

S P A R T A C I S T L E A G U E O F T H E U . S .  
I N T E R N A L D I S C U S S I O N B U L L E T I N

On the Black and National Questions

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by A. Lumumba

Comrades,

No one in the 1933 or 1939 discussions regarded self-determination as inapplicable to the American black question. A close examination of the 1933 exchange reveals that Swabeck opposed self-determination as a slogan. He felt that self-determination as a slogan ran counter to the general direction of the black movement, which was "toward equality in the social, political and economic sense."

The real dispute of 1933 was over the implications of this statement - "It is therefore our opinion that the...American Negroes position and interest are subordinated to the class relation of the country and dependent upon them. This is one of the issues upon which I base my opposition to MB#5.

The second is the dogmatic and perverse allegation that since blacks do not constitute the embryonic characteristics of nationhood in the European sense - self-determination does not apply.

1933 provides us with an implicit definition of self-determination as understood by the Bolshevik Trotsky. Swabeck erroneously thought that the Stalinist use of this slogan was based on the estimate of Blacks as a national minority. As a consequence his initial remarks sought to prove the contrary. Trotsky simply dismissed these arguments as insufficient and proceeded to advance a definition that destroys Swabeck's opposition on the theoretical level "The negroes are a race and not a nation....Nations grow out of the racial material under definite conditions." Swabeck remained unconvinced on self-determination as a slogan but as a right his viewpoint is emphatic - "We do not contest the right of the Negroes to self-determination." Implicit in this exchange is the simplistic definition of self-determination as the democratic right of a people to secession from an oppressive relationship, be it economic or social.

The third is the equation of self-determination with segregation:

"To propose to the mass of workers and negroes the idea of self-determination would be wrong. For the decisive fact in the acceptance of white supremacy is the acceptance of segregation. The slogan of self-determination requires the desire for segregation as its foundation." (MB#5 p.22)

I will not comment on this point, as I will respectfully assume that no one in the SL, least of all members of the PB, will defend it.

The fourth - application of self-determination to the Hebrew speaking people of Israel. Israel is an oppressor nation. Our slogan for the people of Israel should be: Overthrow your oppressors and restore the national rights of the Palestine Nation! On the contest of the Arab and Israeli bourgeoisies - revolutionary defeatism. Self-determination does not apply to the people of an oppressor

state.

And fifth is the concept of "pseudo-nationalism" as expressed in Black and Red. This concept derives from the arbitrary formula imposed upon us by Fraser and his "militant negroes." MB#5 declares over the heads of the most militant blacks that we must fight for "integration/assimilation" by the "standard of white supremacy."

The latter day disciples of Fraser are no less chauvinist. Having given the Black masses a role upon which we dare not deviate (as the democratizers of the working class) they say: "Such nationalism is devisive and interferes with the development of class consciousness." (Black and Red)

Sixth - the counterposing of national separatism, i.e. self-determination to the struggle for democratic rights. Trotsky fought this in 1933, maintaining that the party should not base its analysis on the stasis quo - that is the general norms of struggle under the pressures of racism. He left room for support of the national separatists in their struggle to "carve out a piece of the great and mighty states."

For Trotsky, the interests and position of Black people were not subordinate to any abstract class relations. As to the references of reactionary and divisiveness - he considered them to be "an adaptation to the ideology of the white workers" i.e. racism. He reserved this diatribe for the white workers, not the nationalists: "The American worker is indescribably reactionary." I can't agree with Trotsky more - if anyone is reactionary it is the workers - the basis of American Black nationalism is his (the white worker's) treatment of blacks. It is the racism of the white workers that is divisive in the struggle for socialism, not the struggle for national separatism.

A. Lumumba

[received 20 January 1975]

January 29, 1975

LETTER TO THE SL

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Comrades/SL,

I wish to inform you of my statement of differences with the Party Line of the "White Question"--submitted 1/75 (Open Letter To The PB).

As of this time I have not received a response. My noting this does not imply any deliberateness on the part of the Political Bureau, for I respect the pressing exigencies of our organization.

I am therefore proposing that those of you, who have the time and intellectual resources undertake to answer my letter. In other words this letter should be looked upon as a direct challenge to the ranks of the SL.

It is my opinion that many of you have been masquerading as communist intellectuals --

Many of you are petty-bourgeois loyalist and chauvinist hiding behind historical analogies. I wish to expose you -- once and for all.

I hesitate to name you only because some can be salvaged in political exchange if given the proper chastisement. I am quite willing to oblige you in this endeavor.

So as I present the views please step forward in writing.

