

The
Communist Position
on

THE
NEGRO
QUESTION



NEW CENTURY PUBLISHERS

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Introduction by NAT ROSS

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NOTE

This booklet contains excerpts from the major speeches in discussion of the Negro question at the plenary meeting of the National Committee of the Communist Party, held in New York, December 3-5, 1946. In addition, it includes the *Resolution on Negro Rights and Self-Determination* adopted by the Plenum, the remarks of William Z. Foster and Eugene Dennis, and the summary remarks of Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., who presented the major report on this vital question. The introduction is by Nat Ross.

Introduction

AT THE end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947, while reaction was intensifying its fierce attack against the oppressed Negro people and the working class, another event captured the heart of progressive America and aroused the sympathetic interest of democratic-minded people the world over. That event was the epoch-making campaign to oust the self-avowed klansman, Theodore Bilbo, from the U.S. Senate. Numerous factors had helped to bring about the temporary non-seating of Bilbo on the opening day of the 80th Congress, on January 3, 1947. But no single factor was as important as the political role and militancy of the Negro people themselves.

During the past fifteen years the country has witnessed the steady advance of the Negro liberation movement. At the beginning of this period the Negro people broke with the Republican party after 65 years of support and turned to the Roosevelt New Deal. To a considerable extent the movement of the Negro people developed along independent political lines, often in alliance with organized labor. During the 30's Negro America was aroused by the world-wide Scottsboro campaign which was initiated by the Communists after their entry in the South, armed with the Marxist understanding of the national character of Negro oppression. In this period hundreds of thousands of Negro workers joined the C.I.O. and other trade unions and together with white workers participated in numerous struggles and strikes.

During World War II, one million Negro servicemen and millions in war factories and on the home front gave unstintingly to win the war against the fascist axis despite the continuing national oppression, Jim Crowism and insults placed in their way. Since V-J Day with tremendous mass layoffs of Negroes from war plants and the renewed lynch terror, have found the Negro people fighting back to retain their hard-won gains and seeking closer association with the labor movement and white progressives. However, hesitation by labor to act boldly and the prevalence of the imperialist poison of

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white chauvinism in labor's ranks has helped to create the danger of the growth of petty bourgeois nationalism and other reactionary and social democratic tendencies among the Negro people.

During this period various types of mass organizations have been built up among the Negro people, with the most powerful, the NAACP, having passed the 500,000 mark in membership. The militant National Negro Congress added another chapter to its struggle for Negro liberation in its petition to the United Nations on behalf of the 13 million oppressed Negro citizens of the United States, which won a wide and sympathetic response among the Negro people. All of these developments testify to the burning desire of the Negro people to achieve full citizenship and full participation in American life. It is an expression toward national consciousness as well as of the warmest sympathy and solidarity with the colonial peoples and oppressed nations throughout the world.

This militant upsurge of the Negro people is best dramatized by their actions in the Black Belt area and throughout the South. The presence of Negroes testifying against Senator Bilbo in the Black Belt city of Jackson, Miss., in December 1946, epitomized the unquenchable century-old strivings of the Negro people to land, democratic rights and freedom. The testimony of the Mississippi Negroes in Jackson reflected the fighting spirit of the hundreds of thousands of Negroes who despite obstacles voted in the 1946 Democratic primaries in many of the Southern States for the first time in over half a century. It reflected the growing desire of virtually all sections of the Negro people in the South for a united Negro people's front—a spirit reminiscent of Reconstruction days.

Alongside of and stimulated by this great upsurge among the Negro people is another development in the South of supreme importance, namely the growing solidarity among Negro and white workers. This is best seen in the labor movement, in the organizing drive and strike struggles, although there is still room for considerable improvement. Not only white workers, but sections of the white middle class have recently spoken out against the Ku Klux Klan and the lynch terror and have joined in other solidarity actions. Examples of this are the actions of the Baptists and other religious denominations among white Southerners, the magnificent work of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and the pact of Southern white and Negro youth for a better South, signed at the Southern Youth Legislature at Columbia, S.C., held under the auspices of the Southern Negro Youth Congress.

It would be criminal foolishness to underestimate the prevalence

NAT ROSS

of chauvinism among white Southerners, or to underestimate the desperate activities of the K.K.K. and other fascist organizations supported by the absentee owned Wall Street corporations in the South and the Bourbon plantation owners. Nevertheless, what is new and dynamic in the South is the growing recognition among various groups and sections of white Southerners that the South as a whole will remain depressed as long as the Negroes are oppressed. This thought was editorially expressed in the *Macon, Georgia News*, a newspaper which, by and large, expresses the viewpoint of the liberal bourgeoisie in the South and their political spokesmen such as Senator Pepper, Governors Folsom and Arnall and Justice Black. The lengthy editorial condemns the plans of the Talmadgeites to exclude Negroes from voting in the democratic primaries and states: "Furthermore, denial to the Negro of the rights of citizenship is foolish. It hurts us. We cannot hold the Negro down without injury to ourselves. His well-being and prosperity increase our own. Our welfare is inseparable from his. We cannot keep a third of our population in bondage without being ourselves dragged down to the same low level."

