

**THE AMERICAN NEGRO AND MARXIST-LENINIST SELF-DETERMINATION: THE HISTORY,
DEVELOPMENT, AND APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR
AFRICAN-AMERICANS BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES 1928-1959.**

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ABSTRACT

This paper historically traces the Communist program of self-determination for African-Americans pointing out key facets of the program as well as important developments and turning points along the way. It begins with an exploration of the origins of the program with a look at Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin during the Bolshevik Party's rise to power in Russia. It follows the development of the theory under Harry Haywood at the Lenin School in Moscow. It traces the Communist International in its adoption of the 1928 and 1930 Resolutions of the Black National Question. The paper finishes by tracing the history of the program as it falls in and out of favor within the highly factional Communist Party of the United States of America.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Comintern | Communist International |
| CPA | Communist Political Association |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union |
| CPUSA | Communist Party of the United States |
| ECCI | Executive Committee of the Communist International |
| KUTVA | University of the Toilers of the East Named for Stalin |
| LSNR | League of Struggle for Negro Rights |
| NAACP | National Association for the Advancement of Colored People |
| NNC | National Negro Congress |
| POC | Provisional Organizing Committee for a Communist Party |

PREFACE

Inspiration for this work started with my introduction to a book titled “It’s Very Simple: The True Story of Civil Rights.”¹ The author, Alan Stang, cautioned readers about the Communist infiltration of the Civil Rights movement. In that work, mention was made of the Communist desire for a separate nation within the United States, a “Negro nation.” Never having heard of such a program before, I was intrigued. It did not take much research for me to learn that a comprehensive history of this program does not exist. Snippets of it are scattered throughout propaganda pamphlets, resolutions, articles in Communist magazines, and many books. As we are often reminded as students of history, everything is written for a reason. Many of the sources I found were McCarthy era warnings of the impending Communist coup. Others declared that the program was necessary, but that it was often “confused” as being something it was not intended to be. A few considered it of the utmost importance (at the time) for the Party to enact and that active struggle should be taken immediately. None of the sources claimed that the program was even remotely successful.

This paper is an attempt to draw the information in all these sources together to give a clearer view of the program of self-determination that the Communist Party touted. It is an attempt to clarify the real intentions of the program and its tumultuous life among the Communist Party. I had desired to find information on the reaction of the black masses to the program; I was unable to find any. That fact is telling in regards to the program. I was able to find a few articles from Party members who openly stated that the masses had no interest in it. The program often served as a token item in the factional Left – Right struggles that the Communists were so fond of waging internally. In the end the theory was just that. A theory developed in an “Ivory Tower” and debated amongst the intellectuals, the program of self-determination never found real traction among the people it intended to rally.

¹ Alan Stang, *It’s Very Simple: The True Story of Civil Rights* (Belmont, MA: Western Islands, 1965), 28.

ORIGINS

Vladimir Lenin

In 1917, while Russia was engulfed in conflict following the fall of the tsarist government, Vladimir Lenin returned from exile in Switzerland. He brought with him his own version of Marxism and immediately began to apply it to the Russian situation. One of the more vital modifications he made regarded the issue of Russia's multiple nationalities. In November of 1917 the Bolsheviks, under Lenin, issued their Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia. In it they declared that the national minorities of the new nation would have the right to self-determination. The slogan of self-determination played a vital role in the propaganda of the revolution under Lenin's leadership.²

As later become evident, the right to self-determination did not guarantee the right to secede. Walter G. Moss explains the situation in his book on the history of Russia, "There was, however, a catch. If the right of secession clashed with the rights of the proletariat, those of the proletariat were to come first." Lenin ensured that only one Marxist party existed, the Bolshevik Party, and since they were the "dictatorship of the proletariat," they maintained veto power over any demands for secession. In all cases the right to self-determination was subservient to the "interests of socialism."³

Moss further elaborates on Lenin's policy:

With the granting of full equality to all nationalities, including the (theoretical) right of nations to secede, and with the gaining of economic benefits that a new socialist system would bring, Lenin apparently thought (or at least hoped) that no nation would wish to secede. In the meantime,

² Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia: Volume II: Since 1855*, 2nd ed. (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 190, 193.; William A. Nolan, *Communism versus the Negro* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 41-2.

³ Moss, *A History of Russia*, 193.

his advocacy of a nation's right to secede could help strengthen the Bolshevik following among discontented nationalities.⁴

This same idea is reiterated by William Nolan, regarding the Bolshevik government's denial of self-determination to several regions following the success of the revolution, he states, "The principle of free determination was held to be saved by having 'the Party as the highest form of class organization of the proletariat,' together with a liberal amount of assistance from the Soviet Army, vote for a 'unity of will, incompatible with the existence of factions.'"⁵

Joseph Stalin

In the years 1912 and 1913, Stalin developed a thesis to apply to the national minorities within the Bolshevik program. Lenin was enthralled by the work, not only for its content but because Stalin was a Georgian, a national minority, and that fact would play well among the other minorities. Stalin elaborated on the work of his predecessors and developed a program that would guarantee a measure of autonomy to the national minorities within the Union.⁶

In his thesis, *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin laid out several key points that would play a role in the development of the self-determination policy for African-Americans. His task was to answer the question "What is a nation?" Stalin points out that modern day nations were composed of many races, as an example, the French nation was composed of Gauls, Romans, Britons Teutons and others. "Thus, a nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people." On the other hand, he elaborates, an empire of "loosely-connected conglomerations of groups, which fell

⁴Ibid., 193-4.

⁵ William A. Nolan, *Communism versus the Negro* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 44.