1. equation of self-determination with segregation (MB#5)
2. application of self-determination to the oppressor state of Israel (PB member)
3. Split and wreck black partisan organizations (NY Exec. member)
4. Blacks should aspire to equality according to the standards of white supremacy (MB#5)
5. Black nationalism/Pan Africanism is reactionary (SYL-Boston)
6. Conditional independence of Puerto Rico (NY Exec. member)

Also I extend a special invitation to Comrade Big G. who thinks I have capitulated to a petty-bourgeois milieu to write and explain to me what Judith Shapiro means by the woefully ignorant SCer and the sophisticated Shachtmanites (Black Fraction report, received 14-10-74).

Those of you not mentioned by name should not entertain the hopes that I am just fishing around. If need be I will smoke you out.

For Black Power Now!

A. Lumumba

by Joseph Seymour

Underlying Trotsky's tentative advocacy of self-determination for American blacks was the belief the blacks constituted a geographically concentrated, embryonic peasant-nation, and not a caste concentrated in the reserve army of the unemployed. Comrade Samuels' letter in WV No. 62 is definitive on this point.

In contrast to the methodology of Trotsky, Swabek and Johnson, comrade Lumumba's support for self-determination is indifferent to the concrete social character and role of American blacks. The core of comrade Lumumba's position is contained in the following passage:

"Implicit in this exchange is the simplistic definition of self-determination as the democratic right of a people to secession from an oppressive relationship, be it economic or social."

With the partial exception of the present-day SWP, no organization claiming to be Marxist has ever held that the right to a separate state is applicable to every caste, religious minority, nationality or immigrant group. Yet this appears to be comrade Lumumba's position. The logic of his position would apply self-determination not only to American blacks, but to Indians and Chicanos in the U.S., Indians in East and Southern Africa, Hindu untouchables and Muslims in India, Tamils in Ceylon, the Barakumin in Japan, Maoris in New Zealand, Irish in England, Algerians in France, Jews in the USSR and so on.

Democratic rights (including that of self-determination) do not derive from the ideal of eliminating oppression; they are based on the actual possibilities made available through the development of human society, centrally of its productive forces. "Right can never stand higher than the economic structure of society and the cultural level conditioned thereby" (Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program). A democratic "right" which is impossible to achieve is not a right; it is a utopian ideal.

The SL/US opposes self-determination for American blacks not because it divides the working class, not because whites are hostile to the demand, but because and only because it is impossible to achieve. And this impossibility is not determined by the present backward, racist attitudes of the white working class, but by the objective way in which blacks are integrated into the American social economy. If a separate state were possible for American blacks, the SL/US would certainly support the right of self-determination; we might even advocate that blacks take the separatist path.

It is unclear both from comrade Lumumba's document and his presentation in the January Boston debate whether he believes a serious struggle to "carve out" a black state from the territorial United States can be waged, whether such a program can be realized, or even whether the struggle for a separate black state could be an important component of an American socialist

revolution as was the struggle for a Ukrainian state in the Bolshevik Revolution or for a Basque nation-state could be in Spain today.

The SL/US uses the term "pseudo-nationalist" with respect to most black radical organizations because virtually none of these organizations has a program for genuine national liberation, a program centered on the demand for a separate black state. American black "nationalist" organizations do not campaign for a separate state not because they would regard such a development as undesirable, but because they recognize that it is unattainable. The real program of American black nationalism is for certain forms of separatism, primarily at the level of political organization, within the framework of the American state and accepting certain forms of objectively imposed racial integration (e.g., at the point of production). The political character of American black nationalism ranges from religious mysticism (the Black Muslims) to Democratic Party ethnic politics (Baraka in his pro-Gibson phase) to anti-cop terrorism (Black Liberation Army) to dual-unionist revolutionary syndicalism (League of Revolutionary Black Workers) to multi-vanguardist Maoism (Black Workers Congress).

The hostility of the SL/US to black nationalism does not derive from our opposition to self-determination, which none of the nationalist groups stand for in a serious way. Given the impossibility of a separate state, nationalist ideology and separatist practice does divide the American working class of which blacks are necessarily a strategically important part. Independently of the question of a separate black state, central programmatic elements of black nationalism--multi-vanguardism, advocacy of capitalist state intervention into the trade unions, Pan-African culturalism--are profoundly hostile to communism. Even if the SL/US reversed its position on a separate black state, the hostility between black nationalism and Trotskyism would remain fundamentally unchanged.

Of course, it is true that nationalist/separatist attitudes common among the black masses reflect the pervasive racism of the white population, including the proletariat. Black nationalism also has an objective basis in the aspirations of the black petty bourgeoisie for an expanded role in the American parliamentary/state bureaucracy. In terming aspects of black nationalism reactionary, we do not refer to individual subjective motivation, but to the objective effect of the black nationalist movement upon the struggle for a communist society. The failure of subjectively revolutionary black militants, organized through the communist vanguard, to seek to win over, to change backward, racist white workers--and not simply to condemn them--is an objective obstacle to an American proletarian socialist revolution. And only a proletarian socialist revolution can end the oppression of blacks as blacks. There is no separatist path for the liberation of American blacks. And this is determined by objective conditions, and not our subjective desire that it should be so. On the contrary, the course of the American socialist revolution would be far, far easier if blacks were in truth an

embryonic nation, for whom territorial state-separatism were possible. If this were the case, the poisonous racial divisions within the American working class could be eliminated, in a sense, through a "short cut." But this is not the truth, it is not a real possibility, it is a fantasy--a kind of opiate for militant blacks who hate a racist society they believe is implacable, permanent, unchanging.

