

THE COMINTERN POSITION ON THE NEGRO QUESTION A Review of H. Haywood's *Negro Liberation*

It is impossible to seriously evaluate Harry Haywood's line without at the same time evaluating the line of the Communist International on the Negro question. Haywood's book, *Negro Liberation*, was an elucidation and defense of the line of the Comintern (CI). When *Negro Liberation* was written, that line was under serious attack from the right wing majority within the CPUSA.

In order to evaluate the line of the CI, it is first necessary to understand the CI itself. With the passage of time and the passing from the scene of the men and women who rode the revolutionary wave of the 1920's and 30's, a certain romanticized view of the CI has developed—especially among younger and less experienced comrades. In fact, the CI was a battle ground where Lenin and Stalin struggled for twelve years to defeat the Trotskyites, the followers of Bukharin, Rykov, *et. al.* In the course of this struggle it was inevitable that from time to time positions reflecting the incorrect ideas of Bukharin, Trotsky, and their spokesmen were bound to be taken as the position of the Leninist minority within the CI. Therefore, in examining the CI position on the Negro question, we must take a scientific view that is not colored by our support for and admiration of the CI as the world's anti-fascist battle center.

From another point of view, the projections of the CI cannot be understood apart from the time and circumstance that fashioned the class struggle in Europe in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

The salient feature of that period was the rise of fascism in Europe. This was the greatest danger to the proletariat, to the revolution. The CI was forced to approach the fascist danger from the point of view that war and fascism were the forms that the counterrevolution was taking, to which all questions had to be subordinated.

In 1930, *twelve* monarchies ruled in Europe. The natural process of the class struggle drove a section of the radical bourgeoisie into the communist movement during the struggle for the republican form of government. This was inevitable since the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat can only be fought out in a republic. This situation, in addition to

several other factors, such as the split in social democracy whose "left" wing joined the Communist Parties, was reflected as a split within the Comintern itself.

By 1928, the Leninist forces had defeated the Trotskyites and the Zinovievites; the struggle against Bukharin was under way. This struggle continued for many years—the influence of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin was not easily done away with.

It goes without saying that the majority of the delegates to meetings of the CI had very little knowledge or understanding of the Negro Question in the USNA. It is an admitted fact that the one Party with concrete knowledge on this question, the CPUSA, was so racked with white chauvinism that they could not or would not fight for a correct position.

An example of the lack of understanding of the Negro question in the USNA by the CI was the setting up of a Negro Commission in 1924 composed of representatives of the British, French and Belgian Parties. At that time these imperialist states were the major colonizers of Africa. By not even including representatives of the CPUSA, it was clear that the CI regarded the Negro Question of the USNA as an aspect of the general African question. In other words, today we of the CLP do not mean the same thing by the word *Negro* as did the CI of 1924. For us the word Negro is a national term. There are no Negroes in Brazil or Trinidad. The only Negroes are in the Negro nation. But the CI used the term Negro as a racial term; consequently the Negro question was the question of Africa and the millions of her inhabitants who had been kidnapped from the continent in former times or had somehow migrated to non-African countries. To treat all the persons of African descent with the same formula—no matter where they may be—is a violation of the laws of dialectical materialism. With a superficial glance it appears that the "Negroes" of 1924 were the "Helots of the world." However, a closer look shows a different historical evolution and a different quality to the struggles of the "Negroes" in the Union of South Africa, Canada, France and Alabama, even though the features may appear to be the same. (See: Notes of the 4th enlarged Plenum, 12 June 1924)

In the context of the struggle within the Comintern, a statement was worked out reflecting the necessary accompanying compromises regarding the Negro question in the USNA. At the 6th Congress, Ford, reporting for the CPUSA, stated that there were no more than 50 Negroes in that Party. The other Negro delegate, Jones, along with Ford, bitterly attacked the CPUSA for their "inactivity, chauvinism and race prejudice." At the end of the debate in the commission, a resolution was drawn up and presented to the Congress. That resolution—*The Resolution on the Negro Question, 1928*—laid the subjective base upon which a good number of correct Marxist slogans attempted to stand. The Negro Commission reported that, "at the present, the Negroes were a national but non-territorial minority." Such a formulation begs the question—the Negroes are a national minority of what? The answer is implicit—a national minority of the continent of Africa. This makes no sense. Africa is a continent comprised of nations. In

this respect Lenin wrote, "Europeans often forget that colonial peoples are also nations, but to tolerate such "forgetfulness" is to tolerate chauvinism." (*A Caricature of Marxism*, Vol. 19, Selected Works, p. 250, International Publishers, 1942.)

Sadly enough, it was left to Pepper, who later became a Trotskyite, to state a generally correct line. Pepper stated, "The Negroes are a colony within the USA and hence falling within the Comintern policy of national self-determination for oppressed colonial peoples. The Negro nation could be developed out of the compact mass of farmers on a contiguous territory." He advocated the slogan of a Negro Soviet Republic and struggled against the opinion held by the majority that the problem was a racial and not a national question. (For further information and details see *Minutes, The Negro Question, 26 October 1928*.)

A debate ensued over the "colonial" status of the Negro nation, and a sub-committee was finally set up to consider this question. The sub-committee drafted the 1928 resolution which was endorsed by the political secretariat and published on 26 October 1928. As we know, this resolution rejected the concept that the Negro question was a colonial question. In a period when the world was divided between the various imperialist powers and a new war for the redivision of the world loomed ahead, the resolution never explained how an oppressed nation could not be a colony, a situation unique in the world. The only solution was that the Negro question was not a national, but a racial question, a non-territorial question, a question of a "nation without territory" or resources other than human resources. This view, upheld by the majority of the CI, violates every concept of Leninism and flies in the face of the historical experience of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Without territory, there can be no nation. Stalin defines a nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." He further states, "It is only when all these characteristics are present together that we have a nation." The concept of a nation without territory is an unscientific formulation in contradiction to the Leninist definition.