⁶ Ibid., 40.; J. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," vol. 2 of *Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 417n130.

apart or joined together according to victories or defeats” is not a nation. Rather a nation is, “a stable community of people.”⁷

What distinguishes a state from a nation? Stalin notes that states, such as Russia, include many different languages, but also notes “that a national community is inconceivable without a common language... thus a *common language* is one of the characteristic features of a nation.” While a common language is necessary, a shared language does not guarantee that all parties belong to the same nation. The English and Americans share the same language but are not the same nation. “Thus, a *common territory* is one of the characteristic features of a nation.”⁸

Stalin goes further by noting that a common territory is not a guarantee of nationhood. “Americans themselves would not deserve to be called a nation were not the different parts of America bound together into an economic whole... Thus, a *common economic life, economic cohesion*, is one of the characteristic features of a nation.” Stalin’s final feature notes the “Specific spiritual complexion of the people constituting a nation... modified by changes in the conditions of life.” He concludes, “thus, a *common psychological make-up*, which manifests itself in a common culture, is one of the characteristic features of a nation.”⁹

Stalin combines all of these points and declares, “a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.” He further cautions that all these points are necessary for a nation to exist and that the absence of any of these points must be followed with the admission that the nation does not exist. Later in the work Stalin points out that, “Social-Democracy in

⁷ Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, , 303-4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 306-7.

all countries therefore proclaims the right of nations to self-determination.” He elaborates that no one should deny that right through force. At the same time, however, Social-Democracy does not demand that all customs and institutions need to be protected; rather, Social-Democracy must work to remove those that are harmful to the toiling peoples. In all matter the needs of the proletariat are of primary concern.¹⁰

Stalin summarizes, “The right of self-determination means that a nation may arrange life in the way it wishes. It has the right to arrange its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to enter into federal relations with other nations. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign, and all nations have equal rights.”¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 307.

¹¹ Ibid., 321.

Harry Haywood



Source: <http://marxistleninist.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/008.jpg>

In April of 1926, Harry Haywood, an African-American Communist, traveled to Moscow for training at the Comintern School. He enrolled at the Universitet Trydyashchiysya Vostoka Imeni Stalina, the English translation being the “University of the Toilers of the East Named for Stalin.” The school was better known by its acronym, KUTVA. The University was founded by the Bolsheviks for the purpose of

training cadre from around the world. At the time of Haywood's entry its student body represented over 70 different national and ethnic groups.¹²

At the university Haywood was introduced to the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Because of the recent success of the Bolshevik Revolution, the discussions often treated the teachings as guides to action; after all, the Soviets had managed to repel the intervention of seventeen nations while simultaneously winning a civil war by uniting more than one hundred different peoples in various stages of social development within the old Czarist state.¹³

Haywood notes that,

The guiding principle of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the national question was to bring about the unity of the laboring masses of the various nationalities for the purpose of waging a joint struggle – first to overthrow czarism and imperialism, and then to build the new society under a working class dictatorship. The accomplishment of the latter required the establishment of equality before the law for all nationalities – with no special privileges for any on people – and the right of the colonies and subject nations to separate... this principle was incorporated into the law of the land in the Declaration of Rights of the People of Russia.¹⁴

The working class dictatorship as laid out by the Soviets, and taught at KUTVA, would “draw all nationalities together,” sharing their varied achievements and ultimately leading to a “universal culture.” In contrast, imperialism forcibly denied the right of nations to self-determination, “in order to

¹² Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Auto-biography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 154-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 157-8.

maintain their economic and cultural backwardness as an essential condition for the extraction of superprofits.”¹⁵

While Haywood was studying at the university, the General Secretary of the CPUSA, Ruthenberg, passed away. Two factions emerged in the struggle for control of the Party in the US. One was under the leadership of Jay Lovestone, the other faction supported William Weinstone. As the factions struggled it became apparent that Moscow, and by default, the students at KUTVA, were intensely interested in African-Americans and the struggle for black liberation.¹⁶

At the time the CPUSA had fewer than fifty blacks on its roster. In a bid for power, Lovestone traveled to Moscow and in a series of meetings, he laid out plans to expand the work of the Party within the African-American community. In one of the meetings, with the black students of KUTVA, He informed Haywood that, “as one of our bright young Negroes [sic], [you]are to be transferred to the Lenin School.” Haywood came away from the meeting unsure about Lovestone, but happy to have been selected for the Lenin School. The Lenin School was created in 1926 with the primary intent being to develop the leadership of parties within the Communist International. Haywood was the first black selected to attend the prestigious school.¹⁷

While at the Lenin School, Haywood met a man by the name of Nasanov who had just returned from the United States and had observed the condition of blacks there. He had come away with the impression that blacks in the United States constituted a nation. He and others who felt the same were eager to recruit an African-American to their cause and found such a person in Haywood.

¹⁵ Ibid., 158-9.

¹⁶ Ibid., 187-8.

¹⁷ Ibid., 188-9, 198.

At the time Haywood believed that the call for a separate Negro Nation would be counter-productive to working class unity, and while the idea of self-determination for blacks in the US was not a new idea to him, Nasanov was the first to argue for it definitively. Over several months Haywood participated in many discussions regarding the “Negro Question.”¹⁸

With the renewed interest in the situation of blacks in the US, a committee was formed, of which Haywood was a participant, to draft a resolution for submission to the Negro Commission for the approaching Sixth Congress of the Communist International. In discussions for the draft, Haywood came to the realization that black nationalism within the US was an indigenous trend and, while it had been diverted by other nationalist movements, most notably the Garvey Movement, the revolutionary potential of the trend could be used to support the fight against US imperialism. While the committee did not accept this view for its draft, Nasanov and Haywood were able to submit a resolution with the draft.¹⁹

