

2. James S. Allen

AUTHOR OF "THE NEGRO QUESTION IN THE UNITED STATES"
AND "RECONSTRUCTION: THE BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY"

AT THE heart of our debate on the question of self-determination is, of course, our analysis of the status of the Negro people, whether they are a nation or not. And naturally, those who deny that the Negro people are a nation, also deny the validity of the slogan and program of self-determination. These have been the two principle points of debate. What I have had to say about this I have said in two articles recently published and I don't mean to go over the material given there. (*Political Affairs*, Nov. and Dec. 1946.)

I want to devote my time to taking up some of the arguments in opposition to our interpretation of the Negro people as a nation and our program for self-determination as the ultimate solution.

Two principle counter-propositions have been advanced. First that a national program must at all times be subordinated to the interests of socialism, and to the interests of the working class, and that being the case—with which we have no argument—the specific situation in this country is such that advancing the slogan of self-determination is in opposition to the interests of socialism and to the interests of the working class. Let me ask the comrades to think back over the history of the debates on the question of self-determination not only in our Party, but internationally, and see if that is not the argument which was put forth by the Austrian Social Democrats, by the Polish Social Democrats, by the Bund in Russia, in order to deny the validity of self-determination with respect to the numerous nations which made up the Austro-Hungarian empire and in all of Central Europe at that time, and also of the old Russian empire. And has not history shown that they were completely erroneous, that when the Austro-Hungarian empire was broken up it was not on some vague cultural autonomous communities, or some other similar vague groupings, but on the basis of national groupings formed solidly on a territorial basis. The same thing took place in the old Russian empire, and in Russia it was

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a socialist development, while in the Austro-Hungarian empire it was a capitalist development.

Now some of the specific points raised in opposition to the draft resolution in respect to the Negro nation. The first point is that the Negro people as well as Southerners as a whole are fleeing from the South. Yes they have been fleeing from the South ever since the days of slavery and after the overthrow of slavery, and particularly since World War I. But has that changed the situation in the South fundamentally in any sense? Has it wiped out the share-cropping plantation in the South? Has it done away with the actual base of reactionary political power in the South which contributes to reaction on a national scale in the form of the Bourbon Democrats? It has brought about some important changes creating an important Negro proletariat situated in the North in close association with white workers, but it has not wiped out these persistent semifeudal remnants of the South. We would be guilty of very harmful illusions if we thought that these remnants of feudalism can be so easily wiped out and if in conjunction with that we also thought that the upshoots of this system, and particularly white chauvinism among all layers of the population, can be so easily destroyed by such automatic tendencies without the active intervention of the class forces and of the Negro people which alone can bring about such changes.

Furthermore, we cannot assume that social development in the South, nor elsewhere, is a static proposition. Changes naturally go on and among these are changes in the relation of the people brought about by nation-wide factors such as industrial booms or crises. When there is an industrial boom in the country as a whole the tendency is for the labor supply in the present agrarian area of the South to be tapped and when there is a crisis the tendency is the opposite—for these workers to return to their towns and villages and share-cropper shacks. That we have seen from the history of our own country for many years.

Another matter raised by one or two comrades is that the Negro people have not developed a national consciousness. I wish to point out the difference between national consciousness and a national slogan. First of all, a national consciousness may not always be expressed in a national form. We see that happening everywhere. With respect to the Negro people, the form of the expression of their identity as a people, which is simply another way of saying their national consciousness is expressed in ways which are not at all clearly national, such as race consciousness. Certainly in many parts of the world, particularly as the upsurge against imperialism has

developed, many people were swept into national movements as a development of their resentment against imperialist domination. This was manifested in terms of the present upsurge and struggle for democracy, the struggle against imperialism, and these do not always start as national struggles. They develop in that direction and very quickly reach that stage in this period.

For instance, the Moslems in India have developed national slogans only in the past 5 years, since 1940 when the slogan of Pakistan was put forth. Until then it was considered as a communal and semi-religious question and British imperialism took advantage of it to split the peoples of India. That is quite a historic development. And why should we assume that in this country a national movement among the Negro people should not develop in forms different from elsewhere, when actually it is.

Another idea advanced is that Stalin stated in his book, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, that a nation during a period of capitalist development has its national slogans expressed by the bourgeoisie. And one comrade argued that since there is not a well-developed Negro bourgeoisie, and there is not, therefore a national consciousness cannot be developed among the Negro people. But is it true that in all periods of history it is always the bourgeoisie which carried forward national slogans? That is not true. Who is fighting for Chinese independence? Is it the Chinese landlords and capitalists? Or the Chinese peasants? Or to mention the Soviet Union where it is obvious that it is the proletariat which is advancing the development of nations.

A rather unusual, unscientific conception was introduced into the discussion—that of national racial minority. I am sure that many of us remember the whole period of previous discussions on this question. I always found that where someone who opposes our position of the Negro people as a nation, tried to present an alternative position to be in accordance with realities, to be scientific in its basis, tied up with current issues and struggles of the people, he has not been able to do so in scientifically correct terms. He has had to fall back in his discussion of the Negro question on really outmoded concepts such as race or pure class or labor or castes. And what else is the meaning of national racial minority? Because as Marxists we certainly cannot accept a racial category as a point of departure.

We have also talked a great deal about equality. Sometimes I think that where this term is advanced as a very generalized term in the course of a discussion of this kind, it lacks concreteness and lacks validity. One must stop to think what we mean by equality

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for the Negro people. Is that equality to be attained as a result of a general educational program, as a result of a general propaganda program? Is it to be attained through the winning of certain equal rights here and there?

In order to obtain this equality for the Negro people it is necessary to overthrow a whole system of oppression, to root out the very real and concrete base of that oppression which in the South is the semifeudal land system that exists there in combination with the trusts and monopolies. And also a question of utmost importance to us is that we cannot think of attaining real equality for the Negro people without at the same time carrying on a consistent struggle against white chauvinism.

Here, also, I wish to refer to the relation of self-determination to socialism. We have a responsibility to think not only in terms of our immediate situation, but also in terms of our ultimate solutions. Is there anyone here that thinks that with the winning of socialism in the U.S. we will be able automatically, without special attention to the question, to uproot all the prejudices which have been left over from capitalism, among them, white chauvinism? Therefore, the program of self-determination is necessary not only from the point of view of the giving of direction to our present movement and our present struggle, but from the point of view of the ultimate solution of the question.

I just want to close on one point. One comrade remarked that he thought the resolution before us was merely for the record, that nothing serious was going to be done on the basis of this resolution. I certainly don't think that is our intention. I think that it will be necessary on the basis of this draft resolution, as it is improved and revised, to launch a really systematic and well-organized discussion within the Party on the whole problem of our concrete present tasks and also our general theoretical approach.