



Commentary #7 on the Draft Party Program

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN OUR PROGRAM

The rise and development of the U.S. as one of the greatest powers in the world was rooted in the most brutal exploitation and oppression of nations and national minorities.

The U.S. proclaimed it was the melting pot of the world, a country where people of all nationalities could blend together with liberty and equality for all. But a closer examination finds this to be a cruel deception.

The arrival of the first slave in 1619 signalled the beginning of the bitter exploitation and oppression of Blacks in this country for centuries to come. The tides of immigrant workers soon found the streets of the U.S. were not paved with gold after all, except for the ruling class. The genocide carried out against the Native Indians began the vicious campaign of forced removal from their land which continues to this day.

Because people came from so many different national backgrounds, many objective differences existed within the ranks of the working class — those of language, custom, race and religion. In the process of forging the U.S. nation, some of the national divisions were resolved relatively peacefully through a process of amalgamation. This was the case for many of the European nationalities.

With others, like Blacks, this process of amalgamation or integration into the mainstream of society has still not occurred. Because of its history of slavery, resistance and other factors, a different nation developed in the South and consolidated. This nation, unlike the U.S. nation, was not able to exercise self-determination. It was oppressed by the U.S. nation. The same was also true of the Chicano Nation.

For several other non-European nationalities — most notably Native Indians and Puerto Ricans — amalgamation also did not take place.

The separation of nationalities because of special oppression served a two-fold purpose. It meant a greater ability for the imperialists to reap super-profits. Through fascist terror and denial of basic democratic rights, the oppressed Black and Chicano Nations continue to be a source of cheap labor. As well, the divisions in the working class have meant that the fighting ability of the entire working class has been held back.

The bourgeoisie used Black labor from the South to scab on white workers organizing unions in the north. Newly-arrived immigrants were also used to break strike lines. Migrant workers were

accused of stealing jobs. Time after time, the working class saw class brothers and sisters fighting one another.

In certain sections of the working class, the bourgeois ideology of national chauvinism has a strong influence. Some white workers support the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazis in order to maintain special privileges by opposing democratic rights of



Blacks and other nationalities. This disunity has meant the capitalists have been able to misdirect class antagonisms away from themselves into national antagonism within the ranks of the working class. Today, overcoming the national divisions within its ranks in order to increase its fighting ability is one of the fundamental tasks of the working class.

The Oppression and Division of Nations

What happened in the U.S. is just one aspect of the oppression of nations around the world by imperialism. By its very nature, imperialism means the oppression and division of nations. Imperialist powers like the U.S. must either expand or die. Carrying out this task means subjugating nations: finding new markets, sources of cheap labor, and raw materials.

U.S. domination of Puerto Rico has meant it has had to literally keep an occupation force on the tiny island. The Puerto Rican people have continually resisted this domination. But the U.S., in order to exploit this nation and control its resources, has completely dominated the life of these peoples — militarily, economically and politically.

In Africa, during the colonialization period, tribal groups were torn apart by the artificial state boundaries imposed on them by the conquering imperialists. To this day, the arbitrary divisions are a source of conflicts between the African peoples.

The identity of the chief imperialist powers has changed. At one time the British were the largest subjugators of nations. Today it is the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. The oppressed nations, too, have changed to some degree. Some have been able to throw off the domination of imperialism, as Vietnam did in 1948 and

again in 1975. But as long as imperialism exists as a system, the oppression of nations will continue.

While the imperialists work for the division of nations, the working class works for the genuine equality of nations and eventually for the voluntary amalgamation of nations. Genuine equality of nations means upholding and fighting for the right of all nations to genuine self-determination. A right which includes the absolute right of the nation to determine its own political destiny without interference.

One of the demands of the proletariat is the complete withdrawal of imperialist troops from the territory of these nations, and the withdrawal of imperialist support for the reactionary puppet regimes in these nations. In South Korea, for example, U.S. military and economic support keeps the reactionary regime alive. If that aid were withdrawn, the regime would fall.

The Struggle for Democratic Rights

Genuine equality of nations means upholding the democratic rights of all nations and national minorities. In the U.S., oppressed nations and national minorities are denied some of the most basic democratic rights needed to advance the revolutionary struggle. For example, workers in the oppressed Black Nation are denied the right to organize unions through right-to-work laws and KKK terror. In parts of the South, like the notorious Plaquemines Parish in Louisiana, all workers are required to have an itinerant workers pass, like the pass system in South Africa. This is used to maintain a tight control over the workers and oppressed masses.



Even outside of the oppressed nation, the national minorities are denied democratic rights. The struggle of Blacks to be able to have access to city parks and schools in Chicago is one small example. Undocumented workers, especially Mexicanos, have no rights at all. They are rounded up by La Migra, the immigration police, and quickly deported. Often all money and last paychecks are

confiscated.

Genuine equality of nations requires a consistent fight against great nation chauvinism. This is to renounce any special privileges for members of the oppressor nation and any justification for the continued exploitation and oppression of other nations.

For example, in the U.S. the dominant language is English. The bourgeoisie and backward forces say Spanish speaking people should simply learn to speak English. The multi-national working class rejects this special privilege and fights for the genuine equality of languages. This means that all people must have the right to use their own language, to be educated in their native tongue and have services provided in their language.

In this country, the main struggle against chauvinism is directed against white chauvinism. All attitudes and actions by the white working class which oppose the genuine equality of nationalities must be persistently combatted. Concepts that whites are superior and other nationalities and races are inferior can only hold back the unity and fighting ability of the working class as a whole. The working class fights for complete equality for all nations and national minorities and opposes privileges for any one nationality.