ADOPTION

1928 Comintern Resolution

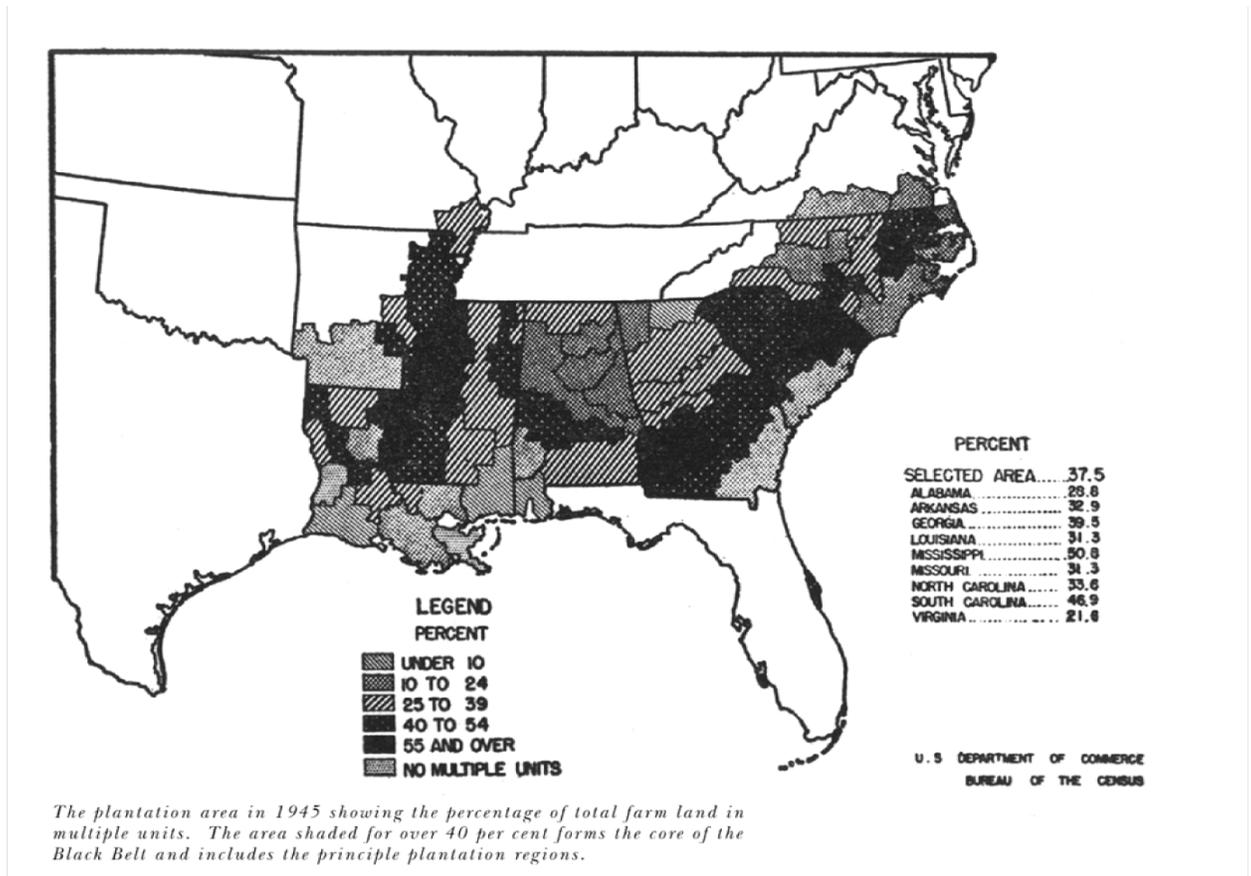
The Sixth World Congress of the Comintern was held in Moscow in July and August of 1928. The Congress convened under the slogan of “War Against the Right Danger and the Rightist Conciliators.” The right deviation was based on an overestimation of the strength of world capitalism and a belief that it had stabilized, was reconstructing itself, and would eventually recover. Debate amongst the delegates of the Congress divided between two positions regarding blacks within the Black Belt of the United States where they constituted a majority of the population. The first position held that blacks in the South were an oppressed nation and the right to self-determination needed to be raised and accepted

¹⁸ Ibid., 218-22.

¹⁹ Ibid., 228-31.

as the slogan for their struggle for equality. The second position regarded the question as related to a “racial minority” whose needs were encompassed by the slogan of complete economic, social, and political equality as was already being applied to blacks in the North.²⁰

The Black Belt in 1945



Source: Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation* (New York: International Publishers, 1948)

Haywood favored the first position which he and Nasanov had submitted in their draft to the Negro Commission, a body created by the Comintern to serve as a clearing house for issues related to the Negro Question. Haywood felt that the second position stripped the struggle for equality of all revolutionary content, and would make the Negro Question a simple struggle against racial ideology. In

²⁰ Ibid., 256-8, 261.

his mind it was an attempt to fit the African-American question into a simplistic frame of pure proletarian class struggle. The result of the second line would rule out all nationalist movements as divisive and distracting from the struggle for socialism. In 1928 the Negro Commission sided with proponents of self-determination.²¹

The Executive Committee of the Communist International, the ECCI, in line with the findings of the Negro Commission, released two documents that established the new line of the Comintern regarding the Negro Question in the United States. The first document was published in the *Daily Worker* of February 1929 with the title "CI Resolution on Negro Question in USA." The second document was the "Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies" published in *Imprecorr* in December of 1928.²²

It is worth noting that another document made it into the American mainstream before the official resolutions from the Comintern. The document was written by John Pepper under the title "American Negro Problems." The article was published in the October 1928 issue of *The Communist*, and called for a Negro Soviet Republic within the United States. In his autobiography Harry Haywood states that Pepper floated the paper in a manner that suggested it was the official position of the Comintern and that the "distorted version" of the new line led to much "confusion and misunderstanding" and that Pepper had distorted the idea into a "vulgar caricature" of the Comintern's official position. Haywood argued that Pepper was trying to grab the spotlight and upstage the move towards a new policy.²³

John Pepper would later be expelled from the party for falsifying an expense account and lying about his travels. His expulsion, however, ultimately stemmed from his alliance with Jay Lovestone the

²¹ Ibid., 264.

²² Ibid., 268.

²³ Ibid., 267-8.

acting secretary of the CPUSA. The Lovestone leadership was found guilty of right-deviations that grew out of an overestimation of the strength of capitalism and their belief in American exceptionalism. The Comintern believed that the capitalist system was failing and that the masses of the world were swinging leftward. Lovestone and Pepper held that the Comintern's belief was not applicable to America. In June of 1930 the Lovestone leadership was expelled from the Party for its beliefs. Pepper's expulsion quickly followed.²⁴

The official 1928 resolution from the Comintern was a realignment of the Party's work within the United States regarding the black masses. The document instructed American comrades to consider "the struggle on behalf of the Negro masses, the task of organizing the Negro workers and peasants and the drawing of these oppressed masses into the proletarian revolutionary struggle, as one of its major tasks." The resolution suggested methods to bring about the organization of the black masses. A sampling of these includes the recruitment and training of black leadership within the Party, the establishment of black unions, the integration of black and white unions wherever possible, the expansion of the Party's work among black women, and the fight against the agents of the oppressors of the Negro race to include preachers, churchmen and the petty bourgeois leadership of other Negro organizations.²⁵

The idea of self-determination receives only a small mention within the resolution:

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

²⁴ Ibid., 298, 307.

