

JUL 16 1975

1959 Cloverfield, Apt. 117
Santa Monica, California 90404
July 14, 1975

Barry Sheppard
SWP National Office
14 Charles Lane
New York, New York 10014

Dear Barry,

In reading the political resolution, "The Decline of American Capitalism: Prospects for a Socialist Revolution," I was surprised to find that you characterize the Japanese Americans as a national or racial grouping that is not an oppressed national minority or nationality. To my knowledge, this characterization of the Japanese Americans has never been made by the party before.

I think that this characterization has been an error and have begun to compile some statistics which demonstrate that the Japanese Americans on the mainland (not in Hawaii, of course) are an oppressed national minority. The question is rather complicated and not all of the statistics are easily available, but I believe that the evidence is clear that both in the present and in the past, Japanese Americans have faced not just isolated instances of prejudice, but systematic oppression as a racial nationality.

Obviously, the question of the Japanese Americans as an oppressed national minority is not a major one, fundamental to our strategy and program. It could, however, cause complications, especially in California and New York, where Japanese Americans have often been in the leadership of Asian American struggles (e.g., the Ethnic Studies fight at UCLA this spring) and where our campaigns have to relate to the Asian American community. I would hope that even if you do not agree at this time that the Japanese Americans are an oppressed national minority, you will remove that characterization from the political document (especially since that document sets out our fundamental analysis and perspectives on the coming American revolution) until we can have further discussion and submit further evidence around this question.

Please let me know as soon as possible why you have concluded that the Japanese Americans are not an oppressed national minority, since I am thinking of writing a contribution on this question to the pre-convention discussion.

Comradely,



Patti Iiyama

JUL 21 1975

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

July 16, 1975

Patti Iiyama
Los Angeles

Dear Patti,

Since I was responsible for the formulations on Japanese-Americans in the resolution and have discussed the question with several other Japanese-American comrades since the resolution came out, Barry asked me to make a brief response to your letter. I would like to also point out that this is not a closed question and that the party could use some information and debate on this question.

Let me outline our methodology on this question.

First of all, we rejected the idea raised by some in the radical movement and by a few comrades that there is actually some type of Asian-American nationality or nationality in formation. We decided to look at the specific cases of Chinese, Phillipino, Japanese and Korean minorities as separate groups.

Secondly, we looked for something more than simply prejudice against Asians in general. We looked for a systematic pattern of national exclusion from social, political and economic life that was rooted in the political and social structure (either temporary or permanent) of American capitalism and in the current lives of these minorities.

It seemed quite clear that there was an oppressed Chinese national minority, chiefly based on the recent wave of immigration which plays a role as a cheap labor supply in the cities where it is concentrated.

There, Chinese face job discrimination, housing discrimination and brutal treatment by the police and other authorities. Generally they were also victims of school segregation and have waged struggles for control over their schools and for bilingual, bicultural education in a number of cities across the country.

However, we were unable to make the same case for the existance of a Japanese-American oppressed national minority or nationality. When I have discussed this with several Japanese-American comrades who had questions or disagreed with our formulations, we were able to come into agreement as soon as I posed these concrete criteria.

Comrades Katherine Pon and Steve Beren disagreed with this formulation in the Upper West Side and said like yourself that they would check into statistics on the living standards, distribution and other facets of the lives of Japanese Americans. The statistics convinced them that the draft resolution's formulations were completely correct.

This does not mean that we do not believe that there was an oppressed Japanese-American minority in the past, especially before World War II. And it does not mean the Japanese-American nationality does not suffer racial discrimination.

I might add that our view of the existence of oppressed minorities is not a fixed, eternal thing. They can assimilate into the general population or lose the facets of their special oppression and separation as a group.

What we were unable to find, and what you must show to help us reverse this position, is how Japanese-Americans face discrimination, segregation, and deprivation of political rights to the same degree as other oppressed minorities and nationalities do; how this has led to the development of any sort of community that has social and economic coherence and which suffers from this form of national oppression in any material way.

This must be different from American capitalism's generalized racial prejudice against people of color. We're talking about oppression of Japanese in particular.

Of course, if you can produce concrete arguments that could lead us to reversing our position, or begin to do so, we would be open to considering leaving this section out for the time being.

Hopefully, this letter will help give you a framework toward discussing this question.

Comradely,

Tony Thomas