The coming period in the South will call for much greater unity and solidarity. The Republican majority in Congress (despite certain demagogic maneuvers with regard to the Negroes) are preparing to put over a reactionary program on labor and social legislation, on taxes, tariffs, etc., which will deepen the existing unequal status of the South with the rest of the nation. Despite friction between them the Bourbon Democrats will basically cooperate with the Wall Street Republicans in this reactionary offensive in Congress. This unholy combination will also strive to widen the industrial wage differential between South and North and bring back the dollar a day wages on the Black Belt cotton plantation. This program will hasten the coming of the cyclical economic crisis in the United States and its special more disastrous effects on the already doubly oppressed Negro nation in the Black Belt, as well as the impoverished white workers of the South.

This basic common bond between the Wall Street Republicans and the Bourbon oppressors of the Negro people in the Black Belt must be broken and defeated. It can be done if the labor movement and the progressive forces throughout the country will recognize the essential fact that the struggle for national liberation of the Negro people is a prerequisite to any fundamental progress in the nation as a whole.

The material in this pamphlet consists of the resolution on the

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Negro question adopted at the meeting of the National Committee of the Communist Party of the U.S.A., December 3-5, 1946, which was based on the report made on this question by Comrade Benjamin J. Davis, and a number of the speeches which were made in the course of this discussion. The resolution, which should be carefully studied, reaffirms the basic Marxist characterization of the Negro question in the United States as a national question. At the same time it drastically corrects the sectarian and schematic use during the 30's of the Marxist concept of self-determination and strikes a body blow to any revisionist and bourgeois liberal approach to the Negro question that may still persist in Communist ranks.

Every Communist must master the theoretical principles that underly this resolution and translate its supremely important national and international significance to the American people in the struggle against Wall Street's drive for imperialist world domination. For as Marx says, "theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses."

Once the Communists understand the far-reaching importance of this resolution and its fundamental slogan of self-determination it will become a real impetus to develop the united front among the Negro people, and to the present day struggles for the defense of the Negro people, for their immediate demands, for full economic, political and social equality for the Negro people. The resolution can become an invaluable guide in the bold and uncompromising fight against white chauvinism—no matter in what subtle or other form it may appear or hide itself.

The resolution can become a great lever for stimulating the immediate day to day struggles and the whole Negro liberation movement in the deep South. The Communists will win the masses of Southern white workers in the common struggle if they ceaselessly hammer away at the *fundamental truth*—that there is no other road to progress for the impoverished whites, for the labor movement and the South as a whole, except as the white workers *in their own interests*, step forward and join the struggle against Jim Crow and national oppression and for the right of the Negro majority in the Black Belt freely to determine its own ultimate destiny.

The resolution will serve as an important weapon for all Communists in the United States, Negro and white, to advance the liberation movement of the Negro people—that powerful and indispensable ally of the working class—in the historic struggles that lie ahead, for democracy and socialism in the United States.

NAT ROSS

resolution

On the Question of Negro Rights and Self-Determination

ADOPTED AT THE PLENARY MEETING
OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE,
C.P.U.S.A., DECEMBER 3-5, 1946.

THE present drive of reaction against the Negro people is an attack upon the living standards and democratic rights of all the American people. It is an effort to halt the vital upsurge now taking place among the Negro people, to stop the growth of Negro and white labor and progressive unity, and to split asunder all progressive alliances and groupings.

Defense of Negro rights has become an imperative and inescapable task of the American labor-progressive coalition in the struggle against reaction and the threat of fascism. Such a coalition must be based solidly upon alliance with the Negro people.

North and South, the Negro people are attaining a new high level of fighting unity in defense of their rights and of gains won during the recent period. Their organizations, which are being strengthened and extended, are fighting for those democratic rights here at home which were proclaimed as our nation's war objectives abroad.

In sharp contrast with the situation following the First World War, masses of Negro workers are now actively participating in the trade unions. In the major wage struggles and strike movements since the end of the war, the employers have not been able to divide the workers on the "race issue." A growing confidence in the labor movement exists among the Negro workers, while the white workers realize better than previously the role of race and national prejudices in dividing their ranks.



A new wave of the struggle for democracy is arising in the South. In their courageous resistance to lynch terror, the Negro people are playing a leading role in the fight for democracy. For the first time since Reconstruction (1865-1877) and since the Populist movement of the 1890's, important sections of the white masses of the South are beginning to ally themselves on a significant scale with the Negro

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people in their common struggle against the trusts, and against the Bilbos, Rankins and Talmadges.

Irrespective of its immediate objectives, this struggle is directed at the semifeudal sharecropping-plantation system of the South, the source of the most brutal forms of Negro oppression. The sharecropping system, descended from slavery, perpetuates conditions which are essentially semifeudal. This system is a cesspool of reaction which poisons American political and economic life. The Nazi-like doctrines and practices of lily-white superiority, the main stock-in-trade of the Southern Bourbons, constantly inspire fascist groups and tendencies all over the country. The relation of Southern semifeudalism with the northern big trusts promotes the drive of the monopolies towards full-scale reaction, towards fascism.

