independence. And, even if the situation is "not yet" ripe for the uprising itself, they are advised not to restrict themselves to propaganda concerning the right to self-determination but to organize a very high level of mass struggle around this issue. Although this is said to be for the "right to self-determination", the sentence's whole drift suggests that it is in preparation for, and with demands that will lead towards, a later uprising.

Part of the 1930 resolution is devoted to devising ways to facilitate such a secessionist movement. For example, the heavy emphasis on the slogan "state unity of the Black Belt" appears to be based on the idea that concentrating the black people in one political entity would facilitate a national rebellion. Instead of soberly estimating the present stage of struggle for the political rights of the black people, the slogan of state unity was put forward as one of three basic demands. In practice, it appears that this slogan played no role among the masses.

In its preconceived plan for a secessionist movement, the CI leadership failed to take into account the factors that worked against the development of a struggle for independence. It failed to take ac-

count of the fact that there were major historical, economic and political factors behind the lack of enthusiasm of the black masses for separatism; the black masses had good reason to prefer a different sort of liberation struggle. While correctly judging that dispersal and industrialization hadn't wiped out the existence of a black nation in the South, the ECCI failed to take proper account of the fact that some of the basic features that defined the black people as a nation were unstable.

This secessionist scheme not only ignored the temper of the black masses in general and various objective factors that lay behind this stand of the black masses, but it didn't take into consideration the influence of the work of the CP itself in the South, work undertaken in accordance with the CI's directions. This is particularly striking as it comes right after the CP-led Gastonia strike, which had been heavily promoted (and correctly so) by the CI and the CPUSA and was indeed a major event in the South. This strike did not lead the masses in a secessionist direction but on the contrary its results remind one of the fact that such nationalist movements as the Garvey movement had had no appeal where the white and black workers had been organized into common trade unions and had a history of common struggle.

But the resolution refrains from taking into account the effect of such work as this by the CP in bringing the influence of the revolutionary proletariat into the area; and this despite the fact that the CP was now undertaking systematic work in the South, as the CI had instructed. Instead the CI seems to be counting on the black people's movement coming up in a secessionist direction and, essentially, to be looking for ways to hasten such a development.

One of the results of this schematicism was that the 1930 resolution, as we have seen, put forward as its main slogan the right to self-determination for the black people in the Black Belt, a slogan which did not deal with the ongoing struggle that was developing for equality. This helped to foster in the Party a tendency towards national fetishism. Had this aspect of the 1930 resolution been seriously implemented, it would have tended to link up communist work in the black people's movement not with the proletarian revolution in the U.S. as the highest goal but with a struggle for an independent black republic as the highest goal.

However, because the black masses were so opposed to the idea of a separate country being carved out of the Black Belt, the orientation of making the right to self-determination the main slogan among the masses in the Black Belt was not implemented. There were many attempts to do so, but they all failed. No matter how much the CPUSA periodically castigated itself for having failed to make agitation for the right to self-determination a living issue in its work in the black people's movement (to say nothing of a "main slogan"), it never succeeded in doing so.

Limits on the National Fetishism in the 1930 Resolution

Nevertheless, there were distinct limits on the national fetishism that appeared in the 1930 Resolution, limits that would be far exceeded by the later advocates of national fetishism.

For example, we have seen that the 1930 Resolution did not take into account the fact that the desire of the black masses in the black belt to win equality within the confines of the U.S. was progressive and corresponded to the most effective way open to them, in the existing situation, to fight for their rights. But elsewhere in the resolution it took a different stand with regard to the situation in the North, when in Point 3 it praises the progressive nature of the stand of the "broad masses of the Negro population in the big industrial centers of the North" in "making no efforts whatsoever to maintain and cultivate a national aloofness, [and] on the contrary, working for assimilation." It states

"This effort of the Negro masses can do much in the future to facilitate the progressive process of amalgamating the whites and Negroes into one nation, and it is under no circumstances the task of the Communists to give support to bourgeois nationalism in its fight with the progressive assimilation tendencies of the Negro working masses."

We have also seen that, in the debate leading up to the 1930 resolution, the idea was put forward that the "social equality and other similar slogans have no revolutionary meaning unless they are viewed in light of an accessory to the slogan of self-determination." And Haywood, just prior to the 1930 resolution derided the slogan of equality in general and social equality in particular if it wasn't connected with the fight for independence.