--6 March 1975

copies to Lumumba, Ron A., Gerald,  
on 12 March 1975  
also Reuben

A RESPONSE TO THE "OPEN LETTER" AND THE POLITICAL  
POSITIONS PUT FORWARD BY COMRADE LUMUMBA IN THE  
SAMUELS/LUMUMBA DEBATE AT BOSTON

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by Gerald Smith

Comrade Lumumba has, unfortunately, always had fundamental political differences with the SL. Due to severe personal problems and, yes, pressure from a petty bourgeois milieu, his political differences have been aggravated and exaggerated. Thus the extremely hostile and sometimes even apolitical character of the letter to the comrades of the SL (January 25, 1975). Nevertheless it is my opinion that comrade Lumumba is a serious and disciplined communist, and should be treated as such, regardless of the tone of his letter. I will therefore attempt to deal with the essence of the political differences. Comrade Lumumba raised his differences (officially) in his letters to the PB and the SL, and at the Samuels/Lumumba debate in Boston. I am fairly optimistic that, as a result of the discussion, we will fuse on a higher level of unity.

Trotsky and Self-Determination

I find it strange that someone that has argued in the past that we should not call ourselves Trotskyist, and in fact calls himself a "nationalist," should use the argument of the "Bolshevik Trotsky" to support his political positions. Even the by-then revisionist SWP was forced to admit in their introductory commentary in "The Negro Question in America" in Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination:

"As he himself [Trotsky-G.S.] stated in the discussion, he had never studied American race relations, and the views he presented were based only upon 'general considerations' ... and 'upon the arguments brought forward by the American comrades' (which he found insufficient or dangerously wrong)." (Emphasis mine.)

Trotsky also said:

"I am not sure if the Negroes do not also in the Southern states speak their own language." (ibid. p. 14.)

Once again the SWP admits:

"In the first of the three discussions Trotsky rejected all arguments against supporting the right of Negroes to self-determination (along with a few poor arguments in favor of it." (ibid. p. 22, emphasis mine.)

and the prognosis of Carlos:

"We saw that when the Negroes were brought to the South they stayed there for many decades. When the war came, many emigrated to the North and there formed a part of the proletariat. That tendency can no longer operate. Capitalism is no longer expanding as it was before. As a matter of fact, during the depression many of them went back to the farms. It is possible that instead of a tendency to emigrate, there will now be a tendency for the Negro to stay in the South." (ibid., pp. 27-28, my emphasis.)

History has proven that Carlos was wrong, and that the exact opposite is in fact the case.

Comrade Lumumba! Do you think that we, as serious Marxists, should accept the political positions and prognosis of people who were, if you please, "woefully ignorant" of the specifics of the Black question, from the simplest of facts (Negro language) to the actual historic dynamic of the Black movement in the U.S.? No comrade, your use of Trotsky's endorsement of the right of Black people in the U.S. to self-determination is an attempt to use the weaknesses of Trotsky against the essence of Trotskyism.

### What Is Self-Determination?

The second point of difference that comrade Lumumba raises is that "...the dogmatic and perverse allegation that since Blacks do not constitute the embryonic characteristics of nationhood in the European sense [whatever that means--G.S.] --self-determination does not apply." is an incorrect attitude towards the question.

This points to the comrade's confusion on what the right of self-determination really means, and why and when Marxists advocate this right. I don't want to be "dogmatic," but Lenin says:

"Consequently, if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or "inventing" abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state." (Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," Collected Works, Vol. 21, my emphasis.)

Comrade Lumumba agrees that Blacks are not a nation, or even an embryonic nation. Then how does he justify the application of the right of self-determination to Blacks? Essentially by re-defining it: He sees the definition of self-determination as

"...the democratic right of a people to secession from an oppressive relationship, be it economic or social." (Open Letter to the PB, by comrade Lumumba, my emphasis.)

The first thing comrade Lumumba should explain to us is what he means by "a people." Are Puerto Ricans in the U.S. "a people?" How about Chicanos? Were Jews, before 1948, "a people?" This definition is at best a sloppy formulation and at worst anti-Leninist. But since we are told by comrade Lumumba that, "Lenin didn't have the last word on the national question," I would like to know if comrade Lumumba considers Lenin's definition wrong or just not "flexible" enough. Trotsky made a statement in Whither France? which I think can serve as a good warning to comrade Lumumba: "Theoretical sloppiness always takes cruel vengeance in revolutionary politics." The only thing "implicit

in this exchange" (between Trotsky and the SWP leaders) was that they did not possess a working knowledge of the concrete peculiarities or the social character of Blacks in the U.S.