²⁵ *The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Black National Question in the United States* (Washington D.C.: Revolutionary Review Press, 1975), 1-21.

population. The struggle for equal rights and the propaganda for the slogan of self-determination must be linked up with the economic demands of the Negro masses.²⁶

Haywood claimed that the new line established in the resolution, “pointed out that all the objective conditions exist in the Black Belt South for a revolutionary movement of black people against imperialism... [The Black Liberation movement] could fulfill itself only by the achievement of democratic land redivision and the right of self-determination for Afro-American people in the Black Belt.” He argued that the new line recognized that black equality could only be achieved through revolutionary action and no longer depended upon “bourgeois humanitarianism.” The Party was being called to take a leading role among the masses of oppressed blacks and to integrate them with white laborers.²⁷

The 1930 Comintern Resolution

Following the Sixth Congress, Nasanov and Haywood were paying close attention to the publications of the CPUSA in an attempt to gauge the work the Party was doing among blacks in the United States. By 1930 it was becoming clear to both of them that “there was not only confusion in the Party, but definite opposition to the new line” of self-determination.²⁸

Nasanov recommended that Haywood remain in Moscow to help draft another resolution. It was obvious to them that the brief resolution from 1928 was insufficient, so another more detailed resolution would be drafted by the Comintern Negro Commission following the Seventh Convention of the CPUSA.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 278-80.

²⁸ Ibid., 321.

²⁹ Ibid., 327.

In August of 1930 The Negro Commission of the Communist International convened with the goal of clarifying the position with the help of American delegates. Worth noting among the delegates was Earl Browder, James Ford, and Harry Haywood.³⁰

The Chairman of the Commission was Otto Kuusinen. Having looked into the issue he came to the conclusion that the American Party had not overcome its underestimation of the slogan of the right to self-determination and there was uncertainty about the fundamentals underlying the program.³¹

The result of the Negro Commission was printed in the February 1931 issue of *The Communist International* under the title, "Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States." The lengthy document focuses exclusively on the need of the CPUSA to address the Negro Question and lays forth the necessary line it should take. The first paragraph summarizes the reasons for the new resolution, "the Party has not yet succeeded in overcoming in its own ranks all under-estimation of the struggle for the slogan of self-determination, and still less succeeded in doing away with all *lack of clarity* on the Negro question." The resolution takes pains to elaborate on the new line's stance regarding blacks in the North versus blacks in the South.³²

The struggle of the Communists for the equal rights of the Negroes applies to all Negroes [sic], in the North as well as the South. The struggle for this slogan embraces all or almost all of the important special interests of the Negroes in the North, but not in the South, where the main Communist slogan must be: *The right of self-determination of the Negroes in the Black Belt.*³³

³⁰ Ibid., 331.

³¹ Ibid., 332.

³² *The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions*, 22.

³³ Ibid., 22.

After elaborating on the demand for equal rights, the resolution delves into the slogan of self-determination laying forth three demands that must be applied to the Black Belt. “(1) Confiscation of the landed property of the white landowners and capitalists for the benefit of the Negro people.” This “agrarian revolution” is necessary to break the feudal system employed by the white exploiters against the black farmers and contract laborers. “(2) Establishment of the State Unity of the Black Belt.” The localities that have a majority black population must be merged into one governmental unit without displacing either the blacks or whites who reside there. Any attempt to transplant either population is a “reactionary caricature” of self-determination. “(3) Right of Self-Determination.” This means the overthrow of the current class rule and its replacement with a government controlled by the black majority with control over all issues, including issues that affect whites, and the right of that government to determine its relationship with neighboring nations.³⁴

In applying this policy the Party is urged to make it a slogan of action, not merely one of propaganda. In addition the demand must not be conditional upon the Negro Nation’s acceptance of a Soviet system; rather true self-determination must be the goal. The resolution further cautions that the demand does not necessitate secession from the United States, only the option, to be exercised in accordance with the will of the black majority.³⁵

The resolution also addresses the other nationalist movements within the black community, such as Garvey’s program which called for a mass migration of blacks “Back to Africa” where they could establish their own nation. Such reactionary separatist movements divert “the Negro masses from the

³⁴ Ibid., 29-31.

³⁵ Ibid., 31-3.

real liberation struggle against American imperialism.” As such, the programs should not be welcomed by Communists without criticism.³⁶

Linking this program with the partial demands and daily needs of the black masses is addressed in the following section of the resolution in five sub-sections:

(a) The direct aims and partial demands around which a partial struggle develops are to be linked up in the course of the struggle with the revolutionary fundamental slogans. (b) ...Every partial demand... is to be considered from the viewpoint of whether it is in keeping with our revolutionary fundamental slogans, or whether it is of a reformist or reactionary tendency. (c) Everything should be done to bring wide masses of Negroes into these partial struggles... and not to carry the various partial demands to such an ultra-radical point, that the mass of working Negroes are no longer able to recognize them as *their own*. (d) Communists must fight in the forefront of the national-liberation movement... Negro Communists must *clearly dissociate* themselves from all bourgeois currents in the Negro movement. (e) One must work with the utmost energy for the establishment and consolidation of *Communist Party organizations and* revolutionary *trade unions* in the South... immediate measures must be taken for the organization of proletarian and peasant *self-defence* [sic] of whites and blacks against the Ku-Klux-Klan...³⁷

The preceding paragraph is a reminder to the Party that it must scrutinize every demand they choose to support to ensure that it is keeping with the ultimate goal of fighting the American capitalist system. In addition every cause must be aligned with and used to propel the slogans of the Party to the masses. While doing so the Party must guard against manipulating the causes so much that they

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

³⁷ Ibid., 35-7.

alienate the masses rallied behind them. The final point demands immediate work among the blacks in the South which were severely neglected by the CPUSA.

The resolution continues noting that the Communists must ensure unity among the races within the struggle. "Their constant call to the Negro masses must be: *revolutionary struggle against the ruling white bourgeoisie, through a fighting alliance with the revolutionary white proletariat!*"³⁸

The final paragraphs of the resolution can be summed up with, "the Negro question in the North must be linked up with the liberation struggle in the South, in order to endow the Negro movement throughout the United States with the necessary effective strength," and, "it is essential for the Communist Party *to make an energetic beginning already now* with the organization of *joint mass struggles* of white and black workers against Negro oppression."³⁹

APPLICATION

1928 through 1944

Having completed his work, helping with the drafting of the 1930 Resolution, Haywood returned to the United States in November of 1930. Upon his return he was asked to draft a manifesto for the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR) which was to be founded as the nucleus of a "united front movement" around the Party's program for black liberation. *The Liberator*, a publication of the now defunct American Negro Labor Congress, was selected as the official publication for the new LSNR.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., 37.