Discussing the question of territory, Stalin wrote:

But why, for instance, do the English and the Americans not constitute one nation in spite of their common language?

Firstly, because they do not live together, but inhabit different territories. A nation is formed only as a result of lengthy and systematic intercourse, as a result of people living together generation after generation. But people cannot live together for lengthy periods unless they have a common territory. Englishmen and Americans originally inhabited the same territory, England, and constituted one nation. Later, one section of the English emigrated from England to a new territory, America, and there, in the new territory, in the course of time, came to form the new American

nation. Difference of territory led to the formation of different nations." (*Marxism and the National-Colonial Question*, Proletarian Publishers, 1975, pp. 19-20.)

It is for the very same reason that the slaves imported from various African nations were forged first into a *people* under the slavers' lash, and later, as a result of the violent segregation imposed upon them by Anglo-American imperialism, this people, forcibly held within the territory of the Black Belt of the South, was forged into a nation.

Far from being a "non-territorial" nation, the Negro people were forged into a nation on the basis of a common language, economic life, culture and territory. The formulation of a "nonterritorial nation" is chauvinism and liquidates the national question.

By 1930, due to the sharp inner party struggle, the defeat of Bukharin in the Comintern and in the Soviet Party, and due to the ever sharpening struggle of the Negro masses within the USNA, the Comintern called a conference of "Negroes" in Hamburg. Present were delegates from Nigeria, South Africa, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Gambia, Trinidad and the USNA.

The main resolution that came from this meeting was that "Negroes" should be organized internationally as a class. Marxists define classes according to the relationship to the means of production. To attempt to organize "Negroes" as a class is just another way of saying that the Negro as a race totally precludes the class structure and consequent class antagonism that characterize nations and national development. It is clear that as late as 1930 the dominant ideology was that Africa is the homeland of the Negroes; Negroes in Trinidad, Brazil or Alabama are bits and pieces that have been broken off. In fact, even though the Comintern waged an important struggle against the rampant chauvinism in the CPUSA, they continued to smear Marxist slogans over their fundamentally incorrect thesis that the Negroes in the USNA were a "non-territorial oppressed nation." We shall see that later on the CI and the CPUSA did finally embrace a territorial description but to this day, with the exception of the CLP, the Negro Nation remains a racial nation to the Marxist movement. Of course the idea of a "black" nation is a gross distortion of Marxism, a crude attempt to extend Bauer's thesis that nations are the extension of tribes rather than a historically evolved community of people formed on the basis of common language, territory, economic life and culture.

The struggle for clarity on this question continues today. The movement is still sharply divided; this division on how to characterize the Black Belt extends into the ranks of our Party. We hear slogans and descriptions coming from all directions. The concept of a "black" nation does not deserve comment. Even to speak of a "black" nation is to slyly sanction the idea of a "white" nation, which ideologically and historically follows Hitler and the fascists of South Africa and Rhodesia. Let these heroes of the SDS and the League for Industrial Democracy explain how it is possible to have black nations without white nations and how such projections are not part and

parcel of the national oppression that we are fighting against.

We throw the wolf out the front door and he sneaks in the back. Once the concept of a "black" nation is defeated, it immediately reappears in the form of the "oppressed nation." Because of the historical meaning of that phrase, because of the general backwardness of the revolutionary movement, it is almost impossible to get agreement even on the meaning of the term in order to consider its applicability today.

Our understanding of an oppressed nation is a nation within a multinational state wherein all classes are without a political voice. The "oppressed nation" arose at a certain point in history—the breakup of feudalism. Stalin writes,

Before proceeding directly to the concrete immediate tasks of the Party in connection with the national problem, we must first lay down certain premises without which the solution of the national problem is impossible. These premises relate to the appearance of nations, the origin of national oppression, the forms assumed by national oppression in the course of historical development, and finally, the forms of solution of the national problem in the various periods of development.

There are three such periods.

The first period is the period which saw the break-up of feudalism in the West and the triumph of capitalism. The formation of people into nations occurred during this period. I am referring to such countries as Great Britain (without Ireland), France and Italy. In the West—in Great Britain, France, Italy and partly in Germany—the period of the break-up of feudalism and the formation of people into nations on the whole coincided in time with the period which saw the appearance of the centralised states, and as a result the nations in their development became invested in state forms. And inasmuch as there were no other national groups of any considerable size within these states, such a thing as national oppression was not known. In Eastern Europe, on the contrary, the process of formation of nationalities and the elimination of feudal disunity did not coincide in time with the process of formation of centralised states. I am referring to Hungary, Austria and Russia. In these countries capitalist development had not yet begun; it was perhaps only incipient; but the necessity of taking defensive measures against the invasions of the Turks, Mongols and other Oriental peoples that centralised states capable of withstanding the onslaught of the invaders should be formed without delay. And since in Eastern Europe the process of formation of centralised states proceeded more rapidly than the process of formation of people into nations, mixed states arose, each made up of several nationalities which had not yet formed themselves into nations but which were already united in a common state.

Thus, the first period is marked by the appearance of nationalities in the dawn of capitalism: in Western Europe we observe the birth of

purely national states to which national oppression is unknown, whereas in the East we observe the birth of multinational states with one more developed nation at the head and the remaining, less developed nations in a state of political, and later of economic, subjection to the dominant nation. These multinational states of the East were the birthplace of that national oppression which gave rise to national conflicts, national movements, the national problem and the various methods of solving that problem.