But, whatever role the CI leadership may or may not have had in inspiring these arguments, it didn't repeat them in the 1930 resolution. Instead it stated correctly and dramatically that the slogan of equal rights was a fraud if it wasn't connected with a relentless struggle in practice against all aspects of the oppression of the black people. It contrasted liberal phrasemongering with the actual struggle in deeds, and it showed that the liberal phrasemongering had the purpose of blocking the class struggle. It put forward that the struggle for equality and against all forms of Negrophobia was part of the proletarian class struggle against the bourgeoisie; it denounced the liberals for seeking to draw attention away from the one effective method of fighting the shameful system of white superiority, namely, the carrying out of the anti-racist struggle as one of the most important fronts of the class struggle. As the resolution stated:

"4. The slogan of equal rights of the Negroes without a relentless struggle in practice against all manifestations of Ne-

grophobia on the part of the American bourgeoisie can be nothing but a deceptive liberal gesture of a sly slave-owner or his agent. This slogan is in fact repeated by 'socialist' and many other bourgeois politicians and philanthropists who want to get publicity for themselves by appealing to the 'sense of justice' of the American bourgeoisie in the individual treatment of the Negroes, and thereby side-track attention from the one effective struggle against the shameful system of 'white superiority': from the **class struggle against the American bourgeoisie**. The struggle for equal rights for the Negroes is in fact, one of the most important parts of the proletarian class struggle of the United States." (Emphasis as in the original.)

Rapid Growth of the CP's Influence Among the Black Masses

Despite the problems with the 1930 resolution, the 6th Congress of the CI and the two ECCI resolutions did succeed in throwing the CPUSA into the forefront of the black liberation movement. The 1930 resolution, despite certain weaknesses, did reinforce the determination of the CPUSA to throw itself heart and soul into this struggle. Thus the period 1928-1930 marked a major turning point, not just in the ability of the CPUSA to write good resolutions about the black people's struggle, but in the revolutionary practice of the CPUSA against the oppression of the black people.

The CP threw more effort than ever before into organizing work in the South. In 1930 the Party established a branch in Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham was the biggest industrial center in the South; it was just outside the Black Belt; and the iron and steel industry attracted large numbers of black workers to the city. And there were also large numbers of black workers in the coal mining industry around 1930.

In 1931 the CPUSA established the Sharecroppers' Union which militantly organized the fight against the plantation owners. This organization was viciously attacked by the state and armed battles took place twice with the police. Despite this repression, the Sharecroppers' Union grew rapidly and by 1935 it had over 12,000 members, a number of whom were white. This was not a large number compared to the total number of sharecroppers in the South, but it was a major event for the times and a beacon for all sharecroppers.

Throughout this period, the Party and the Communist International waged a militant international campaign in defense of the Scottsboro defendants (nine black youth, the youngest being only 13 years old, being framed on a charge of raping two white women). Hundreds of thousands of white workers were drawn out to rallies and demonstrations to protest this attempt at legal lynching. Frequently rallies

and demonstrations were integrated into the work of organizing strikes among the workers in the basic industries." In an international campaign, parties in other countries organized large, militant demonstrations at American embassies and consulates demanding freedom for their black proletarian brothers being held hostage in Scottsboro, Alabama.

In numerous cities campaigns were launched against police brutality, job discrimination and Jim Crow practices. Throughout the South the Party and the Trade Union Unity League were among the main forces organizing the workers' trade unions, the strike movement, and the movement of the unemployed on an integrated basis.

As a result of its revolutionary work, the Party by 1935 was in the front ranks of the black people's movement. The popularity of the Party among the black masses was such that even editors of Southern black bourgeois newspapers were forced to comment favorably on its work. This is a quote from the article "Negroes and Communists" in *The Florida Sentinel*:

"The frequent appeals of the Communists to American Negroes is causing the black man to think more seriously of his new-found friends and to consider more at length their doctrines for the progress of the workers.

"No group of white men has made so bold attempt to defend the Negro and to work religiously for his protection as the Communists.

"Sometimes their words are ill-timed and carelessly hurled, frequently they contain too much venom, and often they are without direction, but the men seem to be sincere and whole-hearted in their efforts to aid all the workers without regard to color.

"The Communists have shown a total disregard for color prejudice and lack of appreciation for station and titles. They have accepted the black man on equal plane with all other workers, throughout the world and seem willing to toil for his elevation as they do for all others of their group.

"Recently members of the organization in Germany staged a demonstration for the aid of the eight Negro boys condemned to death at Scottsboro. They hurled bottles at the American consulate which contained messages saying 'Down with American murder and imperialism,' 'Hail the brotherly union of white and black youth proletarians,' and 'Down with the bloody lynch law on our negro comrades.'

"While we do not approve the type of demonstration the Communists are given to adopt in their various protests, there is something about the fundamental appeal of the organization which is becoming very attractive to the ears of Negroes who are being so sorely oppressed beneath the heels of the oppressors."

So one can see that CPUSA was having success in its new emphasis on the revolutionary struggle in defense of the black people, and was winning a tremendous amount of support. The period of the early thirties, in fact the whole period of the thirties, was characterized by a tremendous increase in the unity of black and white workers in the movement due in part to the CP's work.

The Party had become a major force to deal with in the struggle of the black people. The black bourgeois leaders were not down and out or becoming the minority influence in the black people's movement, but they had to contend with the growing power of the CP's work. For example, the NAACP was begging to be let in on the Scottsboro case. The International Labor Defense, which was a Party initiated united front organization for support and defense of those on trial or in jail, was organizing legal defense along the lines of using the trial as a platform to mobilize the masses (while not neglecting to obtain excellent lawyers for the defendants) and was having a great deal of success. The NAACP had originally refused to take up the Scottsboro case out of fear to defend black youth accused of rape, but the movement in defense of the Scottsboro defendants really gripped the imagination of the masses and forced the NAACP to reconsider.