³⁹ Ibid., 37-8.

⁴⁰ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 343.

The program of the LSNR was laid out in *Equality, Land and Freedom: A Program for Negro Liberation*, and published in *The Liberator*. The call for self-determination was presented quickly, the fourth paragraph of the preamble states:

We proclaim before the whole world that the American Negroes [sic] are a nation---a nation striving to manhood but whose growth is violently retarded and which is viciously oppressed by American imperialism. The program here presented outlines the only course of action which guarantees the development of the American Negroes [sic] to full nationhood, which will elevate them to that rightful place of equality before all and subservience before none.⁴¹

In addition the call for self-determination is made more explicitly on page eleven:

The League of Struggle for Negro Rights stands for the complete right of self-determination for the Negro people in the Black Belt with full rights for the toiling white minority.⁴²

The overall program of the LSNR was extremely ambitious. A condensed list of the demands beyond self-determination includes: the end of Jim-Crowism and all discrimination, the end of forced labor, the end of social segregation, the end of white supremacy, the death penalty for lynchers, the outlawing of the KKK, the right to bear arms, the right to vote, hold office, and sit on juries, wage equality between blacks and whites, admittance to all jobs, unemployment relief, destruction of the plantation system, cancellation of debts for farmers, abolition of residential segregation and excessive rental costs, mass resistance to evictions, a call for clinics, hospitals, libraries and playgrounds in Negro communities, destruction of dilapidated housing, free universal compulsory education for Negro children, access to higher education, rewriting of textbooks to include the true account of the Negro,

⁴¹ *Equality, Land and Freedom: A Program for Negro Liberation* (New York: League of Struggle For Negro Rights, 1933), 7-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

equality for Negro women in work, an eight hour work day for domestic workers, maternal insurance, maternal leave and free maternal medical care, legalization of inter-racial marriage, limits on child labor hours with equal pay for children, the end of segregation in sports, the end of discrimination and segregation in military service, and finally the adoption of the included Bill of Civil Rights by Congress.⁴³

The official organ of the LSNR, *The Liberator*, began publication in 193?. The final issue was published in 1934. The end of *The Liberator* coincided with the demise of the LSNR and the failure of the program of self-determination to gain traction outside of theory circles. (BB 440)

Haywood writes that the LSNR failed because it:

...had adopted a program and manifesto which included the full program of the Communist Party on the Afro-American question, including destruction of the plantation system, confiscation of the land without compensation, and right of self-determination in the Black Belt. It had called for affiliation of other organizations to the LSNR on the basis of support for this complete program. The obvious result of these rigid demands was that no other groups would affiliate with the LSNR.⁴⁴

Because of this fact, the LSNR remained a small isolated group. In addition the LSNR became a clearing house for work among blacks within the Party. Rather than the Party taking up the work itself, it often referred issues concerning blacks to the LSNR or “The Negro Party” as it was derogatively called by some member of the CPUSA. This fact allowed white chauvinism within the Party to remain in force.

⁴³ Ibid., 18-26.

⁴⁴ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 439.

Ultimately, Haywood asserts, the LSNR became an obstacle to alignment of the Party with the needs of blacks, and it remained a “paper organization.”⁴⁵

James Ford also writes about the failings of the LSNR. His position was based upon the religious aspects of the organization. The CPUSA tended to treat ministers as misguided leaders of the masses and thus worked to draw the masses away from them rather than work alongside them. The ministers were trusted leaders within the black community and the LSNR’s refusal to work with the ministry contributed to its own isolation.⁴⁶

The “paper organization” aspect is also reported by Wilson Record who states that the LSNR formulated its own program and offered it on a “take it or leave it” basis. The organization “never became a force in any of the Negro communities it entered. It became largely a paper organization.” Record points out that the LSNR’s sweeping program was intended to appeal in one regard or another to every possible aspiration of the black people, even those of the exploitative black bourgeois.⁴⁷

In hindsight the demands of the LSNR were extensive and while black people were certainly able to find some of them appealing, the radical demands helped isolate the LSNR from similar organizations and also helped to ensure that the organization would gain very little support from the white masses. The program was too radical for its time and enforced too rigidly. While in existence, the LSNR was the organization most responsible for the application of the self-determination theory. With the organization’s failure came the failure of the theory to gain real exposure among the black masses.

William A. Nolan writes, “The formative period of communist propaganda among Negroes [sic] was not productive of even modest results.” He states that Communist propaganda directed toward blacks in the United States was high in numbers with over 20% of the articles in *The Communist* in the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 439-40.

⁴⁶ Nolan, *Communism versus the Negro*, 130.

⁴⁷ Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party*, 78-82.

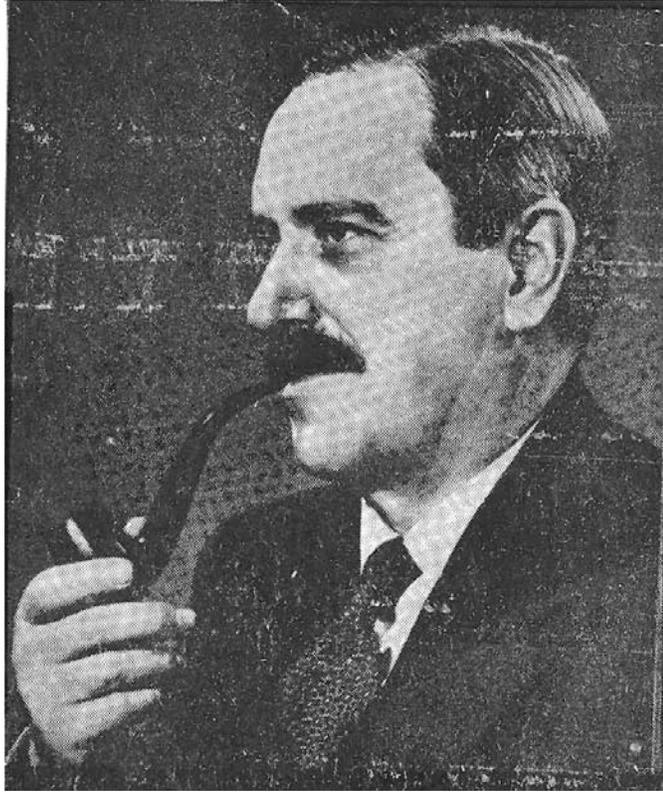
first quarter of 1930 dedicated to the problem of blacks in America. Unfortunately, many of the articles were not aligned with reality on the ground. As an example Nolan points out that calls for the legalization of inter-racial marriage may have been a well established line in theory circles, but it was hardly beneficial to the masses of unemployed blacks looking for an organization to assist their immediate needs against employment discrimination.⁴⁸