It is clear that the national question is the question of a people who are deprived of civil rights, who are shunted aside in economic growth, who are economically subjugated. It is a question of a people deprived of equal rights—a people defeated in their struggle toward a national state. This surely *sounds* like the position of the Negro people ever since the turn of the century. But it is not, and cannot be, because the development of the *oppressed* nation is connected with the struggle against feudalism and the defeat of the national bourgeoisie during that period. It is clear in Stalin's work—a work that has withstood the test of time and revolutions—that the period of the oppressed nation was the period *prior* to modern imperialism.

The second period was the period of the rise of modern imperialism. This was the period when the Negro nation began to be formed—in the very late 19th and early 20th centuries. This second period was the time of the connection between the national and the colonial question. The fact is—as noted by Lenin and Stalin—that colonial oppression is the form that national oppression takes during the period of modern imperialism. It should be clear that the rise of modern—*financial*—imperialism, spelt the end to the oppressed nations of the former period. Imperialism quickly gobbled up the world and has fought two wars for its redivision. Under such conditions it was not possible for an oppressed nation to remain outside of the sphere of imperialism. All formerly oppressed nations were transformed into colonies of imperialism. Everyone is forced to admit that the oppressor the the Negro Nation is imperialism. Thus, they are compelled either to admit that the form of the oppression is colonial, or to renounce Marxism as the method of analysing social phenomena.

The reader will forgive us if we spend a considerable amount of time on this question because the confusion of the first and second periods of national development is the keystone to the line of Haywood's book and the vulgar chauvinist positions of the CPUSA and the entire New Left. That confusion is basically stated thus: the Negro question is a question unique in history and an aspect of American exceptionalism, the American "exception" to Marxism. Contrary to the fact that every nation in history was formed from many "races" and peoples, the Negro nation is presented as a national question of "race." We should be clear that when Stalin uses the term "race" he uses it only in the sense of *tribe*. Here in the USNA and hence among the "Left", the term "race" means *color*. Even these modern chauvinists don't dare refer to the Negro people as a tribe. Further, this projection goes on to indicate that since it is a racial nation it cannot be colonial—it can only be oppressed. But science compels us to renounce this

muddle. If we allow that the Negro question is a national question, as science demands, the basis of the nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of comon language, territory, economic life, and culture. Either there is a nation, or there is not. To project a "racial" nation, based solely on color, which is unbounded by a national territory, is to deny the existence of a nation at all. If we recognize the existence of the nation, then we are forced to recognize its colonial oppression by imperialism.

We can be sure that the reluctance of the modern chauvinists of the Left to accept this scientific analysis is their inability to conceive of a colony within the political boundaries of the state of the United States of North America. No matter what these apologists for imperialism may propose in this regard, a historical, Marxist examination proves that when the basic economic relations shift, the social relations—the social form—shifts in conformity. Hence national oppression of the pre-imperialist period was necessarily different from the national-colonial oppression in the period of financial imperialism, when national oppression was transformed into colonial oppression.

Although the CI resolution of 1930 was primarily a criticism of the CPUSA, we concentrate on examining this document because it was the final statement on the various political lines in effect in the Left today.

First off, the resolution states:

In the interest of the utmost clarity of ideas on this question, the Negro question in the United States must be viewed from the standpoint of its peculiarity, namely, as the question of an *oppressed nation*, which is in a peculiar and extraordinarily distressing situation of national oppression not only in view of the prominent *racial distinctions* (marked difference in the color of skin, etc.), but above all, because of considerable *social antagonism* (remnants of slavery). This introduces into the American Negro question an important, *peculiar* trait which is absent from the national question of other oppressed peoples.

How are we to account for the social antagonism between the Irish and the English? Or between any oppressed and oppressor peoples anywhere? How do we account for the savage bloodletting and persecution of all colonials. A historical examination of the question shows that in order to get cotton to the world market at a competitive price, or with the maximum profits, it was necessary to impose a semi-feudal system over the Black Belt and especially over the black. There is no problem of segregating the Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico or the Angolans in Angola. But there was a problem isolating the Negro within the continental boundaries of the USNA. The social antagonism between Negro and Anglo-American enforces the unnatural isolation, the segregation, that was the necessary social context for the semi-serf conditions forced upon the masses of Negro people. This accounts for the extremely violent character of Negro

segregation; it is not some mystifying difference of skin color (a factor that is present in almost every country) or historical factors such as the history of slavery or the remnants of slavery. Venezuela and Brazil had slavery, but even in their worst days the violent segregation that was a way of life for the Negro was never imposed on the black Brazilian.

In Ireland, the social antagonism in the form of the "religious question" masked the national colonial oppression of the Irish people, just as the question of "color" has masked the national oppression of the Negro. What must be grasped is the obvious fact that since everything proceeds from history, and given the history of the Negro being enslaved according to color, color discrimination and segregation is the only form that Negro national oppression could take. Every content, in this case the super-exploitation of an oppressed nation—has a form. The form is necessarily evolved from history. The examination of any national question will verify this. But the fundamental fact is that the Negro question is the result of Wall Street imperialism and not so-called racial identification. Color discrimination is the *specific form* of national-colonial oppression.

From its beginning to its end, the Comintern resolution shows itself to be an awkward compromise between the two main factions that controlled the CI. On page 136 (Appendix, *The Negro National Colonial Question*, Workers Press, 1975), the resolution supports the above position:

This whole system of "segregation" and "Jim-Crowism" is a special form of national and social oppression under which the American Negroes have much to suffer. The origin of all this is not difficult to find: this Yankee arrogance towards the Negroes stinks of the disgusting atmosphere of the old slave market. This is downright robbery and slave whipping barbarism at the peak of capitalist "culture."