Liquidationism and the Black National Question

The vigorous work of the CP against the oppression of the black people was a striking feature of its revolutionary work of the first half of the 1930's. It was the CP that led the working masses in the fight against the capitalist offensive and the utter destitution forced on millions upon millions of working people by the Great Depression. It was the CP that championed the unemployed. It was the communist-led unions and fractions in other unions (united in the Trade Union Unity League, the successor of the TUUL) that displayed an immense activity, although they represented only a small share of the organized workers, at one point of the Depression, the strike wave of 1933, they led 20% of the strikers directly and influenced 50% of the strikers in the AFL and the "independent" unions (non-AFL and non-TUUL). It was CP-led strikes and organizing drives that sparked the struggles and organizing drives that eventually reached huge proportions later on in the 30's. And it was the CP that constantly mobilized the workers against U.S. imperialism and world capitalism and in solidarity with the toilers of other lands.

But the CP faced tremendous difficulties. It still had more to do in developing Leninist organizational methods and in grasping Leninist theory; it faced harsh repression by the bourgeoisie; it had to deal with various reformist movements and schemes floated by the bourgeoisie to divert the masses from the revolutionary alternative; and it faced difficulties as the mass movement of the 1930's developed in a somewhat roundabout way so that the size of the

CP grew far more slowly than its influence and the size of the struggles it led.

The CP might have overcome these problems. It had revolutionary spirit, and its dedicated work had put it in the forefront of the mass movement which was rising. It had to maintain its revolutionary line, while paying close attention to the exact forms in which the masses were rising to political life. And it would have to carry out a fierce struggle against opportunist influence upon the Party.

Unfortunately, in this situation, the CP proved vulnerable to the change in the line of the international communist movement that was formalized at the Seventh Congress of the CI in 1935. [See the May 1st, 1985 issue of **The Supplement**, devoted to the subject "In Defense of Leninist United Front Tactics/On the backward turn in the line of the international communist movement at the Seventh Congress of the CI in 1935".—ed.] With the CI now no longer assisting the CP to strengthen its revolutionary resolve, but instead reinforcing the opportunist influences upon the party, the CP began to depart from the revolutionary path. Earl Browder, Party leader, was able to develop his revisionist line and to liquidate one aspect after another of the Party's revolutionary line and replace it with reformism.

Thus, in the latter half of the 1930's, although the CP's influence seemed to grow and it appeared to register many new victories, the cancer of Browderite liquidationism was corroding it from within. The excitement of the mass ferment of the latter 1930's covered up the increasing opportunism in the CP's work. The Party began to tone down its fight against President Roosevelt, chieftain of the capitalist class, and to reconcile with the labor bureaucrats as well. It eventually gave up any independent stand and took the line that the workers should simply be a pressure group to back the liberal bourgeoisie and defend it from the conservatives.

When the CP was following a revolutionary line, it step by step reinforced its work among the black working people and against their oppression. When the CP began to be corroded by Browderite revisionism and liquidationism, this too affected its work with respect to the black people. The same revisionism and liquidationism now affected this work. Just as it gave up the fight against reformism and opportunism in general and began to promote the liberal bourgeoisie, so now it extended its hand to the black reformists, the social-democrats and the black bourgeoisie whose influence it had previously fought. It step by step abandoned the struggle to use revolutionary methods against the oppression of the black people and resorted to liberalism and reformism.

The liquidation of revolutionary organization extended to its work among the black people as well. In 1936, the Party's League of Struggle for Negro Rights was liquidated and replaced with a "broad united front" organization called the National Negro

Congress. At the founding convention of this organization the keynote speaker was none other than A. Philip Randolph, the notorious social-democrat and betrayer of the black people. In that same year the Sharecroppers' Union was liquidated and its membership merged into the Agricultural Workers' Union and the Alabama Farmers' Union, the latter being strongly influenced by the racist and Coughlinite forces and organized on a Jim Crow basis.

By the late 30's the Party theoreticians were writing articles and books on how Roosevelt's policies were improving the conditions of the sharecroppers and tenant farmers and how Jim Crow was breaking down and would eventually disappear. Actually, Roosevelt's politics were directed at helping the plantation owners and almost no help ever reached the black sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

During World War II, after the formation of the U.S.-British-Soviet alliance, the CP gave up mass struggles altogether as allegedly a hindrance to victory over fascism. It capitulated utterly to the liberal bourgeoisie and went all out for "national unity" instead of class struggle. As a result, the CP even held back from any real struggle for the integration of the army (blacks were drafted into the army but once inside they were viciously Jim Crowed) and from the fight for employment of blacks in the munitions factories, allowing the half-hearted reformist forces to take the lead on these questions.