### In Defense of the Fraser Document

The third point comrade Lumumba raises is an attack on Marxist Bulletin No. 5, For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question, by Fraser. Comrade Lumumba says that Fraser (and the SL) equate self-determination with segregation. Nothing could be further from the truth! Being one of the "latter day," "chauvinist," "disciples of Fraser," I will try to explain what Fraser really said. Fraser writes:

"To propose to the mass workers and Negroes the idea of self-determination would be wrong. For the decisive fact in the acceptance of white supremacy is the acceptance of segregation. The slogan of self-determination requires the desire for segregation at its foundation. Upon this foundation national consciousness is built." (p. 22, original emphasis.)

Is Fraser here or any place else in his document equating self-determination with segregation? Obviously not! What he is saying is that the slogan of self-determination requires the desire (or acceptance at minimum) for (or of) segregation--on the part of racist white people, "Nationalists" and modern day Booker T. Washingtons who are saturated with defeatism, and pseudo-Marxists who have given up on the perspective of waging a united, i.e., Black and white, class struggle and have liquidated the Black question by adapting to nationalism (because after all "who are we to tell Black people what to do")--as its basis. What Fraser is saying is that if a racist pro-segregationist cracker was asked to support the right of self-determination for Black people, he would probably say: "Sure, I'll support it. I don't want them god damn niggers livin' round me no way." To say that one phenomena is the basis, or foundation, for another does not equate them. For instance, to say national oppression is the foundation of nationalism (of the oppressed nation) does not equate the two. What Fraser (and the SL) does say is that ultimately both segregation and separation in the U.S., where there is no material base for the separation of the Black section of the population from the white section, will have the same effect in the class struggle, i.e., dividing the working class along race lines. The goals of a Black separatist and a white segregationist coincide on only one point--separate existence of the two races. On all other points their goals are diametrically opposed.

Point #4 from the letter to the Comrades of the SL (January 29, 1975) is totally off-the-wall. It is necessary to overcome a feeling of deep disappointment to deal with such a gross falsification. Comrade Lumumba claims that Fraser holds the position that, "Blacks should aspire to equality according to the standards of white supremacy." Here's what Fraser really says:

"What is the problem of consciousness among Negroes? Some Negroes are not conscious of their right to equality. They are victims of the pressure of white supremacy and through the B. T. Washington influence accept the social status of inequality as right and proper. They must strive to be the equivalent of whites by the standards of white supremacy." (p. 21, emphasis mine.)

Fraser points out very clearly that this feeling on the part of some Blacks (that they should aspire to be equal by the standards of white supremacy) is a problem that blocks the development of consciousness, not something that should be aspired to.

### Self-Determination and the Hebrew Nation

On the Israel/Arab question comrade Lumumba again makes a fundamental error. He claims that because the Hebrew-speaking nation is the oppressor nation they have forfeited their right to self-determination. But Lenin says:

"...the tasks of these parties [workers parties--G.S.] with regard to national policy must be two fold: recognition of the right of all nations to self-determination..."

and later that

"...(in reality, the recognition of the right of all nations to self-determination implies the maximum of democracy and the minimum of nationalism.)" (Both quotes from Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," Collected Works, Vol. 20, emphasis mine.)

Lenin did say:

"The general and fundamental principles of Marxism undoubtedly imply the duty to struggle for the freedom to secede for nations that are oppressed by 'one's own' nation, but they certainly do not require the independence specifically of Holland to be made a matter of paramount importance."

In the case of the Middle East the question of the right of self-determination for the Hebrew-speaking nation is of paramount importance due to the unstable situation there (look at Cyprus). This is why we call for the creation of a bi-national, Hebrew-Arab, state. Instead of pushing the Jewish working class into the arms of its capitalist class by calling for some sort of classless "Arab revolution," we seek to drive a wedge between the Jewish working class and its capitalist class by promising the Hebrew speaking workers that we will not trample upon their national rights and by putting forward the only genuinely democratic solution--the right of self-determination for all nations through permanent revolution.