The resolution goes on to raise and discuss the question of slogans.

In raising the slogan of equal rights as a slogan that applies to all Negroes, North and South, contradiction inherent in the CI formulation is concealed. Negroes in both the North and South are victims of national oppression; while the whites in the south are equal to one another. But they are unequal to the whites in the North, a fact which is obscured by the resolution's formulation. The Anglo-American from the south easily melts into the Anglo-American population of the north, but because of the historic color factor, this is an unending fight for the black from the Negro Nation.

The contradiction breaks the surface in the slogan for the Black Belt. The resolution goes on to state:

The struggle of the Communists for the *equal rights* of the Negroes applies to all Negroes, in the North as well as in the South. The struggle for this slogan embraces all or almost all of the important special interests of the Negroes in the North, but not in the South, where the main Communist slogan must be: *The Right of Self-Determination of the Negroes in the Black Belt*. These two slogans, however, are most closely connected. The Negroes in the

North are very much interested in winning the right of self-determination of the Negro population of the Black Belt and can thereby hope for strong support for the establishment of true equality of the Negroes in the North. In the South the Negroes are suffering no less, but still more than in the North from the glaring lack of all equality; for the most part the struggle for their most urgent partial demands in the Black Belt is nothing more than the struggle for their equal rights, and only the fulfillment of their main slogan, the right of self-determination in the Black Belt, can assure them of true equality.

The contradictory nature of the slogan "Self-Determination for the Negroes in the Black Belt" is not readily noticeable because of the general atmosphere of chauvinism and Negro segregation. But by "Negroes", the Comintern means the *blacks* in the Black Belt. If there is self-determination for the blacks, what about the whites? Are we talking about the self-determination for oppressed races or about nations? Is the term "Negro" a national or racial term? If it is racial, then there is a contradiction not only with Marxism, but with all science. If it is national, then it cannot mean color. The resolution starts off on the horns of a dilemma. Self-determination cannot be applied to any formation but nations. Nations arise, based among other things on a common territory. All modern nations to one degree or the other have minorities. Unless these minorities are in some way involved in the self-determination, we are basing self-determination on race and there is no resolution to the oppression of one race by another. If we are talking about a nation, then we must include the substantial white minority in the discussion. If we are to tell the minority of whites in the Black Belt that they are to be deprived of their civil rights as the path to freedom, we might as well forget the whole proposition.

Of course, the leaders of the CI and the CPUSA realized that they were caught in such a contradiction. In order to sound Marxist, while upholding the CI thesis of a national but non-territorial minority, they coined the concept of a "nation within a nation." Haywood could not help but repeat and uphold this slogan in his book. After the experience of the past 25 years it has to be admitted that the slogan of a nation within a nation is nothing more than the demand for cultural autonomy. The scientific description of the Negro Nation is a nation within the political boundaries of a multi-national state.

The resolution clearly sees the difference of treatment of the Negroes in the North and South. It attempts to explain this difference on the basis that in the North the Negro is an industrial worker and in the South, a peasant.

Furthermore, it is necessary to face clearly the inevitable distinction between the position of the Negro in the *South* and in the *North*, owing to the fact that at least three-fourths of the entire *Negro* population in the United States (12,000,000) live in compact masses in the South, most of them being peasants and agricultural laborers in a

state of semi-serfdom, settled in the "Black Belt" and constituting the majority of the population, whereas the Negroes in the northern states are for the most part industrial workers of the lowest categories who have recently come to the various industrial centers from the South (having often even fled from there.)

In fact, the distinction does not arise between industrial worker and peasant, but rather between the oppressed nation and the national minority in the oppressor nation. An aspect of imperialism is the creation of nations. A contradictory aspect is the dispersal of nations. Imperialism creates nations in the process of imposing capitalism on the subject people. At the same time, in search for a better life away from the poverty and discrimination of the colony, people flee to the richer environs of the "mother country."

The ideological excuse for the original conquest and continued oppression of a nation is great nation chauvinism—the ideology of the superiority of the oppressor nation. Chauvinist ideology brands the oppressed nationalities as inferior and hence unequal. This inferiority is translated into social inequality in the form of the denial of civil rights and second class citizenship. Hence a national minority which cannot be integrated develops in every imperialist country. Be they of the same or of a different color, the facts do not change—the various African minorities in France, the Irish in England and the Negro in Anglo-America bear this out.

But the basic thesis of a "non-territorial minority" sticks like a bone in the throat. Because they could not scientifically describe the difference in oppression between the national minority in the oppressor nation and the colonial national, science was forced to take second place to consistency based on outright chauvinism—the denial of the nation by not recognizing its territory dictates the denial of its colonial status.

In the following section, the same error is repeated in a different form.

The Struggle for the Equal Rights of the Negroes

2. The basis for the demand of equality of the Negroes is provided by the *special* yoke to which the Negroes in the United States are subjected by the ruling classes. In comparison with the situation of the other various nationalities and races oppressed by American imperialism, the yoke of the Negroes in the United States is of a peculiar nature and particularly oppressive. This is partly due to the historical past of the American Negroes as imported slaves, but is much more due to the still existing slavery of the American Negro which is immediately apparent, for example, in comparing their situation even with the situation of the Chinese and Japanese workers in the West of the United States, or with the lot of the Filipinos (Malay race) who are under colonial repression.