By 1943 the last Party organizations were officially liquidated in the South. This is the year before the Party was abolished and converted into an "educational association" in the rest of the country in 1944.

In the period when the CPUSA was advancing its work among the black masses on a revolutionary basis and winning enormous sympathy among the black masses, the slogan of the right to self-determination played no role in its work among the masses; this was repeatedly admitted in the CP press, but no solution to this problem was ever found. The actual fights were waged on questions of equality, against discrimination and persecution, against the semi-feudal exploitation of the sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the deep South, against capitalist exploitation, and in solidarity with the black people of other countries. And it was the CP's work in these struggles that won the hearts of the black masses, despite the indifference of the masses to right to the self-determination slogan or even their opposition (as the way the right to self-determination slogan was developed in the 1930 resolution appeared to mean that a separatist struggle was what was really being aimed at).

But the period of Browderite liquidation, from the mid-1930's to the official liquidation of the Party in 1944, provided another test of the right to self-determination slogan. Here too it turned out that the slogan of right to self-determination, although correct at that time, was no magic weapon. It did not protect the Party against the liquida-

tion of revolutionary work in the struggle against the oppression of the black masses. Browder was able to carry out the most disgusting liquidation of this work; the most disgusting fawning on the reformists, social-democrats, liberals, and black bourgeoisie; and the most disgusting betrayal of the struggle against Jim Crow; and so forth -- all the while maintaining the analysis of a black nation and of its right to self-determination. In fact the CPUSA published its first book on the black nation theory in 1936, the year of the liquidation of the Sharecroppers' Union and the year in which a great deal of the Party's direct work among the black masses was liquidated in favor of building the National Negro Congress together with the social democrats and black reformist bigwigs.

The right to self-determination slogan wasn't dropped until 1944, the year after the liquidation of the Party in the South. It was one of the very last things Browder dropped. It was dropped only at the stage when Browder was expanding his united front to include the National Association of Manufacturers and J.P. Morgan. That's pretty far gone.

National Fetishism Helps Sidetrack the Repudiation of Browderism

In 1945 the criticism of Browderite liquidationism began; the CP was reconstituted; Browder was ousted from leadership of the American communists and soon expelled from the Party. The CP faced the task of repudiating Browder's revisionism and restoring the revolutionary line of the Party.

The front of the black people's movement was one of the fronts on which Browder's revisionist theories were denounced. In fact, it was a major front of the fight that was waged against Browderite revisionism in '45, '46 and '47. Browder's theory of the peaceful dying out of Jim Crow and his theory of the reform of the semi-feudal plantation system on the basis of the good will of the capitalists were denounced. His liquidation of the Party organization in the South was denounced.

As a result of this initial criticism, and the general invigoration of the Party by the struggle against Browder, Party work was begun again in the South. As well, the struggle was taken up against the racist offensive that followed the Second World War; the bourgeoisie had the aims, among others, of driving the black workers out of the industries they had entered during the war and of splitting the workers' movement along racial lines.

However, as with the other aspects of the fight against Browderism in this period, the criticism only went so deep. The most flagrant liquidationism was denounced -- especially Browder's denial of the need for the Party and for mass struggle. Many crimes of U.S. imperialism were once again denounced. But the basic liberal-labor politics that led to this wholesale liquidation of the Party and the mass struggle were kept. [This is outlined in the article "Why the CPUSA didn't resist Khrushchovite

revisionism" in *The Workers' Advocate* of June 10, 1984. --ed.]

As a result, the Party remained weak and a revolutionary line was not reestablished. One example was that the initial increase in militancy and certain attempts to reestablish revolutionary work on various questions were short-lived. For example, work among the sharecroppers was resumed in 1947 but liquidated again in 1949.

National fetishism was one of the factors that protected the half-hearted repudiation of Browderism and gave it a militant-sounding veneer. In 1930 the tendency that came up towards national fetishism played only a minor negative role in the overall advance of the CP's work among the black people. But in the late 1940's national fetishism came up as a major matter that confused the struggle against Browderism and diverted the criticism away from the need for a penetrating repudiation of liberal-labor politics.

At this time almost everyone in the Party admitted that separatist sentiments among the black masses were nil and the movement was coming up strongly on the question of equality. And almost everyone had to admit that the tendency in the early thirties to essentially encourage a secessionist movement and put forward the formation of a Negro republic as the goal was not a correct interpretation of work for the right to self-determination. As well the experience of the previous period had shown that the self-determination slogan was no magic weapon against reformism, although this was not admitted. Nevertheless the national fetishism in this discussion in the CP was actually worse than that in the 1930 CI resolution and in the Party at that time.

To give comrades an idea of the national fetishism expressed in the 1946-47 discussions I would like to go over a few quotes. The first is from an article used to introduce the discussion in the Party by a comrade by the name of Claudia Jones. She states:

"Hence, equal rights for the Negro people of the Black Belt can be achieved only through enforcement, through their exercise of the right to self-determination." One wonders what the black people in the rest of the South and the rest of the country are supposed to do to win and insure their equal rights.

