

In the year 1929 the Communist Party of the United States, after discussions with Stalin and the leaders of the third international, identified the status of the black people in the southern part of the U.S. as that of an oppressed nation. This concept considered the Black Belt in the South as the area which was a key factor in the life of every Afro-American in the U.S.

Until 1929 the Marxist forces in the U.S. had little understanding and less influence on Afro-American struggles. On the few occasions that the question was discussed it was described as fundamentally a class question. Prior to '29 it was not uncommon for white Marxists to tell disiect stories and practice other forms of open white chauvinism.

After the 1929 resolution recognized the black people as an oppressed nation in the South there were big changes. The Communist Party spearheaded the giant Scottsboro struggles, fought the Herndon case and led many other mass campaigns against white ruling class frame-ups of black victims. The CPUSA was able to influence the CIO organizing drive in the '30s in its partially successful efforts to unite white and black workers against giant unorganized Wall Street holdings in auto, steel, etc. In the South--Gastonia, Atlanta, Birmingham, for example--historic steps were made to involve white workers in the battles for Afro-American rights. For the first time the Marxist-Leninists saw the black people not as a problem but as a powerful working class ally in the fight against fascism and imperialist war.

The CPUSA made tactical and theoretical errors within the general correct line. Most important mistake was the failure to encourage an independent Marxist-Leninist Party in the South under black leadership. Browderism was developing in the CPUSA. Browderism reflected the demands of U.S. imperialism, even before World War II ended, for class and national collaboration at home in the interest of U.S. imperialist plans for world domination after the war. When Browderism won leadership in 1943 its first steps was liquidation of all Marxist-Leninist organization in the South and a repudiation of the right to self-determination for Afro-Americans in the Black Belt. Along with this Browderism gave up all struggles in the North and West for the black man's rights in the Army and in the factories.

Browderism argued that the black people in the period of an anti-fascist war had exercised self-determination and decided for integration--that is acceptance of token rights for a few of the middle class and continued fierce oppression of the vast majority with the white ruling class in power everywhere. Tied in with all this was Browder's notion that the Democratic Party was progressive--an anti-monopoly coalition.

Another familiar Trotskyite-Revisionist-Browderite argument is the "Negro Question" is fundamentally a class question. Of course, it is true that class struggles, the struggles of the rising bourgeois supported by the workers against the feudal set-up--led to the existence of nations. But simply restating this does not determine whether any given struggle is primarily national or class. Supposing someone incorrectly said, trying to sound militant, that the war in Viet Nam is fundamentally a class struggle. All they've done is to wrongly describe a democratic national war of liberation and tried to narrow down the forces fighting against U.S. imperialism.

Since Browder and 1942 all revisionist attacks on Marxism-Leninism in the U.S. have emphasized attacks on the right of black people to self-determination in the South. In 1956 Gates and Co. repudiated self-determination at the 16th National Convention. In 1959, at the 17th Convention, Gus Hall and friends did the same.

The latest attacks on the right to self-determination comes from the Progressive Labor organization.

We have received a mimeographed copy of a meeting of the National Co-ordinating Committee of Progressive Labor which attacks the position of Hammer & Steel by name on the question of self-determination. This was not published for public consumption. But it is well known that some PL leaders have attacked H&S on many occasions and refused to hold discussions with us. We have always been ready for discussions with them. We have quoted them fairly in H&S. H&S does not believe in publicly identifying all leading forces as does PL. We use only names of people who have publicly identified themselves in PL's pre-Convention discussion.

Here is a quote from June 14, 1963 letter of the Chinese Central Committee called, "A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement." "The oppressed nations and peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America are faced with the urgent task of fighting imperialism and its lackeys. History has entrusted to the proletarian parties in these areas the glorious mission of holding high the banner of struggle against imperialism, against old and new colonialism and for national independence and people's democracy, of standing in the forefront of the national democratic revolutionary movement and striving for a socialist future."

And here is a quote from the PLCC document mentioned above called "The Black Liberation Struggle and the Right to Revolution" issued only for PL leaders: Mort: question to Milt Rosen, page 16, "In your opinion a national liberation struggle can only be led by the bourgeois?" Milt Rosen: "In the main thats right." Morty: "Well who led the Cuban revolution? Didn't the working class play a decisive role?" Chorus: "No, No." Is it not clear that PL leaderships line on vanguard parties and national liberation are somewhat different?

In Vol. 4, No.3 of Progressive Labor is an article by William Epton which is evidently intended to be the basis for the main resolution on the Afro-American question at PL's convention.

Epton states, "This quote from Haywood does not imply that we (PL) have arrived at the conclusion that the black people are a nation." Epton also says, "We state the black people and... their organizations have the right to self-determination, i.e. the right, based upon their own experience their struggles and their organization and program to determine their position in this country."

Put these two quotes together and what have we got--Browder's line that there is no black nation, that self-determination is not based on objective reality but on subjective desires, that self-determination can be exercised under conditions where imperialist armies occupy black territory.