The question has to be asked: What is the difference between the position of the Chinese and Japanese workers in the West and the Negro in Alabama? The scientific answer is involved with the concept of nationals

and national minorities. The reason that the Filipino migrated from the Islands to the continental USNA was to escape the starvation, brutality and terror of the imperialist occupation of his homeland. The lot of the Filipino national minority workers in the western states was much better than the lot of the worker in the Islands. Otherwise the government would not have had to pass special discriminatory laws preventing the mass migration of the Filipino into this country. The dispersal of nations under imperialism creates national minorities in the imperialist country. The question of the national minority is a category of the National question, but to confuse the two aspects and fail to differentiate between the nationals and the national minorities—or the form and intensity of the oppression in the colonial country opposed to that of a national minority in the imperialist country—is a serious error. However, this error brings us back to the consistent base of the Negro resolution. The Filipino in the western part of the USNA is in fact a "national but non-territorial minority." But to describe the Negro in the Negro Nation in the same way as describing a national minority in the oppressor nation is to do a real violence to elementary logic, let alone dialectics.

As far as the difference between the treatment of the Negro in the Negro Nation and the Filipino in the Western USNA is concerned, it appeared in 1930 that the Negro was treated by far the worst. This should come as no surprise, but not because of the "*special* yoke" or the history of slavery. It is because a comparison is being made between the Negro national in his homeland, and the Filipino national minority in the US—a comparison which is intellectually dishonest and unscientific. If, instead, the authors for a moment compared the brutality, torture and barbarism that characterized the oppression of the Filipino *in the Philippines* with the Negro *in the Negro Nation*, it would immediately be apparent that national-colonial oppression is equally bloody and brutal in every colony. Conversely, if the authors of the resolution were consistent, the only comparison to be drawn with the Filipino national minority in the Western states, is with the Negro national minority in the northern states. In that case, both occupy a relatively better position in relation to the colonial national. But this would have testified to the actual territorial existence of the Negro Nation.

The most contradictory aspect of the resolution is to be found in the second section entitled, "The Struggle for the Right of Self Determination of the Negroes in the Black Belt." It should be carefully noted that there is a world of difference between the slogan "Self Determination for the Negroes in the Black Belt" and "Self Determination for the Negro Nation." The first concept stands firmly on the racial theory. The CI demanded self determination for a people in a specific area, but this in no way involves a historically constituted community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and culture. They mean self determination for a race—not a nation. The slogan of Self Determination for the Negro Nation proceeds from the concrete evolution not simply of a people, but a nation.

The resolution goes on to state:

5. It is not correct to consider the Negro zone of the South as a colony of the United States. Such a characterization of the Black Belt could be based in some respects only upon artificially construed analogies, and would create superfluous difficulties for the clarification of ideas. In rejecting this estimation, however, it should not be overlooked that it would be none the less false to try to make a fundamental distinction between the character of national oppression to which the colonial peoples are subjected and the yoke of other oppressed nations. Fundamentally, national oppression in both cases is of the same character, and is in the Black Belt in many respects worse than in a number of actual colonies.

What this set of contradictory sentences is saying is that: the Negro zone of the South is not a colony. While national oppression of the colonial people and national oppression of oppressed nations is fundamentally the same, in the Black Belt it is worse than in actual colonies.

First of all we must point out that "national oppression" came only during the first period of the rise of nations. During this period, in Eastern Europe, the state arose to meet the demands of defense of a feudalistic country that contained several peoples. The strongest of these peoples entered fully into national development. At the same time, the weaker peoples began the path of national development. In order to maintain their hegemony over the weaker peoples, the stronger nation imposed certain discriminatory laws that weakened the subject nations and strengthened the dominant one. Examples of this is the imposing of the religion and language of the dominant nation over the subordinate ones, as well as laws preventing the oppressed people from entering certain trades or professions, discriminatory taxes and humiliating identification symbols. This political and cultural oppression cannot help but be followed by economic discrimination of all sorts. Hence we have the situation of an oppressed nation, a nation that is prevented from attaining its full national development.

However, as regards the Negro question, the Negro nation was created after the rise of modern imperialism, in the second period of the national question. Stalin writes:

The second period in the development of national oppression and methods of combating it coincides with the period which saw the appearance of imperialism; when capitalism, in its search for markets, raw materials, fuel and cheap labour power, and in the competition for the export of capital and the possession of the great rail and sea routes, breaks out of the confines of the national state and extends its territory at the expense of near and distant neighbours. In this second period, the old national states in the West—Great Britain, Italy and France—cease to be national states; in other words, by virtue of the seizure of new territories they become converted into multi-national, colony-owning states, and thereby come to be an

arena for that national and colonial oppression which already exists in Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe this period is marked by the awakening and invigoration of subject nations (Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians), which, as a result of the imperialist war, have led to the dissolution of the old bourgeois multi-national states and the formation of new national states enthralled to what are known as Great Powers.

The third period is the Soviet period, the period of the destruction of capitalism and the abolition of national oppression; in which the question of ruling and subject nations, of colonies and mother countries, is being consigned to the archives of history; in which, on the territory of the R.S.F.S.R., we see nationalities which possess equality of rights and equal opportunities for development, but which still preserve a certain historical heritage of inequality owing to their economic, political and cultural backwardness. The substance of this inequality of nationalities consists in the fact that, as a result of historical development, we have received a heritage from the past by virtue of which one nationality, the Great-Russian nationality, is more developed politically and industrially than the other nationalities. Hence the existence of actual inequality, which cannot be eradicated in one year, but which must be eradicated by economic, political and cultural assistance being rendered to the backward nationalities.

These are the three periods of development of the national problem known to us historically.

The first two periods have one feature in common. It is that in both these periods the nationalities suffered oppression and enslavement, as a result of which the national struggle continued to be fought and the national problem remained unsolved. But there is also a difference between them. It is that in the first period the national problem did not extend beyond the boundaries of the various multi-national states and embraced only a few, mainly European, nationalities; whereas in the second period the national problem became converted from an internal problem of each particular state into a problem mutually affecting several states—into a problem of war between imperialist states waged with the object of retaining the non-sovereign nationalities under the sway of the latter and of subjugating new nationalities and tribes outside Europe. Thus the national problem, which was formerly of moment only in the more cultured countries, lost its isolated character in this period and merged with the general problem of the colonies.

