Old 'self-determination' program resurrected

What was the CP's 'Black belt?' theory?

By DOUG JENNESS

One of the political questions around which there has been a great deal of discussion in the radical movement is the relationship between Black nationalism and the Black liberation struggle. Lending its confused gryas to this discussion has been the Lynn Wells-Mike Klonsky faction's discussion paper "The Black Belt Movement." This faction is attempting to resurrect the Communist Party's takers in the "self-determination for the Black belt.

Within the context of American radical ideas, the "Black belt" theory is relatively insignificant and its success in winning adherents to the "Black belt" program was very limited. Nonetheless it does provide an opportunity for discussing the general aspects of this important question.

The slogan of self-determination for the Black belt was not raised by the American Communist Party until 1928, that is, after Lenin's death. Stalin had come to power at the head of a privileged bureaucratic caste, and turned the Bolshevik's policy on self-determination for oppressed nationalities into its opposite. This decision, as we know, was advanced whenever the Soviet bureaucracy wanted to put pressure on a bureaucracy. The consolidation of the anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union had its repercussions.

The Comintern, the international, known as the Comintern, and one of those repercussions was the position of self-determination in the South. "self-determination has never been seen."

In 1928, the leadership of the Comin­

term decided that Black people in Americ­

a were to be considered not as members of a nation and should fight for the "right of self-determination in the South." The American Communist Party, in turn, adopted a map indicating where self-determination could be won. The party adopted a map which indicated the exact boundaries of the projected BlackLib

eration struggle.

The American CP was not given the opportunity to discuss the position before it was made its decision. But even worse, the position was adopted in total disregard of the millions of Black people who were, to say the least, not consulted. The Soviet bureaucrats took it upon themselves to decide for the masses of Black people what the slogans of their struggle should be, what they should fight for. Whether the slogan of self-determination was a separate nation and, if they did, whether or not they thought it should be it was not a slogan of the CP, it was an arbitrary caricature of the right of self-determination has never been seen.

In subsequent years the slogan of "self-determination for the Black belt" was advanced whenever the Soviet bu­

reaucracy wanted to put pressure on the U.S. government (such as during the ultraresist "third period" in 1929-34), and withdrawn whenever they saw a bureaucracy wanted to put pressure on a bureaucracy. The demand was not strongly pushed in the 1950s, and it was finally re­

cluded in 1976 in the Comintern program.

The theory behind the slogan of "self-determination for the Black belt" was that the homeland of Afro-Americans is in those counties in the South where there are Black minorities or significant Black minorities and where share crop­

ping is the prevalent form of livelihood for Blacks. A 1930 Comintern resolu­

tion indicated that only in the Black belt were Afro-Americans entitled to de­

termine their own affairs, including the right to a separate state, while in the rest of the country the CP was to pro­

ote the demand for "full equality," not self-determination, as the principal slogan.

This mechanical approach to the Black liberation struggle failed to reckon with the tremendous migration of Black sharecroppers to Northern cities. The bitter fact that Black people in the United States are oppressed as a group regardless of where they live in the country that the demand for full equality in white capitalist society cannot be achieved North or South.

Marxists disagree with the Commu­

nist Party's old Black belt theory not because it provides for the existence of a separate Black state, but because it arbitrarily creates such a state with­

out reference to the desires of Afro-­

Americans.

Marxists unconditionally support the right of oppressed nations to control their own affairs, and this must include the right to form a separate state with definite geographical boundaries. If the masses of an oppressed nation determine for themselves that they want to break all political ties with the op­

pressor state and demand their own separate state, we will support andstrug­

gle for that demand.

Afro-Americans, as an oppressed na­

tionality inside the United States are now raising the demand for self-deter­

mination. Most commonly this has taken the form of struggles for Black control of the Black communities. At this time, however, only a relatively small num­

ber of vanguard organizations have raised the demand for a separate state and it is not at this time a position wide­

ely supported by the Black community. (Although Newsweek recently rep­

orted that approximately 20 percent of those Afro-Americans questioned in the most recent Newsweek poll favored the creation of a separate state.)

Marxists argue that it is "unscientific" not to specify boundaries, that a definite homeland for Blacks must exist or there cannot be any "ter­

ritorial" basis for classifying Black Americans as an oppressed nation. It is that they are not satisfied with boundaries that a "scientific location?" Does this meet the criteria for a separate Black American nationality? And along with these objective facts is the growing nationalist consciousness of hundreds of thousands of Afro-Americans. These features are a sufficient basis to char­

acterize Black Americans as an op­

pressed nationality. It is not that there is a need to make a fetish out of territoriality to support the "black belt." The Klonsky-Wells group, despite all of their reading of the old CP documents on this question, is still unclear as to what position they would take if the masses of Black people were to demand a separate state with boundaries rad­

ically different from those "scientifically" assigned to them.

What position would they take toward the Chicano and Native-American struggles for self-determination? Would they support a separate Chicano state if the masses of Chicanos were to demand it? Where is the "historical homeland" of the Native Americans? Does their wide dispersal throughout the United States mean that Wells-Klonsky would not sup­

port a separate Native-American state if the majority of Indians demanded it? All the major Indian organizations are probably the 15,000 Indians of Alcatraz Island be ceded to them. Does this Klonsky's and Well's requirement for an "identified" location? The mere fact that a couple of years ago virtually no one would have guessed that Native Americans would demand that Alcatraz be ceded to them as a part of their homeland, is good enough of why it is wrong for socialists to prescribe in advance the territorial boundaries for oppressed nationalities.

Bay Area group plans referendum on withdrawal

By GEORGE JOHNSON

San Francisco's Bay Area Peace Action Council has filed a motion with the registrar here for a referendum this spring on whether to withdraw U.S. forces from Vietnam. The wording of the referendum will be "The "people of the City of San Francisco and the County of San Francisco that there be an immediate cease-fire and to dis­

continue withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Vietnam so that the Vietnamese can settle their own affairs." The wording is substantially the same as Proposition F, the referendum that was passed in the City of San Francisco in 1967, and which was twice used in Dearborn, Mich., where it carried the second time by four to three. The sec­

ond "immediate" and "all" have been added to eliminate any possible confu­

sion about whether the referendum is for immediate withdrawal.

A meeting to begin Feb. 23, is needed to place the referendum on the ballot. BAPAC activists expect to get the 15,000 signatures for the initiative. The decision to organize the referen­

dum was made in hopes that other areas would adopt it too. Initial re­

sponse both in San Francisco and among peace groups in other regions has been very favorable. The referen­
dum is expected to be a major topic at the upcoming Spring Conference to be held here Feb. 28-Mar. 1.

The referendum is viewed by BAPAC as an in no way contrary to mass actions, but complementary to them, and as an educational and organizational means of broadening opposition to the war, and exposing Nixon's Vietnamization' shell game.