### Independence of the Black Movement

In the Lumumba/Samuels debate in Boston comrade Lumumba put forth to me arguments that, if implemented, could be far more hazardous than the slogan for self-determination. Comrade Lumumba argues:

- (1) That the Black movement should be independent, i.e., not "subservient" to the proletarian movement.
- (2) That the SL gives the Black movement a role, which is to "democratize" the working class.
- (3) "As it stands now we cannot recruit one nationalist--he'll have to give up his nationalism." (Comrade Lumumba in the Lumumba/Samuels debate in Boston)

"Independence?"--But this is an abstraction if we pluck it out of the history of the Black movement. What we have seen concretely is that if the Black movement does not develop a class perspective it will either fall directly into the hands of the capitalist class (Baraka's support to Gibson, Bobby Seale running on the Democratic ticket, etc.) or it will wind up in the blind alley of individual terrorism (BLA, etc.). The proletariat must not be "neutral" towards the Black movement nor should its vanguard be transformed into a bunch of cheerleaders giving unconditional support to the demands put forth by the Black movement. Worst of all, what this policy ("independence") would leave the door open to are petty bourgeois individualists who could cover themselves with the authority of the vanguard party without submitting to the discipline of the party. Communists must struggle for hegemony inside the Black movement on the basis of the party's program and under the direct guidance of the party. In short we are for a communist takeover of the Black movement.

"Giving the Black movement a role?"--But it is not Fraser or the SL that "imposes" a role on the Black movement. History, due to the objective conditions of Blacks in the U.S., has dictated this attribute to the Black movement. It is the historical role of Blacks along with class conscious whites to fight prejudice in the working class and the society as a whole in order to pave the way for the development of class consciousness in the working class.

"We cannot recruit one nationalist?"--Comrade Lumumba may not realize it but truer words were never spoken. We cannot nor do we seek to recruit nationalists as nationalists, but rather we seek to win Black nationalists over to communism, to transform Black nationalists into Black Trotskyists, to aid them in developing class consciousness and making a break with their nationalism. Because after all:

"Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even the 'most just', 'purest', most refined civilised brand. In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances

internationalism..." (Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question," Collected Works, Vol. 20.)

We are well aware of the fact that Black nationalism and white chauvinism are not the same. We do not equate the two, as we do not equate separatism with segregation. We realize that there is a difference between the nationalism of the oppressed and the nationalism of the oppressor. This does not mean that the nationalism of the oppressed (a form of bourgeois or petty bourgeois consciousness) can be revolutionary or even progressive, only that:

"The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support." (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 20.)

What this means concretely is that if there exists a nationalist movement or organization that advances certain democratic demands (such as Cops Out of the Ghetto, the Right of Self-Defense for the Black Community Against Racist Attacks, No Federal Troops to Boston) the proletarian vanguard party may not only unconditionally support these demands, but may also incorporate these demands into its program. The proletarian vanguard does this not to support nationalism, but in fact to undermine it and win the best elements of these Black organizations to the banner of the vanguard party.

### Black Nationalism and Revisionism

Black nationalism, unfortunately, is not dead. In fact the revisionists are trying to revive it and give it strength and credibility, in the same way the Third International gave the Second International a new lease on life after Lenin had almost killed it. So today the revisionists through their total capitulation to nationalism are reviving it and preparing to betray the Black masses in a more cynical fashion than the Third or the Second could have ever imagined. "Leaving the door open for the Black masses to make their choice," has historically only "left the door open" to theoretical confusion and political degeneration.

Concretely, the call for self-determination means the call for race war (cloaked in Marxism). The Black masses do not need consoling theories that contradict reality, but a revolutionary program that speaks directly to their objective needs. Even if Black people did constitute a nation, i.e., the right of self-determination did apply, it is most likely that in most situations we would argue against separation (while continuing to struggle against all forms of discrimination). The theory of "Socialism in one country" and calling for the right of self-determination of Black people in the U.S. have a lot in common. They both are utopian (because there does not exist a material base for their existence) and reactionary (in every attempt to implement them the result is always reactionary). Even their origins are similar inasmuch as they were both born in the womb

of reaction when the class struggle was at an ebb flow and both were thought up by a totally defeatist state of mind. Our movement was born in struggle against these false theories. We are struggling to revive confidence and the will to struggle in the Black masses. We will do this by building a party which will truly be a party of the Black people in the U.S.--a genuine Communist party.

--[received 12 March 1975]

by A. Lumumba

Through the use of a shoddy debater's trick, G. hopes to dismiss the politicalness of the discussion by implying a personalist character to the tone of my remarks.

Comrade G. prostitutes his principles for a sophistic advantage by implying that "Lumumba's coming forth officially" is the consequence of "personal problems" and "milieu pressures" rather than a serious attempt to get clarity on a disputed matter.

Comrade G. feels the need to offer apologies for my extremely hostile tone against individuals who are violating party procedure by advancing non-Spartacist positions without official announcement or recourse to democratic discussion.

It is noteworthy that G. felt the urgent need to excuse my tone without disassociating himself from two obvious revisions of the Spartacist program--split and wreck Black organizations, conditional independence for Puerto Rico.

Comrade G. reveals his hypocrisy by criticizing me for openly referring to politics and practices he has on several occasions denounced in private.

Comrade G. must accept the responsibility for entering the discussion as a character assassin.