The development of the national problem into a general problem of the colonies is not a historical accident. It is due firstly to the fact that during the imperialist war the imperialist groups of belligerent powers were themselves obliged to appeal to the colonies, from which they recruited the man-power that went to form armies. Unquestionably, this process, by which the imperialists were

inevitably constrained to appeal to the backward peoples of the colonies, could not but awaken in these tribes and peoples the desire for emancipation and for struggle. There is another factor which caused the national problem to extend, to develop into a general problem of the colonies and to spread over the whole surface of the globe, first in isolated sparks and then in the flames of the movement for emancipation. This factor was the attempt of the imperialist groups to dismember Turkey and put an end to her existence as a state. Turkey, the country which among the Mohammedan peoples is politically the most developed, could not reconcile herself to such a prospect. She raised the standard of war and rallied the peoples of the East against imperialism. A third factor was the appearance of Soviet Russia, whose struggle against imperialism has met with several successes and has naturally served to inspire the oppressed people of the East, awaken them and rouse them to the struggle, and thus make it possible to create a united front of the oppressed nationalities, from Ireland to India.

These are the factors that in the second state of development of national oppression resulted in the fact that bourgeois society, far from solving the national problem, far from bringing peace to the peoples, has fanned the spark of national struggle into the flames of a struggle of the oppressed peoples, colonies and semi-colonies against world imperialism.

So we see that national oppression, which characterized the first period, is fundamentally different from colonial oppression—the second period. The difference lies in the fact that scores of new nations are created by imperialism itself, by the export of finance capital. These nations were created by forcibly bringing people into the capitalist era, not simply as commodity consumers, as was characteristic of mercantile imperialism, but as commodity producers.

We should ask ourselves—what is a colony? A colony is a non-sovereign nation under the hegemony of a foreign multinational state and is the investment area of finance capital.

It is true that *under imperialism* “national oppression” and “colonial oppression” became the same; but this is only because with the transformation of pre-monopoly capitalism into financial imperialism in the leading capitalist countries, not only all the formerly oppressed nations, but the rest of the world as well, were transformed into colonies imperialism.

The resolution goes on to explain its position:

On one hand the Black Belt is not in itself, either economically or politically such a united whole as to warrant its being called a special colony of the United States. But on the other hand, this zone is not, either economically or politically, such an integral part of the United States as any other part of the country.

The most striking aspect of this statement is its contradictory form. No one can doubt that the Black Belt is economically and politically a part of the USNA. The maze of highways and railway lines, the river transportation, the telegraph, the common use of money and the fact that the southern political apparatus dominates the government of the USNA are objective facts.

The weakness of the paragraph is that they do not spell out what makes up a special colony. What we need to deal with is the question of non-sovereign nations that are under the hegemony of an alien state that exercises the dictatorship of finance capital. Marxist philosophy begins with the distinction between qualities and the various and even contradictory features that a quality may express. Of course there are specific features of the Negro Nation that are in contradiction with classical national colonial characteristics.

Why is this so? First of all, there was never a feudal class that blocked with an invading imperialism, and hence there was never a historic motion of all classes against invaders and for democracy. Secondly, and more importantly, the Negro Nation was formed within the continental boundaries of the state of the United States after the development of modern imperialism. Under these conditions, national development was bound to be twisted especially since the national characteristics were formed under the conditions of colonial exploitation. The point is that the “Negro Zone” being or not being an economic or political whole is no argument. Puerto Rico is no longer an economic or political whole—imperialism sees to that! The island of Puerto Rico can no longer even feed itself. The immediate result of imperialism is to make the colony dependent on the imperialist country. It is also interesting to note that the resolution never refers to the USA as a nation, but a country, which at least implies their acceptance of the USNA as a multinational state. Further:

Industrialization in the Black Belt is not, as is generally the case in colonies, properly speaking, in contradiction with the ruling interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie, which has in its hands the monopoly of all the industry; but insofar as industry is developed here, it will in no way bring a solution to the question of living conditions of the oppressed Negro majority, nor to the agrarian question, which lies at the basis of the national question.

Is industrialization contrary to the interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie? By answering this question “yes” the Resolution takes the position of Kautsky, who wrote, “Imperialism is a product of highly developed industrial capitalism. It consists in the striving of every industrial capitalist nation to bring under its control and to annex increasingly big agrarian regions irrespective of what nations inhabit those regions.” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, International Publishers, 1942, p. 162).

However, Lenin states clearly, “the characteristic feature of imperialism

is not industrial capital, but finance capital," (ibid.) and further, "if it were chiefly a question of the annexation of agrarian countries by industrial countries, the role of the merchant would be predominant." (op. cit., p. 163)

The very heart of finance capital is its investment in the production of commodities. In *Imperialism* Lenin, quoting Hobson, shows how first heavy industry is transferred to the colonies and finally light industry, leaving the service industries in the imperialist countries. History has confirmed all of this and there is not a colony or neocolony that is not undergoing a rapid industrial expansion.

On the contrary, this question is still further aggravated as a result of the increase of the contradictions arising from the pre-capitalist forms of exploitation of the Negro peasantry and of a considerable portion of the Negro proletariat (miners, forestry workers, etc.) in the Black Belt, and at the same time, owing to the industrial development here, the growth of the most important driving force of the national revolution, the black working class, is especially strengthened. Thus, the prospect for the future is not an inevitable dying away of the national revolutionary Negro movement in the South, as Lovestone prophesied, but on the contrary, a great advance of this movement and the rapid approach of a revolutionary crisis in the Black Belt.