Further she goes on to say, "the goal of national self-determination should serve as a beacon to the day-to-day struggles for Negro rights." Haywood, Allen and Weiss write articles of a similar vein. It may have been correct to uphold the right to self-determination at this time, but the socialist revolution, not self-determination, was the beacon that had to be used to guide the struggle for black rights.

It is interesting that Claudia Jones slips back and forth between the right to self-determination and "the goal of national self-determination" itself. Right to self-determination means the right to secession. Self-determination, or the "exercise of the right to self-determination", means seces-

sion, the formation of a politically independent country. This shows how national fetishism keeps falling into playing with the most blatant nationalist rhetoric. If her statement is taken literally, she is putting secession as the goal of the struggle.

However, Jones does not really mean secession. But she didn't simply make a slip by talking about "the goal of national self-determination" rather than the "right to national self-determination". That was no slip of the pen. The Party was full of discussion of how the black people could exercise their national self-determination; about whether they already had exercised their right to self-determination; on the task of building the black people's consciousness of nationhood; on what a tragedy it would be if they assimilated; that local self-government would be an appropriate form of self-determination; etc. Self-determination itself, not just the right to self-determination, was put forward as the goal and defined as meaning any solution of the national question.

The ECCI in 1930 made a slip on the question of national fetishism. But its goal was the revolution, and it was searching for every means to build the revolutionary movement. The advocates of national fetishism in the post-World War II discussion gave up the revolution and were searching for some practical form of "the exercise of self-determination" to be achieved through coalition with "labor" (the labor bureaucrats), the black bourgeois organizations and the reformists. They were descending from revolutionary scheme-mongering to reformist scheme-mongering; to tinkering with the present system. And they covered over their reformist stand on how to achieve democratic rights (including local self-government) for the black people with big phrases about self-determination and consciousness of nationhood.

(By the way, Lenin pointed out that the right to self-determination, in the communist sense, did not mean federation or autonomy or local self-government, etc. The right to self-determination was the right to separate; if the nation decided not to separate, then how the common country was to be organized, whether it was to be a federation, or have autonomous areas, or be run through local self-government, was a matter for all the inhabitants to deal with. Thus communists advocated freedom for the nationalities inside the country as an important principle of democracy, not as an application of the right to self-determination. Clearly Lenin didn't regard the struggle against the oppression of the nationalities as less important on that account, but his remark does show, once again, that the principle of the right to self-determination only deals with one aspect of that struggle. See section 8 of *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, *Collected Works*, vol. 20, footnote on p. 441.)

The basic content of the national fetishism was the promotion of nationalism. It was no longer connected to flirting with the idea of encouraging a secessionist movement, that's true, but it wasn't connected to the revolutionary movement either. Foster got to the core of it when he stated that the Party must "adopt as a major task the awakening of the Negro people's consciousness of nationhood." Formerly we Marxists had thought that we were advocates of proletarian internationalism and that we fought national oppression in order to liberate the black people and to clear the field for the class struggle and to more easily awaken the workers to class consciousness. But here was Foster advocating building the "consciousness of nationhood" as the goal.

The Browderite rightists stood against Foster's views from a reformist stand. They wanted to drop the right to self-determination because it was inconvenient. They justified this with typical Browderite arguments about the allegedly progressive nature of American capitalism in the post-war period, about a long period of progress, and on and on about how blacks were being assimilated as equals and hence there was not much need to fight against their oppression.

One advocate of this was a man by the name of Doxie Wilkerson. One of his arguments against the right to self-determination is really capitulationist. He says this slogan raises the idea that the black majority should rule in the areas where blacks are the majority and you know this raises in the minds of white southerners.

However, there was some opposition to both the national fetishism and the Browderite type of tendency. There was an article written in this period of time by a man by the name of Francis Franklin. Like everything written at this time, it is painful to read because of the flawed and essentially reformist framework which pervades the entire debate in the Party at this time. But it is interesting because it upholds the right to self-determination without making a fetish of it, and even more interesting is the response it received in the Party press.

Franklin pointed out that as long as blacks were the majority in the black belt and a black nation existed there, you had to recognize its right to self-determination. But, he said, since there is no separatist sentiment, and in fact the black masses want integration and equality within the given country, the Party should recognize this sentiment as progressive and throw every effort into organizing struggle for equal rights. He held that "Our program should declare that the realization of this program of complete Negro liberation will necessarily involve a revolutionary change in the Southern states" which he proceeded to give a program for.

Now, Franklin's article contained various of the shortcomings typical of the time, plus a few weird theoretical arguments of his own. Nor do we know what became of Franklin and what else he may have

done or advocated. But for our present discussion that is not so important. The point we want to make is the wild response that the advocates of national fetishism made to his views, despite the fact that Franklin obviously displayed great enthusiasm for the struggle for black liberation and upheld the right to self-determination.