Milt Rosen quotes Browder word for word, without citing his source, in Bulletin #1 of PL when he says, "The Negro people have already begun to determine their own destiny." Rosen drives home his revisionist line in the Co-ord. Committee's private discussion, "I don't think we have a national liberation movement in the U.S. today--although I've used the term as much as anyone else."

Here is William Epton at the same Co-ord. Committee meeting, "I think that the revolution will take place in this country with the mass of the Negro people in the Democratic Party. I don't know if in other revolutionary situations the mass of the people remained in the main bourgeois Party." Epton again, Vol. 4, #3, "SNCC could under present conditions organize the rural Negroes into political groups with the prospect of forming a third party in the South. The base has already been laid and is being laid thru the voter registration drives." The same awe of U.S. imperialism and its democratic pretenses in the political and electoral field exists in PL as in the CPUSA. Here we see the same errors re the Democratic Party. No wonder that even the theoretical possibility of a victorious national liberation struggle by Afro-Americans in the South while the white ruling class continues to rule the North and West is inconceivable to PL leaders, just as it was inconceivable to many people that the Cuban revolution could exist 90 miles from U.S. shores.

Here is how Milt Rosen sees the Afro-Americans centuries old cry for land in a quote from the PLCC meeting. Rosen was polemicizing against Malcolm X position and said, "They want the white ruling class to give them territory and land where they can go about setting up their black bourgeoisie." What about the black

sharecroppers, the black agricultural workers in the South whose land has been stolen and the farmers exiled to slums in the North? Milt Rosen seems to sneer at their aspirations when he says, "At this stage I don't see a successful legislative battle to get the southern oligarchy to cede land territory to black people."

In January Hammer & Steel published a few comradesly critical comments on PL's actions in Harlem of last July. We felt that their theoretical errors were leading them into illusions about the democratic pretenses of U.S. imperialism, into needless court cases as well as exposing cadres to long prison terms. We did not feel it correct to remain silent when PL was appealing for financial and other support from Africa, Asia and Europe on the false basis that their actions in Harlem had any real effect on that struggle in July. In short, we felt that PL's line and actions in Harlem were based on overestimation of U.S. imperialism strategically and underestimation of it tactically.

Here is what PL leaders said on this question in their CC discussion:

William McAdoo, page 28, "I would like to talk about Harlem--the period from the 18th of July to the 25th of July. In that period we made a lot of mistakes and we did a lot of things that were correct. We gained a small victory and a big defeat. The main reason was because there was no concept of the relationship of forces there."

Fred Jerome, page 29, speaking about Harlem, "McAdoo mentions but didn't stress--our lack of a theoretical position at that point."

Selma Sparks, page 31, still on Harlem, " I don't want to be second guessing you but the defeat came about because there was a lack of a base in the community. You must have something of your own. If we have something of our own it must be based in our community, otherwise its not ours. No white led, white run organization can have a base in the black community."

Milt Rosen, page 32, "We didn't make the breakthrough precisely because the black cadre that we had in this particular situation reflected not only their own weaknesses of the Marxist-Leninist movement and did not have the strength or the ideological wherewithall to make this breakthrough. I dare say if we would have done all the things everybody wanted us to do we would have made that breakthrough even though PL is a white organization."

Larry Phelps, page 33, "We were involved in a number of issues in Monroe--the contacts were as good as we could expect in the situation. But there was no consistent attitude toward political agitation. That is the major weakness of our organization."

We leave it to the reader whether the above quotes from PL leaders substantiate the criticism by H&S that PL leadership takes action without ideological preparation. From these quotes we gather an impression of a white middle class organization involving black personnel in dangerous, adventurous actions in order to satisfy the white middle class fund givers that something (not too theoretical, not too disturbing to the status quo) but something is "being done" on the Afro-American question.

Marxist-Leninists cannot uphold the position that U.S. imperialism is the main enemy of all peoples and go along with PL's tactics of exposing everybody and anybody to the imperialist courts and police. A police spy has been editing the PL magazine. PL rationalizes this development by citing only the individuals fear of jail. In this respect PL differs little from the CPUSA. They are unable to learn from mistakes, unable to critically examine their illusions about class rule in the U.S. and the need for protecting forces from the police and FBI.

The Afro-American people increasingly identify their liberation struggles with the national liberation struggles of the African peoples as well as those of Asian and Latin American peoples. This is a great positive development which will grow stronger. PL's statements that black liberation will never defeat capitalism in the U.S. "even in another 100 years" reflects fear of the Afro-American liberation movement (which according to Rosen doesn't exist, but they fear it).

The argument that state power for black people interferes with black and white working class unity is false. Unity requires equality. Equality means guns and state power. The Afro-American liberation struggle is an Achilles heel for U.S. imperialism.

Hammer & Steel appeals to all honest forces in the left to unite in support of the Marxist-Leninist line since 1929, the policy of self-determination. We urge all delegates to the PL convention to reject modern revisionism and neo-Browderism on the Afro-American question. Whatever happens H&S sees no useful purpose compromising principle on this matter. We support, encourage and try to aid every blow of the Afro-American people for national liberation.

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