First of all, it stands to reason that there can be no pre-capitalist forms of exploitation of the "Negro Proletariat." If they are a proletariat, they are the creation of capital. This also applies to the question of farm labor.

The question of the "Negro peasantry" is much more difficult to explain in the midst of a highly developed capitalist economy. In order that there be a complete understanding of Lenin's use of the terms feudal, semi-feudal and slave in relationship to the forms of the exploitation of the Negro sharecropper, we reprint those formulations as they appear in his work *The Development of Capitalism in Agriculture*.

We should begin, as Lenin did, with an understanding of the form, as distinct from the content of capitalism in agriculture. Lenin wrote:

The case of America confirms in a particularly striking manner the truth emphasised by Marx in Vol. III of *Capital*, that capitalism in agriculture does not depend on the form of land ownership or land tenure. Capital finds medieval and patriarchal land tenure of the most varied types: feudal, "allotment-peasant" (i.e., dependent peasant), clan, communal, state, etc. Capital subordinates all these types of land tenure to itself; but this subordination assumes various forms and is achieved in various ways.

The core of the struggle between Marxists as regards the reality and tactics of the Negro question are reprinted below.

3. The Formerly Slave-Owning South

"The United States of America," writes Mr. Himmer, "is a country that never knew feudalism, and has none of its economic survivals." (P. 41 of the article mentioned.) This assertion is diametrically opposite to the truth; for the economic survivals of slavery differ in no way from similar survivals of feudalism; and in the formerly slave-owning South of the United States these survivals are very strong to this day. It would not be worth while dwelling on Mr. Himmer's mistake if it could be regarded as a mistake committed in a hastily written magazine article. But the whole liberal and Narodnik literature of Russia proves that with regard to the Russian *otrabotki* system—our survival of feudalism—exactly the same "mistake" is made systematically and with extraordinary persistence.

The South of the United States was a slave-owning territory until the Civil War of 1861-65 swept slavery away. To this day the Negro population, which does not exceed 0.7 per cent to 2.2 per cent of the total population in the Northern and Western divisions, represents 22.6 to 33.7 per cent of the total population in the South. For the United States as a whole, the Negroes represent 10.7 per cent of the total population. That the Negroes are in a state of servitude goes without saying; in this respect the American bourgeoisie is no better than the bourgeoisie of other countries. Having "emancipated" the Negroes, it took good care, on the basis of "free" and republican-democratic capitalism, to restore all that possibly could be restored to do all it possibly could to oppress the Negroes in the most shameful and despicable manner. To characterise the cultural level of the Negro it is sufficient to point to a slight statistical fact. While the proportion of illiterates among the white population of the United States in 1900 was 6.2 percent of the population (of ten years of age and over), among the Negroes it was a high as 44.5 per cent!! More than seven times as high!! In the North and the West the proportion of illiterates was from 4 to 6 per cent of the population (1900); in the South it was 22.9 to 23.9 per cent!! One can easily imagine the sum total of facts in the sphere of legal and social relations that corresponds to this most disgraceful fact in the sphere of elementary education.

What is the economic foundation on which this beautiful "superstructure" has arisen and now rests?

The foundation of the typically Russian, "truly Russian *otrabotki* system," i.e., *share-cropping*.

The number of farms operated by Negroes in 1910 was 920,883, i.e., 14.5 per cent of the total number of farms. Of the total number of farmers, 37.0 per cent were tenant farmers and 62.1 per cent were owners; the remaining 0.9 per cent of the farms were run by farm managers. Among the white farmers 39.2 per cent were tenant farmers, whereas among the Negro farmers 75.3 per cent were tenant farmers! The typical Negro farmer is a tenant farmer. In the West, only 14.0 per cent of the farmers are tenant farmers. This region is still in the process of colonisation; it abounds in new, free land; it is the Eldorado (a shortlived, unenduring Eldorado) of the small "independent farmer." In the North 26.5 per cent of the farmers

are tenant farmers; whereas in the South the proportion of tenant farmers is 49.6 per cent! Half the farmers in the South are tenant farmers.

But this is not all. The farmers we are discussing are not tenants in the European, civilised, modern capitalist sense; they are mainly semi-feudal or—what is the same in the economic sense—semi-slave *share tenants*. In the “free” West only a minority of the tenant farmers are share tenants (25,000 out of a total of 53,000). In the old North, which was colonised long ago, out of a total of 766,000 tenant farmers, 483,000, *i.e.*, 63 per cent, are share tenants. In the South, out of a total of 1,537,000 tenant farmers, 1,021,000, or 66 per cent, are *share tenants*.

In 1910, in free, republican-democratic America, there were one and a half million share tenants; and of this number *over one million were Negroes*. And the proportion of share tenants to the total number of farmers is not declining, but steadily and fairly rapidly rising. In 1880, 17.5 per cent of the total number of farmers in the United States were share tenants; in 1890, 18.4 per cent; in 1900, 22.2 per cent; in 1910, 24.0 per cent.

“In the South,” we read in the commentary of the American compilers of the 1910 census, “the conditions have at all times been somewhat different from those in the North, and many of the tenant farms are part of plantations of considerable size which date from before the Civil War.” In the South “the system of farming by means of leasing the land to tenants, primarily to Negroes, replaced the system of farming by means of slave labour.” “The tenant system is more conspicuous in the South, where the large plantations formerly operated by slave labour have in many cases been broken up into small parcels or tracts and leased to tenants . . . These plantations are, in many cases, still operated substantially as agricultural units, the tenants being subjected to a degree of supervision more or less similar to that which hired farm labourers are subjected to in the North.” (*Op. cit.*, Vol. V, pp. 102, 104.)