In his book, *The Communist Party of the United States: From Depression to World War II* Fraser M. Ottanelli writes very little, only five pages, about the program of self determination. He argues that party organizers in the field necessarily focused on the short-term needs of blacks and discarded the call for self-determination, “a Sunday ritual,” since the program failed to draw support from the masses. He summarizes by stating, “The experiences of local organizers prevailed, and by 1935 the program had virtually disappeared from official Party statements. As Earl Browder admitted, southern blacks were willing ‘to fight against jim-crowism and oppression, for democratic rights and other economic and political demands,’ but not to fight for self-determination.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Nolan, *Communism versus the Negro*, 34-5.

⁴⁹ Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 40.

Earl Browder



Source: Earl Browder, *Teheran: Our Path in War and Peace* (New York: International Publishers, 1944)

Haywood states that the League of Struggle for Negro Rights was superseded by the National Negro Congress (NNC) in 1936. This is somewhat misleading. The Seventh Congress of the Communist International had called for United Front strategy to stem the surge of fascism and the CPUSA had been instrumental in the development of the NNC but they never managed to gain control of it. While suggestions that the Congress was controlled by Communists existed, it was truly an independent organization that welcomed all elements of the American population who were dedicated to fighting for the rights of black people. No calls for self-determination were made at the founding convention and in fact the proposals of James Ford, a Communist delegate, were rejected on the basis of maintaining the

NNC's policy of remaining free from all political influence. Several Communist organizations were welcomed under the NNC umbrella but Communist influence remained limited.⁵⁰

In the fall of 1936, Harry Haywood returned from Spain where he had been a member of the International Brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War in an attempt to stop the spread of fascism there. Upon his return he found that "rumors" had been spread suggesting that he fled the front without permission. In his autobiography, published over 40 years later, Haywood stated his case against the slander. Regardless of their legitimacy, the rumors were accepted by many leading Communists and the result was an isolation of Haywood from leadership roles within the Party. As the primary theoretician and supporter of Negro Self-determination his isolation helped to ensure that the theory played little part in the coming upheavals within the Party.⁵¹

With the growth of the NNC and the United Front strategy the theory of self-determination remained largely dormant, coming to the forefront only in 1944 when it was officially dropped from the CPUSA's program when Earl Browder, the General Secretary of the CPUSA, published a paper stating, "African American's had exercised self-determination by rejecting it."⁵²

In May of 1943, before Browder's rejection of self-determination, the Comintern was dissolved. It issued a statement "that it could no longer determine policy and tactics for Communist parties operating in such widely divergent conditions of historical and social development, and on different levels of class consciousness and maturity as exists in each separate country." The Comintern had acted

⁵⁰ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 440.; John Baxter Streater, "The National Negro Congress, 1936-1947" (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1981), 44, 81-2.; Cicero Alvin Hughes, "Toward a Black United Front: The National Negro Congress Movement" (PhD diss., Ohio University, 1982), 107-13.

⁵¹ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 467-9, 490.

⁵² Earl Browder, "On the Negroes and the Right of Self-Determination," *The Communist* (January 1944): 84.

as a central leadership for parties throughout the world, those same parties were now being told to develop their own theories as they saw fit.⁵³

In December of 1943, shortly after the dissolution of the Comintern, a meeting took place in Tehran between President Roosevelt, Premier Stalin, and Prime Minister Churchill. At the meeting the three powers worked to coordinate their efforts against Hitler's Germany and published a short declaration stating among other things, "we express our determination that our nations will work together in the war and in the peace that will follow....emerging from these friendly conferences we look with confidence to the day when all peoples of the world may live free lives untouched by tyranny and according to their varying desires and their own consciousness."⁵⁴

Browder, then General Secretary of the CPUSA, was enthralled by the agreement reached at Tehran because it aligned well with his own feelings about possible compromise between Capitalism and Socialism within the United States in the post war era. In 1944 he published the book *Tehran: Our Path in War and Peace*. While not the first hint of his "deviation" from the traditional Marxist-Leninist line of the CPUSA it is his most elaborate.

In the book he lays out his overreaching theory regarding the peaceful coexistence Communism and Capitalism in the post-war era. In it he concedes "it is obvious" the American people are not ready for Socialism and the hope of waging a revolution against capitalism will only serve to isolate socialist minded parties from the masses. Thus such parties must subordinate their demands to those of the majority. Marxists must face the fact that American will remain capitalist in the post war period.⁵⁵

⁵³ Peggy Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist: A Personal View of a Political Life 1925-1975* (Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company, 1977), 160.

⁵⁴ Earl Browder, *Teheran: Our Path in War and Peace* (New York: International Publishers, 1944), 12-3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-9.

Browder's takes his thinking further by declaring, "The existence of a separate political party of Communists, therefore, no longer serves a practical purpose but can be, on the contrary, an obstacle to the larger unity." Thus the party should merge with larger organizations already present within the US system and make practical demands in alignment with the aims of the larger entity.⁵⁶

Taking the hint from the dissolution of the Communist International, the events at Tehran, and the success of the united front strategy of the National Negro Congress, Browder dissolved the Communist Party of the United States in May 1944, and regrouped it under the Communist Political Association (CPA). This fit well with his own view that the American two-party system made a third party divisive and relegated any such party to practical obscurity.⁵⁷

1944 through 1958

Initially American Communists believed this decision was supported by Moscow. In April 1945 French Communist leader Jacques Duclos, published a scathing article critical of Browder's actions and his revision of Marxist theory. Within the CPA the article was widely believed to have been directed from leadership in Moscow.

The scathing letter argued that:

In truth nothing justifies the dissolution of the American Communist Party, in our opinion.