Mr. Trotsky--Mr. Lenin

Comrade G. likes to fancy himself a disciple of the political thought of Leon Trotsky. Comrade G. thinks he can obscure his differences with Mr. Trotsky by ranting about specifics of the Black Question. Nothing can be further from the truth. Instead of masturbating with such irrelevancies G. should address the essence of the dispute--economics vs. consciousness.

Mr. Lenin

Comrade G. is a prisoner of the undialectical method of historical analogy. By accepting the empero-contextual definitions of Lenin as an authoritative exposition of theory, G. admits his ignorance of national self-determination as a historic thoery.

Instead of dogmatizing the words of Lenin, G. should acquaint himself with the evidence of political history. Lenin's treatment of the national question is from the point of view of tactics--at best strategical--not understanding this, G. proceeds to miss the entire focus of the dispute by referring me to Lenin.

The best that can be said of Lenin is that he skillfully used the already developed concept to the advantage of the Russian Revolution.

It should be noted for G.'s edification that during the French Revolution the self-determination of nations concept became not only a historical fact but a theory.

The fundamental premise being the principle of representative government and popular sovereignty. (See "Attention Reuben.")

Comrade G.'s reply must be put down as nothing more than a sophomoric exercise in dogmatic evasion of some salient issues raised by my opposition. To take G.'s reply at face value, however, presents a difficulty. To answer him is comparable to trying to explain calculus to a high school student who has flunked algebra. Apparently, G. is not even superficially acquainted with much of what American Communism has presented theoretically on the Black Question. I refer Comrade G. to the Communist Party's position in 1928, Appendix #1.

It is no longer important whether the CP was right or wrong in its advocacy on Trotsky in his "woeful ignorance of specifics." The point of discussion is the theoretical ambiguity of the SL on this matter. Even more important is the fact that the same sociological trends that gave rise to Trotsky's formulations are still in evidence but on a dialectically higher phase of maturity.

In the U.S. where Black people as worker, as bourgeois are more keenly aware of their peculiar racial exploitation than is the white worker of his class position, G. says my concept of an "Independent Black Movement" if implemented would be "far more hazardous than the slogan of self-determination." G. does not realize and I wonder why that most Blacks especially Black workers realize that white workers will not jeopardize their favored position as labor prostitutes for Black struggles, a la League of Black Revolutionary Workers.

Faced, as we are, with a very complex social reality, a little marxist learning like that of G. is a dangerous thing. So pitifully insufficient is his grasp of reality that he is worried about an Independent Black Movement. The very idea of a "Black for Blacks Movement" (as Joe Johnson put it) comes like a nightmare in the dream world of his dogmatism. Heresy of Heresies! Seeing the role of the Blacks as the helpmeets of a gang of white petty bourgeois chauvinists and racist accommodationists he tries to slip a quickie through with a crafty use of rhetoric: "It is the historical role (his emphasis) of Blacks along with class conscious whites (meaning CP, RU, OL, SWP?) to fight prejudice in the working class." I laugh at Comrade G., who know concretely the substance of this rhetoric garbage.

#### A Little Bit for Seymour

Comrade Seymour, I suspect, is fatigued. I expected more than rhetoric from him. Perhaps his intellectuality needs a little goading. Lumumba is willing to oblige him.

Attention Seymour:

I have before me the work by Oliver C. Cox (Caste, Class, and Race). According to the character and definitions presented of caste, your prolific abuse of this concept is unwarranted. And I demand an explanation. From what I understand there is no valid reason, excepting arbitrariness, for the analysis of Blacks as a caste.

I offer you some definition that you may consider the error of your assertion. (See Appendix #2.) According to these definitions, International Jewry is a caste and Israel is a caste society--Jew consciousness is caste consciousness and the Hebrew-speaking nation is a caste.

And as you know a caste does not have the right to self-determination.

Attention Comrade Reuben

Historical phenomena are not abstractions neatly tied up in academic definitions.

The assumption that nationalism is a product of a particular development dating from the sixteenth century symbolizing the break-down of medieval society is untenable for two reasons: one, it attributes to the sixteenth century the work of the Middle Ages; two, it presupposes developments that only came about in the nineteenth century.

Your error lies in not distinguishing the nation as a historical fact and nationalism as a theory. It should be emphasized that although nations have existed for centuries, before the French Revolution no necessary connection between the state as a political unit and the state as a cultural unit could be found. Some nation states were more or less culturally united, others were composed of culturally disparate elements. The fact of the matter is that the cultural/political conception of nationality had no precedent in history prior to the latter half of eighteenth century. The nation existed only as a juristic and territorial entity.

Right On to the French Jacobins

The contribution of the French Revolution was its establishment of the democratic idea of the state--rights of man, popular sovereignty, etc. The post-medieval conception of the divine right of kings (or economics) received its mortal blow from the French events. The people themselves (most politically conscious classes) became the chief agency of state-making, passing from the role of subject to that of sovereign. The revolutionary theory that the people have the right to form their own constitutional government is the Achilles heel of every form of national oppression, including U.S. white chauvinism.