To characterise the South it is necessary to add that the population is fleeing from the South to other capitalist regions and towns, in the same way as in Russia the peasantry is fleeing from the most backward central agricultural gubernias, where the survivals of serfdom are most preserved, is fleeing from the tyranny of the Valyai-Markovs, to the more capitalistically developed regions of Russia, to the capitals, to the industrial gubernias and to the South (*The Development of Capitalism in Russia*). The share-cropping region, both in America and in Russia, is the region of the greatest stagnation, where the toiling masses are subjected to the greatest degradation and oppression. Immigrants to America, who play such an important part in its economic and social life, avoid the South. In 1910 the foreign-born population comprised 14.5 per cent of the total. In the South the proportion of the foreign-born population ranged from 1 per cent to 4 per cent, in the various regions; whereas for the rest of the country the proportion of the foreign-born population ranged from 13.9 per cent to 27.7 per cent (New England). Segregated, hidebound, in a stifling atmosphere, a sort of prison for

the “emancipated” Negroes—this is what the American South is like. The population is more settled, more “attached to the land”: except for the district in which considerable colonisation is going on (the West South-Central). 91 to 92 per cent of the population of the two other districts of the South reside in the districts in which they were born, whereas for the United States as a whole the proportion is 72.6 per cent, *i.e.*, the population is much more mobile. In the West, which is entirely a colonisation region, only 35 to 41 per cent of the population were born in the districts in which they reside.

From the two Southern regions where there has been no colonisation, the Negroes are fleeing: during the ten years between the last two censuses these two regions supplied other parts of the country with about 600,000 “coloured” people. The Negroes are fleeing mainly to the towns: in the South, 77 to 80 per cent of the Negro population live in villages; whereas in the other regions only 8 to 32 per cent of the Negroes live in villages. There is a striking similarity between the economic position of the American Negroes and that of the “former landlords’ peasants” of the central agricultural regions of Russia.

. . . Thus, in the North and West—the regions in which two-thirds of the total improved land and two-thirds of the total livestock are concentrated—*more than half* the farmers cannot dispense with hired labourers. In the South, this proportion is smaller only because the semi-feudal (*i.e.*, semi-slave) system of exploitation in the form of share-cropping is still powerful in that region. There is no doubt that in America, as in all capitalist countries in the world, the section of farmers who are most badly off are obliged to sell their labour power. Unfortunately, American statistics provide no data whatever on this subject, unlike the German statistics for 1907, for example, in which such figures are compiled and thoroughly analysed. According to the German figures, out of a total of 5,736,082 owners of agricultural enterprises (the total figure includes even the smallest “owners”), the *principal* occupation of 1,940,867, *i.e.*, over 30 per cent, is that of hired labourers. Of course, the majority of these farm labourers and day labourers possessing strips of land belong to the very lowest groups of farmers.

Let us assume that in the United States, where the smallest farms (of three acres or less) are as a rule not registered at all, only 10 per cent of the farmers are compelled to sell their labour power. Even on this basis we find that *more than one-third* of the farmers are *directly* exploited by the landlords and capitalists (24.0 per cent as share-croppers exploited by the former slave-owners in a feudal or semi-feudal manner, and 10 per cent who are exploited by capitalists, making a total of 34 per cent). Hence, of the total number of farmers, only a *minority*, barely more than *one-fifth*, or *one-fourth*, neither hire workers, nor hire, or go into bondage, themselves.

These important statements have been presented fully within the context of Lenin’s study of the development of capitalism in agriculture. The question is how do we account for the confusion that ends up by

denying that there was capitalism in the south—a confusion that not only characterizes the “Left in this country, but some elements of the CI as well.

The Marxist method proceeds from the obvious fact that everything that happens happens at a certain place at a certain time and under certain conditions. Without describing these conditions, time and place, there is little that is understandable. First of all we must state that there was never any economy in this country except capitalism. Does this collide with Lenin’s statements? Not at all. Marx pointed out as regards slavery in the USNA: “But the business in which slaves are used is conducted by capitalists.” In a word, the slaves were slaves but their masters were capitalists, and production was bourgeois commodity production. The reason that this particular form of exploitation arose was the shortage of labor coupled with the international demand for cotton and tobacco.

It was inevitable that the slave would evolve into a serf or semi-serf and labor under semi-feudal conditions. The first section of the *Negro National Colonial Question* deals with this aspect of the evolution of the Negro people, and needs no repeating here. We need only point out that the landlords were capitalists and production was commodity production. There were semi-feudal conditions, as Lenin points out, but the system was capitalism.

The CI, the “New Left” and the CPUSA, proceeding from the “semi-feudal conditions”, come up with a policy that calls for the overthrow of the remnants of feudalism. This tactic is spelled out as all class unity or in short, a struggle led by the Negro bourgeoisie. We have seen how, over the past years, this “Struggle for Democracy” has led the revolutionary Negro workers from political defeat to political defeat.

Because certain elements within the CI and the CPUSA could not understand slavery within capitalism, or a semi-feudalist form of capitalist exploitation, expropriation and distribution of the surplus product on the one hand; and fearing to really examine Lenin’s writings on the other—good people have attempted to develop a correct politic on the basis of incorrect theory. There is no “battle for democracy” in the South, except to the extent that national liberation is a democratic task; nor are there two stages of revolution in the South. In the epoch of financial imperialism the national liberation of a colony can only be accomplished with socialism. Thus the national liberation struggle of the Negro Nation is the struggle for socialism. The battle must be fought out under the hegemony of the proletariat. This is the policy of our Party.

Nelson Peery