Franklin was attacked in the most hysterical manner because he did not make a fetish out of the further development of blacks as a nation. Worse yet, he held that "to the extent that ... separate national development has been forced upon them, to that extent they have suffered hideously." He advocated voluntary amalgamation of the blacks and whites on the basis of equality. His position was attacked as meaning "nothing more nor less than the disintegration of the Negro nation", and recognition of the fact that the Negro nation might amalgamate with the white population was painted as the worst chauvinism. Haywood accused Franklin of the allegedly terrible crime of advocating assimilationism.

The 1930 ECCI resolution, despite its national fetishism, welcomed any progress towards assimilation for the black people in the North, although it had a different plan for the South. Earlier we quoted the 1930 resolution highly praising the black people of the North for their lack of "national aloofness" and denouncing any idea that the communists should oppose the "progressive assimilation tendencies of the Negro working masses." But by the post-World War II period, national fetishism had grown into a deeply ingrained vice which regarded assimilationism as a crime.

From the bitter denunciations of assimilationism in the criticisms of Franklin's article and elsewhere you can get an idea of the growth of national fetishism — the important thing had become nation-building.

After this protracted debate in the CPUSA, a resolution was passed at the CPUSA's National Committee meeting of December 1946 and printed in the Feb. 1947 issue of **Political Affairs**. The resolution declares for the right to self-determination, which it now defines as some sort of self-government in the black majority area in the South, possibly together with white allies of the black people. But the resolution puts its main emphasis on the struggle "for full nationhood". It stated that "In recognizing the struggle for equal rights in the South as a movement towards full nationhood, the Communist Party supplies new power to the Negro liberation movement and also advances the perspective of full freedom for the Negro people." National fetishism had simply become a banner for promoting nationalism.

This anti-assimilationism and overriding concern, not about the revolutionary movement of the black people and the working class but about nation-building, is entirely opposed to Leninism. Lenin stated:

"The principle of nationality is historically inevitable in bourgeois society and,

taking this society into due account, the Marxist fully recognizes the historical legitimacy of national movements. But to prevent this recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements, in order that this recognition may not lead to bourgeois ideology obscuring proletarian consciousness.

"The awakening of the masses from feudal lethargy, and their struggle against all national oppression, for the sovereignty of the people, of the nation, are progressive. Hence, it is the Marxist's bounden duty to stand for the most resolute and consistent democratism on all aspects of the national question. This task is largely a negative one. But this is the limit the proletariat can go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the 'positive' activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism.

"To throw off the feudal yoke, all national oppression, and all privileges enjoyed by any particular nation or language, is the imperative duty of the proletariat as a democratic force, and is certainly in the interests of the proletarian class struggle, which is obscured and retarded by bickering on the national question. But to go beyond these strictly limited and definite historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie. There is a borderline here, which is often very slight and which the ... [nationalist deviators] ... completely lose sight of.

"Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight for any kind of national development, for 'national culture' in general? — Of course not. The economic development of capitalist society presents us with examples of immature national movements all over the world, examples of the formation of big nations out of a number of small ones, or to the detriment of some of the small ones, and also examples of the assimilation of nations. The development of nationality in general is the principle of bourgeois nationalism; hence the exclusiveness of bourgeois nationalism, hence the endless national bickering. The proletariat, however, far from undertaking to uphold the national development of every nation, on the contrary, warns the masses against such illusions, stands for the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse and welcomes every kind of assimilation of nations, except that which is founded on force or privilege." (Lenin, **Critical Remarks on the National Question**, Sec. 4, Collected Works, Vol. 20, pp. 34-35)

Omitting the Question of the Revolution

And yet, despite their profoundly anti-Leninist and bourgeois nationalist positions, the advocates of national fetishism in this debate patted themselves on the back for restoring a "revolutionary position" on the national question. Meanwhile, throughout this whole discussion, the Party was carrying out a policy of tailing after and promoting the NAACP, Democratic Party liberals such as Henry Wallace, and the reformist and social-democratic leaders of the CIO as the greatest champions of the black people.

In the debate on the national question the more rightist elements in the Party had not only demanded dropping the recognition of right to self-determination but had promoted the greatest illusions about the supposed great victories that the black and labor forces would win in the 1948 presidential elections. This debate was in 1946 when the CPUSA held that the issue was that of backing Truman and the Democrats (and had not yet embarked on the campaign for the third party led by Henry Wallace, a former vice-president under Roosevelt, since he had not yet thrown his hat in the ring and no one had yet considered him a contender -- which is not to say that this third party campaign marked any departure from the stand of building up a Rooseveltian, reformist coalition). This is the propaganda of the rightists.

And yet while the rightists were raked over the coals on the question of the existence of the black belt nation, not a word was said against this reformist illusion-mongering. Indeed, it pretty much became the line of the Party. And in the middle of the discussion a report was adopted by the National Committee of the CPUSA praising the allegedly increasingly working class character of the NAACP and orienting the CP's tactics in the black movement around working with and building up the NAACP.