It is only in practice, in taking up these struggles for genuine equality that the alliance between the oppressed nations and the multi-national unity of the working class can be forged.

The Strategic Alliance

As imperialism is a world-wide system, the struggle against imperialism must also be conducted on a world scale. Both the oppressed nations of the world and the proletariat in all the capitalist countries fight against the exploitation and oppression of imperialism.

Each blow against imperialism weakens its overall grip. For example, when the Russian proletariat seized power in 1917, the imperialist encirclement of the world was broken. When a genuine national liberation movement throws the imperialist exploiters out, another imperialist base area is removed. Together these two fronts are blow-by-blow breaking up the chains of the imperialist system and will one day bury it forever.

This strategic alliance not only exists on a world scale, but also within the state boundaries of the U.S. It is the alliance of the oppressed nations — the Black and Chicano Nations — with the multi-national proletariat which will bring about the end of capitalist

rule in the U.S.

Historically, great attention has been paid to the national question in the U.S. by the international communist movement, because of the importance of this question. Karl Marx began this work when he wrote about the existence of slavery in the U.S. This was fol-



lowed by Lenin who investigated agriculture in the U.S. and concluded that a Black Nation existed in the South. Under the leadership of Stalin, the Communist International in 1928 and 1930 formulated a revolutionary position on the Black National Question, upholding the right of this nation to self-determination. This revolutionary position has always been a touchstone separating Marxist-Leninists from opportunists.

The Communist Party USA (CPUSA), even before it completely degenerated into a bourgeois party, was continually racked with opportunism on this question.

Reducing National Oppression To A Question of Racism

In 1930, the CPUSA took up the revolutionary position on the Black Nation and implemented it. This was the first time the CPUSA actually mobilized and led the Black masses in revolutionary struggle. It was in this period that the CPUSA took up the struggle for freedom of the Scottsboro Boys and mobilized support around the world for this case. But by 1938, the CPUSA abandoned this revolutionary struggle. They reduced the oppression of Blacks in this country to a question of racial oppression and denied the existence of a Black Nation.

Today, the revisionist CPUSA states, "Even though Black people do not now constitute a nation, we do not place any limitations on their struggle to satisfy their aspirations up to and including their right to develop self-government and exercise the right of self-determination." (CPUSA Program, p. 60)

Self-government and self-determination of what? If not a nation with territory, what does the CPUSA propose that Blacks determine? They have reduced the

question to some vague notion of "community control" and more elected officials on school boards and city councils. They have completely gutted the revolutionary struggle of the Black masses for national liberation into a reformist program suitable to the capitalist system.

But the CPUSA is not alone in undermining the revolutionary essence of the national question in the U.S. The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) states in their program, "The Black people in the U.S. are an oppressed nation, not simply a 'racial group'." (RCP Program, p.119) But they qualify this by arguing "Self-determination is a legitimate demand for Black people, but it is not the main demand" and then state that they do not support the demand for the Nation to secede "now or in the foreseeable future."

Self-determination is clearly the main demand for an oppressed nation or colony. The RCP would have a difficult time telling the Palestinian people or the Eritrean people that their demand is not self-determination. By opposing the right of the Black Nation to secede now or in the foreseeable future, the RCP says they think it is better for the Black Nation to remain dominated by U.S. imperialism (since there is not a proletarian state in existence in the U.S.) than to form a separate state. The RCP too, has taken the road of great-nation chauvinism, by justifying the domination of U.S. imperialism over the Black Nation.

The Communist Party/ML in its program speaks of both the existence of the Black Nation and its right to self-determination. However, in their actual practice, the CP/ML is following exactly the same road travelled earlier by the CPUSA.

The October League, the CP/ML's forerunner, stated in one of its pamphlets, "While supporting the right of the Black Nation to self-determination, we at the same time oppose secession...." For Working Class Unity and Black Liberation, p. 15)

The CP/ML continues to hold this position. At the southwide Gary Tyler conference in April, they put forward that the oppression of Black people is a racial question. It will not be long before the CP/ML has to revise its program to jive with their revisionist practice. But it is not surprising that the CP/ML has taken a chauvinist stand towards the Black Nation given their so-



cial-chauvinist position that the U.S. bourgeoisie is not the main enemy. Both positions stem from the same place — class collaboration.

Still other organizations — the August 29th Movement, I Wor Kuen and the Workers Congress — all say they recognize the existence of the Black Nation, yet do nothing about it. The proletariat judges stands based upon what is done, not fine platitudes.

The Black National Question is just one example of the chauvinist stands of these organizations; the same is true of their stands on the Chicano National Question. Their basic stand, viewpoint and method are bankrupt and they revise Marxism-Leninism so it is impossible for these organizations to have anything other than a chauvinist position toward the oppressed nations.

The importance of the national question in the United States cannot be overrated. The whole strategy of the revolution rests upon forging the alliance of the oppressed nations and the proletariat. The Draft Program upholds and fights for a revolutionary stand toward the oppressed nations of the world and inside the state boundaries of the U.S.

At the same time, it also recognizes that there are many important questions which remain outstanding that the Party must take up for solution. The Hawaiian Question, the Native Indian Questions, the Alaskan Questions all remain unsettled. These are all tasks of the Party in the coming years, so that the Party can correctly forge genuine unity of the multi-national proletariat and stand on the principle of the equality of nationalities.

The Party upholds and fights for the closest association of nations which will be forged, not through platitudes about equality and fraternity, but in the course of struggles for democratic rights for all nationalities against great-nation chauvinism and white chauvinism, for the right of self-determination for all oppressed nations, and for socialist revolution. ★