This I maintain is the essence of the concept of national

self-determination rather than some lifeless abstraction such as your tribal nation concept.

I close with the words of Mr. Leon Trotsky:

"It is necessary to teach the American beasts. It is necessary to make them understand that the American state is not their state...'The Negroes should separate when they so desire and we will defend them against our American police'..."

--14 March 1975

copy to Ron A., 15 March 1975

A FRIENDLY CHAT

By Comrade Lumumba

Starring J. Seymour

Co-starring Big G.

Guest Star Harry Turner

Cast: Leon Trotsky  
Jim Robertson  
Arne Swabeck  
Ron

Material in dialogue not in parentheses  
are the actual words of the speakers.

- Gerald: Independence...This is an Abstraction. We are for a communist take-over of the Black movement.
- Lumumba: The decline of labor union radicalism has created a serious and practically insoluble dilemma for the marxist movement. The theory and practice of the marxist movement in America is based on the assumption that white labor must be the radical, anti-capitalist force. The realities in America force the marxists to deal with the Black movement as the de facto radical force, but this does not hide the fact that the marxist movement is in a serious crisis. The greater the Black movement becomes an independent force, the more the marxists must strive to ally themselves with it--and deeper becomes the crisis for the marxist movement. For the alliance it attempts to forge with the Blacks must be one in which the marxists dominate in order not to be absorbed. This alliance is meant to build the marxist party, not the Black movement, in order to rescue the marxists from their own crisis. White labor has been conservative and pro-capitalist for years. As a matter of fact most of the labor unions financially support capitalist politicians while sporting red clauses to make the communist speak in algebraic terms (Workers government, labor solidarity)
- J.R.: Only the destruction of existing class relations and the change in class dominance--the passing of power into the hands of the working class--will suffice to strike at the heart of racism and bring about a solution both real and durable.
- Lumumba: This sounds good as general abstract propaganda. But what is the social content of working class. Jim Crow is not just a (capitalist class) phenomena.
- Swabeck: The unity of worker, black and white, we must prepare proceeding from a class basis, but in that it is necessary to also recognize the racial issues and in addition to the class (labor) slogans also advance the racial slogans.
- Lumumba: This is the Spartacist conception which liquidates the Black movement into a secondary labor question.
- Gerald: (Yes that's right, it) is the historical role of the Blacks to fight prejudice in the working class in order to pave the way for the development of class consciousness.

- Swabeck: It is our opinion that the main slogan should be social, political and economic equality for the Negroes. This slogan is naturally quite different from the slogan of self-determination for a national minority.
- Seymour: Underlying Trotsky's advocacy of self-determination for Blacks (is) the belief blacks (constitute) an embryonic peasant-nation.
- Trotsky: Self-determination is a democratic demand. (The) American comrades advance as against this democratic demand the liberal demand. I understand what political equality means. But what is the meaning of economic and social equality within capitalist society? Does that mean a demand to public opinion that all enjoy the equal protection of the laws?
- Lumumba: Yes that's all it means, the Spartacists like to use the phrases democratic and civil rights. Do you agree with what Seymour says about your belief in a "peasant nation"?
- Trotsky: (Nonsense.) The Negroes are a race and not a nation.
- Seymour: The SL/US opposes self-determination for blacks because it is impossible to achieve. If a separate state were possible, the SL/US would certainly support the right. We might even advocate (it).
- Gerald: (Now Seymour that's not our line). I don't want to be dogmatic but Lenin says self-determination means the political separation of nations...(and this is) why and when marxists advocate this right.
- Seymour: (No Comrade G. that's not marxist.) Democratic rights, including that of self-determination do not derive from the ideal of eliminating oppression; (Marx said in his Critique of the Gotha Program) "Right can never stand higher than the economic structure of society." A democratic right which is impossible to achieve is not right; it is a utopian ideal.
- Trotsky: (This is absolute nonsense.) The negroes should separate when they desire and we will defend them against (the) police.
- Seymour: (No, Trotsky. This is impossible because of) the objective way in which blacks are integrated into the American social economy.
- Trotsky: Racial prejudices are more than ever based on economic privileges--possessed by one group of workers at the obvious and immediate expense of the other.

It is not improbable, therefore, that the bulk of the Negroes have absorbed their lesson far more profoundly than is superficially apparent.