Thus national fetishism served as a diversion to the struggle to root out Browderism in the Party's work against the oppression of the black people. It shielded the abandonment of revolution. For example, by the early 50's, what remained of the CP's work in the black people's movement was largely participation in NAACP chapters and in various liberal churches and reliance on the trade union bureaucrats. By the mid-fifties, the Party liquidated any semblance of independent work and organization among the black masses who were fighting against their national oppression.

In 1959 the CPUSA formally dropped their previous analysis of the Black Belt nation. By this time the dispersal of the black majority in the Black Belt was so advanced that this decision was probably correct. But it was not taken for any principled reasons. Rather the CP changed its stand in order to better mix in with the black reformist and liberal-labor marsh. In fact, instead of explaining how conditions had changed, the CP simply made the

blatantly erroneous assertion, without any explanation, that the recognition of the right of self-determination had always been wrong and had been a sign of left sectarianism in the Party.

By this time, the CP had fallen under the spell of Khrushchovite revisionism. The CP was rapidly shedding any last remnant of revolutionary spirit it may have preserved and turning into a completely servile servant of the trade union bureaucracy and the "left" wing of the Democratic Party. The task in front of true communists was to fight Soviet revisionism, thoroughly repudiate Browderite revisionism, and take the revolutionary path of Leninism. As it soon became apparent that the old CPUSA was hopelessly decayed and gripped by revisionism, the task was to rebuild a new, genuinely communist party to replace the CPUSA. This anti-revisionist task was just as important for advancing the black people's movement and fighting national oppression as it was for all other aspects of communist work.

The Neo-Revisionists Champion National Fetishism

Comrades, the 1960's was a period of great upsurge in the black people's movement in the U.S. By 1965, there was a radicalization of the masses in this movement, which began to take a more militant direction. More and more activists began to reject the limits put on their struggle by the liberal bourgeoisie and the reformist misleaders such as Martin Luther King. They rejected pacifism and turn-the-other-cheekism and took on more revolutionary forms of struggle. The sentiment developed strongly that the black masses should not wait for the establishment and its lackeys to act or put faith in minor reforms, but take things into their own hands.

But, at the same time, a number of factors resulted in much of the movement looking at the struggle from the standpoint of national struggle rather than the revolutionary class struggle. Enormous numbers of newly-awakened black people poured into the struggle; this was an extremely favorable development for the struggle. At the same time, whenever new strata of the working people awaken to political life, and millions of politically-inexperienced people rise up, every question of orientation is thrown up anew. And this took place at a time when the working class movement was very weak, and so the racist trade union bureaucrats rather than the revolutionary activists were often taken as the representatives of the workers. And it took place at a time when the ruling, white bourgeoisie was willing to turn to the intensified utilization of the nationalism of bourgeoisie of the oppressed nationalities as one of the ways of shackling and taming the mass movement. As well, it was a time when the armed national liberation movements around the world were active; this too was a very favorable factor for struggle in the U.S. and one of the important tasks of the revolutionary movement was to support these liberation movements. But, given the weakness

of the proletarian movement in the U.S. and many other places, it was easy for the idea to arise that only national struggle is revolutionary.

This spread of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism played a harmful role in the movement, creating illusions in the black bourgeoisie and various reformist figures, inhibiting the growth of united revolutionary organization of black and white workers, and holding back the masses from Marxism-Leninism, which was called a white ideology.

Not only did this nationalism have some influence among the black masses, but the majority of the left bowed down before it. This was a period of worship of petty-bourgeois nationalism and of various kinds of three worldism. In the late 60's the tendency was to paint everything in national liberation colors and to scoff at the class questions.

As the activists of the 60's took up Marxism-Leninism and the task of creating communist organization separate from the CPUSA, the neo-revisionist trend emerged. It played the role of reconciling Marxism-Leninism with revisionism, liberal-labor politics, and all kinds of other petty-bourgeois influences. It owed much to a merger of Browderite liberal-labor traditions and Maoist three worldism. One of the tasks the neo-revisionists took up was giving a Marxist-sounding cover to the prevailing petty-bourgeois nationalism in an attempt to cuddle up to the cultural nationalists or to establish a "Marxist-Leninist" cover for uniting with this or that section of the black bourgeoisie.

Consider the career of Michael Klonsky, a prominent neo-revisionist leader who headed the October League, which later called itself the "Communist Party (M-L)" and which was the foremost spokesman of the raving chauvinism of siding with one imperialist superpower, the U.S., against the other imperialist superpower, the present-day Soviet Union. Klonsky and the OL always hid their opportunism and their accommodation to the bourgeoisie, whether the ruling white bourgeoisie or the black bourgeoisie, under the cover of national fetishism and extravagant nationalist rhetoric allegedly on the Leninist right to self-determination.