Browder's analysis of capitalism in the United States is not distinguished by a judicious application of Marxism-Leninism. The predictions regarding a sort of disappearance of class

⁵⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁵⁷ Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States*, 208-10.

contradictions in the US correspond in no wise to a Marxist-Leninist understanding of the situation.⁵⁸

“The Duclos Letter” instigated an emergency convention in July of 1945 where the CPUSA was reconstituted, Browder’s “Tehran” theory of national unity policy was rejected, his bourgeois revisionism was exposed, and he was expelled from the Party. Following the convention a Negro commission was called to study the issue of blacks in the United States and to determine the policy of the Party going forward.⁵⁹

The call for a reevaluation of the Negro Question launched a flurry of articles and pamphlets from leading figures within the CPUSA. The pages of *Political Affairs*, the official organ of the Party were filled with discussion articles. Only two persons stood out against adoption of the Right of Self-Determination; Francis Franklin and Doxey Wilkerson.⁶⁰

Francis Franklin’s article, published in *Political Affairs* under the title “The Status of the Negro People in the Black Belt and How to Fight for the Right of Self-Determination,” does not come out entirely against self-determination but rather argues, “The Negro People in the Black Belt are, thus, in a *transitional state of flux* in which *development in either direction – either toward further separate national development or toward complete voluntary amalgamation within the American nation on the basis of equality – is still quite possible.*” He called upon the Party to determine which solution was desirable for the proletariat as well as the Negro people.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Jacques Duclos, “On the Dissolution of the Communist Party of the United States,” *Cahiers du Communisme* (April, 1945): 9.

⁵⁹ Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist*, 163.; Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party*, 234, 240.

⁶⁰ Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party*, 234, 240.

In this spirit, Franklin adds his own preference regarding the Negro Question.

Anyone... whose judgment is not distorted by a mechanically-held preconceived theory knows...
*[t]he Negro people definitely do not want even to hear of any kind of separation from America
either through secession or through the formation of any form of separate Negro state...
Voluntary amalgamation with the American nation on the basis of absolute equality is the
passionate desire of the Negro people.*⁶²

Franklin argues that the entire reason a separate “Negro nation” exists is because of the oppression of the capitalist system and Jim-Crow. The nationalist movements within the community are simply a result of the severe oppression and constitute a slim minority of the black population that has become disillusioned with the struggle for equality. The acceptance of a separate nation within the United States would be an acceptance of the failure to achieve full participation in the nation (America) that they helped create. Given these facts, Franklin asserts, it is imperative that the Communist Party work to encourage the white masses to extend the hand of partnership to the black masses and fight for their full equality.⁶³

Franklin steps back to the earlier work of the Party among blacks in the South.

Our Party aroused passionate enthusiasm among the Negro people through its immediate program and practical daily activity against Jim Crow, for Negro and white unity, against lynching, the poll tax, and discrimination in all its forms, its campaign for the Scottsboro Boys, it’s heroic organizational activity among sharecroppers, it’s demand for absolute social, political

⁶¹ Francis Franklin, “The Status of the Negro People in the Black Belt and How to Fight for the Right of Self-Determination,” *Political Affairs* XXV, no. 5 (May 1946): 443.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 448-9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

and economic equality for the Negro people... To the extent that we aroused enthusiasm among the Negro people, it was largely in spite of, not because of our oversimplified presentation of the right of self-determination... They generally listened politely to our exposition of this right, but treated it as some strange idiosyncrasy to which we were addicted, but which could be forgiven in friends.⁶⁴

Franklin finishes by noting that these facts do not mean that the program of self-determination should be abandoned, but rather that another option, the right of amalgamation be recognized and presented within the program. Marxists must grant all nations self-determination, but such a right does not necessitate the founding of a separate nation or even an autonomous state. If the black masses wish to fight for equality at this juncture, then that should be accepted as their current decision in relation to the question for self-determination.⁶⁵

Doxey Wilkerson's article, "The Negro and the American Nation," published in *Political Affairs* in July 1946, also came out against self-determination. Wilkerson begins by stating his view that:

[T]he "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" slogan does violence to the concrete manifestations of the Negro question in the United States, and therefore is undialectic, un-Marxian; and further, that this program militates against the unity of the whole Negro people and tends to aggravate existing divisions between the white and Negro masses of the South, and therefore is inadequate to promote that maximum working-class unity and strength which the economic and political struggle of this period so urgently require. I believe that we should discard the slogan.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., 451.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 452-454.

⁶⁶ Doxey Wilkerson, "The Negro and the American Nation," *Political Affairs* XXV, no. 7 (July 1946): 653.

Wilkerson follows this introduction with eight theses he feels are necessary to acknowledge in order to approach the Negro Question appropriately.

First: The Negro people have taken on the characteristic of a nation only in rudimentary form; they are still in a very early stage in their development toward nationhood.

Second: Marxist theory recognizes that the problem of each nation may call for a unique solution; and it by no means implies some form of independent statehood as a necessary means to the exercise of the rights of self-determination.

Third: The perspective for the Negro people in the United States is neither toward disintegration as people nor toward statehood as a nation; it is probably toward further development as a national minority, as a distinct and increasingly self-conscious community of Negro Americans.

Fourth: The overwhelming majority of the Negro people abhor and reject any proposal that they separate – in any form whatever, even temporarily – from the American nation as a whole.

Fifth: The present and probable future trend for the Negro people is toward more and more victorious struggles against the special forms of oppression to which they are subjected.

Sixth: A correct Marxist approach to the Negro question must contribute toward maximum unity of the Negro people as a whole.

Seventh: A correct Marxist approach to the Negro question must contribute toward maximum unity of the white and the Negro masses, in both the North and South.

Eighth: *A correct Marxist approach to the Negro question must contribute toward maximum unity of theory and practice.*⁶⁷

Wilkerson elaborates extensively on each point. In point four he states that the popularity of the Communist Party in the 1930's developed in spite of the slogan of self determination "which, fortunately, relatively few Negroes knew about anyway ,and fewer still understood."⁶⁸

Another critical problem of the program pointed out by Wilkerson comes with point seven, "the Negro majority-rule implications of this program serve but to drive an even sharper wedge between the white and Negro masses." The southern whites were raised to believe that the Negro was their inferior and any calls to replace the ruling southern elite with a black leadership played into the fears of "Negro domination."⁶⁹

Starting in January of 1946 and running through January 1947 the monthly publication *Political Affairs*, printed a total of fourteen articles, from various authors, related to issues surrounding blacks. Of those fourteen, eleven related to the policy of self-determination. All but the two articles noted previously, supported the policy. Franklin and Wilkerson were in the minority.

Wilson Record elaborates on "the numerous articles which appeared in support of the self-determination doctrine."