- Lumumba: Yes we have. Today the overwhelming majority of Black militant organizations have self-determination in their program--it is very apparent today.
- Seymour: Of course it is true that nationalist/separatist attitudes common among the Black masses reflect the pervasive racism of the white population, including the proletariat (but) we do not refer to individual subjective motivation, but to the objective effect of the Black Nationalist movement upon the struggle for a communist society.
- Lumumba: The arguments of Seymour smack of vulgar political economy--having nothing to do with the revolutionary implications of a Black social movement.
- Trotsky: (Yes I agree with Lumumba, we communists) support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. The movement of the colored races against their oppressors is one of the most important and powerful movements against the existing order.
- Lumumba: Today we call this movement third worldism or, in terms of Black people, Pan Africanism--The Spartacist program is objectively accommodationist to Black social oppression. They try to hide this fact under the concept of fighting racial oppression as opposed to fighting racism. The realization of a movement of (Blacks as Blacks) runs counter to their arbitrary schema of liquidating the Black movement into an appendage of the labor movement. The hostility to Black nationalism flows from a methodology that views social struggle in terms of narrow integrationism. Comrade Seymour tell Trotsky why you do not like Black nationalism.
- Seymour: (That's right Comrade Lumumba. Instead of fighting for) a program for genuine national liberation--a program centered on the demand for a black state (their movement is a Black as Black movement) ranging from the Black Muslims to Democratic Party-pro-Gibson to BLA-League of Revolutionary Black Workers to Black Workers Congress--a kind of opiate for militant Blacks who hate a racist society they believe is implacable, permanent, unchanging--
- Lumumba: By your own observations you have presented the entire spectrum of Black social struggle concretely, as: worker, lumpen, as bourgeois, and yet you say we believe it implacable to change. What

you really mean is that Blacks do not believe it will change unless (they) change it. We have heard this dung about democracy through development of the productive forces before--this was the same vulgar political economism peddled by Karl Marx when he supported the Northern Bourgeoisie over the Southern Bourgeoisie. As for me I was as doubly oppressed then as I am now. Give me some consistent social struggle growing over into the socialist revolution (Permanent revolution).

- Trotsky: (Lumumba) is correct in a certain sense that self-determination of the Negroes belongs to the question of the Permanent Revolution in America. The Negroes will through their awakening through their demand for autonomy and through the democratic mobilization of their forces be pushed on toward the class basis.
- Swabeck: (No Trotsky, didn't you hear what I said at the beginning.) (I will say this once more.) The unity of the workers, Black and white, we must prepare proceeding from a class basis.
- J.R.: (That's right Swabeck) every struggle, without exception, acquires progressive significance only in that it furthers directly or indirectly the socialist revolution. Any struggle other than the workers' class struggle itself has, at best, indirect value.
- Seymour: (Thank you Comrade Robertson, I have been hammering them with the marxist point.) Democratic Rights do not derive from the Ideal; they are based on possibilities made available through the development of society, centrally its productive forces...economic structure etc.
- Turner: Comrade Seymour, seems to suffer from a pronounced inability to appreciate the dialectical method. Of the leading comrades, Seymour's thought processes best seem to match the metaphysician. To (Seymour) things and their mental reflexes, ideas, are isolated, are to be considered one after the other, and apart from each other, are objects of investigation fixed, rigid, given once and for all. He thinks in absolutely irreconcilable antitheses. His communication is "yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."
- Lumumba: So that's what it's called--metaphysics--I made a charge against a phenomenon of thinking in the Party which I called historical analogy; it goes like this: "there is nothing new under the sun all that once was." That is the methodology of a Christian sect I once belonged to.

Seymour:

Turner makes a big point over my supposed inability to comprehend dialectics. Thus, if I say a coat is brown, it is logically assumed that it is all brown, and not brown and some other color. Similarly, if I say I walked to work, it is inferred that I walked all the way. If I asked Turner who voted a certain way, and he told Robertson and Henry, I would logically assume no other members voted that way. If I later found out that Nelson also voted that way, I would be justified in believing Turner had deceived me. Specifically, Turner's inability to distinguish a demand aimed against the special oppression of a minority worker from a general class demand. When (I) say a policy or program is aimed to combat special oppression, I mean it benefits minority workers to the (exclusion) of non-minority workers, at least in a direct sense. A class demand benefits all relevant workers directly, regardless of race or ethnic group. Thus, increasing apprenticeship admissions for minority youth is a step against special oppression, minority workers benefit, non-minority workers do not, except indirectly. On the other hand, raising the minimum wage is a general class demand. All workers benefit.

Lumumba:

This is the essence of the Spartacist program. A policy that accommodates white worker cowardice. This program says to the workers, never mind that you have consistently betrayed your interest by opting to ally yourselves with the enemy for a few extra crumbs. You have no interest in concrete solidarity with Blacks but only in expansion of labor proceeds, to which you will be sure to get your proportionally (undemocratic) share.

Ron:

(I am not going for what we must say to the white workers programatically.) Either class war or race war. Either we fight as workers against the enemy for proletarian democracy or we black workers will fight you here and now for our democratic right.

--19 March 1975

copy to Ron A.