Thus, even when Klonsky was still one of the leaders of the big student organization SDS and the OL didn't yet exist, he came out with a vague theory that the black ghettos in the inner-cities constituted a nation fighting for its self-determination. This was a theory once called the "nation on wheels" theory for the national territory was supposed to exist wherever the black people happened to be. In fact, if carried out, this would be a theory for the bantustanization of the black population, who would end up segregated off in economically and politically powerless, impoverished enclaves.

Later, when Klonsky and others were parading as "Marxist-Leninists" for a time, various people pointed out that this idea of the movable nation was a little too openly contradictory to Stalin's definition of a nation. So the October League, the Communist League (now calling itself the Communist

Labor Party, it was another neo-revisionist organization which always prided itself as the true upholders of self-determination for the black nation) and other neo-revisionists who were determined to cover up their opportunism with national fetishism revived the thesis of the black people in the black belt South constituting a nation.

However, by this time, the dispersal of the black masses from the black belt was so advanced that there was no material basis for the theory of the existence of a black belt nation. The wildest theoretical absurdities had to be put forward to explain how there was a black belt nation. The Communist League's leader, Nelson Peery, came up with a "brilliant" theory that whites who live in the Black Belt are really Negroes. Such was his profound theoretical contribution to the national question. We must say, it was original.

Then there was O's most famous theoretician on the question of self-determination. Harry Haywood was still around and still a national fetishist. He came up with a theory that you can't tell a nation by counting noses; it doesn't matter that blacks are not the majority in the Black Belt anymore. It's still a nation.

If you think about this, what does self-determination mean for the black people in an area where they are a minority? Now, either it means minority rule which is reactionary and violates the basic principles of democracy, or they will still be a national minority in this area. Indeed, if there hasn't been a revolution yet, such a separate area may well be an area of intensified oppression of the black people and of especially harsh rule of the white bourgeoisie.

This didn't stop the national fetishists from denouncing everyone who opposed them as racists and chauvinists and oppressors of the black people. What the national fetishists lacked in truth they could make up in outlandish rhetoric and demagogy.

Thus they reduced the principle of right to self-determination to an absurdity through their efforts to apply it in a situation where the nation no longer existed in the black belt South. Nevertheless, it was very fashionable among the neo-revisionists, for they found it useful in justifying their cuddling up with the black bourgeoisie. And this support for the black bourgeoisie was not just a theoretical issue, but it took practical forms; for example, the support for the election campaign of Maynard Jackson to mayor of Atlanta was justified as allegedly being an exercise in black self-determination. (Incidentally, Atlanta was never in the Black Belt.) This of course is reminiscent of various of today's liquidators who use similar national fetishism to support Jesse Jackson's campaign.

Thus, far from providing a revolutionary orientation for the struggle of the black people, national fetishism once again proved completely bankrupt at the first breeze. The fiasco of the national fetishist theoreticians was graphically demonstrated in the face of the fascist anti-busing

movement. In this crisis, not one of the neo-revisionist advocates of national fetishism took the stand of organizing revolutionary mass struggle against this racist offensive. Some went down on their knees to beg protection from the state, while others glorified the anti-busing movement.

Oppose National Fetishism While Carrying Forward the Struggle Against Racism and National Oppression!

The rigidities and national fetishism in the 1930 resolution of the CI were, at the time, only a minor weakness within the big push forward being given to the revolutionary work of the CPUSA among the black people. However, in the late 1940's, national fetishism was taken up and developed into a deeply-ingrained vice. It played a bad role in the struggle against Browderism, diverting attention from the key issues and providing a self-righteous cover to the reformist scheme-mongering of the time. It was another factor in the tragic failure of the CPUSA to thoroughly repudiate Browderism.

In the 1960's, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism, with militant-sounding slogans, provided wrong orientations for the black people's movement. In the late 1960's and 1970's, the neo-revisionists revived the black belt nation theory at a time when the black majority in the Black Belt had already been dispersed. They took up some of the worst and most ridiculous features of national fetishism in order to have some Marxist-Leninist-sounding credentials to justify their cuddling up with cultural nationalists, with the black bourgeois, and with various reformists.

In contrast, our Party has always based itself on the ongoing class struggle and on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. We have stood for revolutionary struggle against all forms of racial and national oppression. We have fought to unite the workers of all nationalities in common struggle against the bourgeoisie and for socialist revolution. We have always upheld the struggle of the black people as one of the basic revolutionary forces in this country. And we have had a sympathetic attitude to those oppressed masses with nationalist stands but who were rising in struggle, while we remained irreconcilable foes of all bourgeois nationalism and chauvinism, especially that which presented itself in "Marxist-Leninist" colors.

We did not claim to know everything about the theory of the black national question. But because we grounded ourselves in the actual movement of and struggle facing the black masses and because we insisted on applying the basic Marxist-Leninist principles to that struggle, we have contributed to the revolutionary struggle against the oppression of the black people and deepened our theoretical understanding and our ties with the masses. We have improved our ability to agitate and organize on this front. Today we must deepen our ties with the masses by going still further along this road. <-