All were similar in form and content. Each echoed the analysis initially promulgated as the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International in 1928... Each made continued reference to Stalin's definition of a nation and declared that it was applicable to Negroes in the United States.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 654-66.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 662.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 666.

Each was liberally sprinkled with quotations from Lenin on the national and colonial question. Each insisted that it was not the doctrine that was at fault but the failure of Party members to understand it and apply it in their “day-to-day tasks”⁷⁰

The ultimate result of this discussion was the re-adoption of the program of self-determination by the CPUSA in December of 1946. In the resolution they did make one major adjustment, as suggested by Franklin, “the Communist Party does not attempt to impose any specific solution in advance of the form in which the right of self-determination will be exercised.” In this manner they hoped to alleviate fears that a separate nation, or state, was a mandatory condition of self-determination.⁷¹

Following the adoption of the resolution, discussion of self-determination ceased in the pages of *Political Affairs* until September of 1948. In that time, nineteen months and nineteen issues, there were nine articles related to blacks, only one, published in September, mentioned the idea of self determination.

Two articles from the time-frame are worth looking at. In July issue of 1948 an article by Theodore Bassett pointed out the failings of the Party in its Negro work. While noting that the Party had succeeded in overcoming the problems it retained from Browderism, it “had not yet learned how to carry the fight for special demands of the Negro people to the broad masses and mobilize them in sustained and effective activity.”⁷²

The second article mentions the idea of self-determination, and like Bassett, points out the failings of the Party to make any headway at all among the masses.

⁷⁰ Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party*, 241-2.

⁷¹ “Resolution on the Question of Negro Rights and Self-Determination,” *Political Affairs* XXVI, no. 2 (February 1947): 157.

⁷² Theodore R. Bassett, “The New People’s Party and the Negro People,” *Political Affairs* XXVII, no. 7 (July 1948): 608.

[W]e must face the serious fact that not the slightest progress has been made, not the slightest step has been taken, to organize the share-croppers and tenant farmers in the Black Belt or even to formulate a program for them. The successful carrying through of the national liberation of the Negro people is impossible without such organization. This situation can no longer be tolerated. There is absolutely no reason why organizing committees should not be organized immediately...⁷³

During this same period, the fall of 1948, Haywood published his most in-depth analysis of the Negro problem and the need for the program of self-determination. The book, 241 pages in length, published under the title *Negro Liberation*, was the most comprehensive outline of the program ever written.⁷⁴

While it was never officially adopted by the CPUSA as a blueprint for its program, it was well received by many members of the Party. Unlike previous documents, *Negro Liberation* used the most recent demographic and economic figures to argue its position, a position desirable to Marxists who were always trying to “apply science to politics.”

The work goes in-depth on the history of African Americans and slavery. It covers the failure of Reconstruction to complete the “agrarian problem” (land redistribution). It outlines the relationship of Big Business to the situation and its “super-exploitation” of blacks in the South. It explains the impact that the plantation system in African-Americans throughout the United States with the transfer of its system of oppression to the Northern Ghettos. Haywood cautions against the humanitarian method of breaking the system, with organizations such as the NAACP, that work within the capitalist system and are tools of the bourgeois. He states that the only remedy to the problem is land redistribution and self-

⁷³ John Gates, “The South – The Nation’s Problem,” *Political Affairs* XXVII, no. 9 (September 1948): 903.

⁷⁴ Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation* (New York: International Publishers, 1948).

determination for blacks in the South. The cause would have to be fought in unity with the white workers, who also suffered under Big Business, from the exploitation of black workers. Only by mobilizing the white and black workers in unity in support of each party's needs can true working class unity be achieved. When self-determination for the Black Belt is achieved, then true equality can be declared to have been achieved for the Negro nationality.⁷⁵

Following this surge of work, the Party continued in its failure to apply the slogan. The election of Truman to the office of President of the United States ushered in a new phase of trouble for the CPUSA. With the advent of the Cold War Truman signed Executive Order 9835 instituting "loyalty investigations" of federal employees. The Taft-Hartley affidavits brought the same scrutiny to the civilian work force. The Un-American Activities Committee began its investigations of the Communist Menace. The result was the imprisonment of much of the leadership of the Party under the 1940 Smith Act. Under pressure the Party made the fatal decision to go underground.⁷⁶

While underground the Party still managed to accomplish some work, however, nothing that qualified as mass work. In internal discussions it began to take a decidedly right-ward turn. Haywood suggests that the slogan was "getting into the mainstream." In 1956 the Party reemerged from the underground. The left faction fought to keep self-determination as an active program, but at the Sixteenth Party Convention in 1957 they were forced into a conciliatory position and a "reformist" position was taken on the Negro Question. The phrase self-determination failed to make it into the platform. Haywood among a few others fought to bring the program back and defeat the Right Danger within the Party. When it became obvious to him that the struggle was failing he joined the Provisional Organizing Committee for a Communist Party (POC) with other leftists. Looking back he admits it was an error. The new party failed to get off the ground being a group of uncompromising leftists it was entirely

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1-220.

⁷⁶ Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist*, 166-7, 203.

ineffective in even the most practical matters. In October of 1956 Haywood, along with others, was expelled from the POC.⁷⁷

A series of events around the same time doomed the reputation of the Party and relegated it to a severely limited organization unable to garner even a little of the power it had held in the past. The growth of Cold War hysteria and the propaganda related to it made Communists *persona non grata* in many organizations. Its “fleeing” to the underground had left many members disillusioned. In 1956 the release of Khrushchev’s letter outlining the crimes of Stalin instigated a mass exodus of many of the most loyal Party members. The Soviet invasion of Hungary in the same year made matters worse.⁷⁸

At the Seventeenth Party Convention of the CPUSA, in 1959, the program of self-determination was formally dropped. Shortly afterward Haywood learned that he had been expelled from the CPUSA. The Party severed its ties with the theory and its theoretician.⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

In the end, the program of self-determination remained largely a theory debated amongst the elite in the Party. It was developed on the local conditions surrounding the Bolshevik Revolution and its transplantation to US soil was unwelcome by the masses it purported to play to. Even if the program had been mildly successful with the masses, it is doubtful that the CPUSA would have remained the primary leaders of such a movement given their internal divisions and the repression the Party suffered during the advent of the Cold War.

⁷⁷ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 611-23.

⁷⁸ Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist*, 203,220-30.

⁷⁹ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 623-4.

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