* * *

Just as the Truman Administration receded from and finally betrayed the Roosevelt program in practically every field, it failed to resist the reactionary drive upon the Negro people. Federal F.E.P.C., anti-lynching and anti-poll tax legislation, action against anti-Negro terrorism, uprooting of the K.K.K. and similar fascist organizations and other pressing tasks went by the board entirely. In the recent elections the Republicans capitalized on these failures, and are now seeking the Negro vote for 1948.

Dependence upon the NAM and pro-fascist Republicans, no less than upon the reactionary leadership of the Democratic Party, can only prove disastrous to the Negro people. Only the most determined resistance by a coalition of labor, the poor farmers, the Negro people and all other progressives can prevent the 80th Congress from passing further oppressive legislation.

Only such a democratic coalition can wrest concessions from a Congress composed almost entirely of reactionary Republicans and Bourbon Democrats. It can do this by rallying labor and the people to a program of equal rights legislation, abolition of Jim Crow in the Army, adherence to the Supreme Court decision outlawing the white primary, establishing housing on a non-discriminatory basis, and securing Federal action against the inciters of race hatred.

Such a democratic coalition can rally all the progressive and independent political forces in the country to defeat reaction in 1948.

* * *

A principal task of all labor and progressive forces throughout the country is the struggle against reaction in the South. This is a

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key to breaking the power of the Bourbon Democrats, now allied with the reactionary Republicans.

The main obstacle to the progressive modernization of the South is the sharecropping-plantation system which keeps millions of Negroes in semi-serfdom and which also affects millions of poor white farmers. Basic land reform in the South is thus essential to the defeat of reaction in the country as a whole, to overcoming the backward and distressed conditions of the South, and to the nationwide struggle for Negro rights. Hand in hand with the struggle for the vote and the right of Negroes to hold office, the struggle against Southern landlordism will rally the Negro and white sharecroppers and poor farmers to a broad labor-progressive coalition of all anti-fascist Americans.

Just as the coming economic crisis threatens to depopulate the factories, especially of Negro workers, it will also render hundreds of thousands of Negro farm families homeless and jobless. To anticipate this catastrophe and prepare against it, Negro and white sharecroppers and agricultural workers should be organized into unions alongside the industrial unions now spreading in the South.

* * *

As always, the Communist Party stands firmly in the forefront of the struggle for full economic, social and political equality for the Negro people.

In fighting for their equal rights, the Negro people are becoming more unified as a people. Their fight for liberation from oppression in the Black Belt—the area of Negro majority population—is a struggle for full nationhood, for their rightful position of full equality as a nation. In recognizing the struggle for equal rights in the South as a movement towards full nationhood, the Communist Party supplies new power to the Negro liberation movement and also advances the perspective of full freedom for the Negro people. This understanding, growing out of a constant fight for Negro rights, strengthens white and Negro solidarity, based firmly on working class unity, and provides the program of permanent alliance between the Negro and white masses.

Today, the struggle for Negro liberation is concerned with gaining equal rights throughout the country, which includes in the South the struggle for attaining representative government and land reform. As our own history shows (Reconstruction) the development towards full and equal Negro participation in State and Federal government also moves in the direction of various forms

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of self-government by the Negro people, together with their white allies, in the Black Belt areas where they are in the majority.

This movement provides the basis for the full realization of Negro nationhood, whether it be achieved under capitalism or socialism. The Communist Party supports the right of self-determination for the Negro people, that is, their right to realize self-government in the Negro majority area in the South. Only on this basis will the relation of the Negro people to the State and Federal governments be determined on the basis of freedom.

The Communist Party does not attempt to impose any specific solution in advance of the form in which the right of self-determination will be exercised; nor does it prematurely raise self-determination as an immediate slogan of action. The future solution of this question must arise from the living movement itself, out of the current and future struggles for democracy and equal rights. Its form will be determined by the relationship of social forces in the country as a whole and by the relation of the Negro people to the progressive coalition.



A firm alliance of labor and the progressive forces generally with the Negro people is required by the present struggle against reaction. This alliance demands, in the first place, a constant fight to eradicate the doctrines and practices of white chauvinism in all their forms, among all sections of the population, and especially whenever they manifest themselves in the labor and progressive movement.

In the trade unions, even in some of the most progressive, discrimination against Negro workers still persists. As in the past, the Communists insist upon the fullest participation of Negro workers in the unions on an equal footing, including in positions of top leadership. The unions cannot successfully combat the divisive tactics of the employers without fully recognizing and fighting against the present unequal position of the Negro workers in industry. This requires that the militant trade unionists raise the special demands of the Negro workers, such as seniority readjustments as well as other provisions, to permit equal opportunity for advancement and to protect the Negro from being the last to be hired and the first to be fired.

Especially as it influences the labor and progressive movement, white chauvinism feeds separatist tendencies and distrust of white workers among the Negro people. Therefore, the encouragement of every movement among the Negro people toward greater integra-

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tion with their white allies, requires a simultaneous struggle against white chauvinism, especially whenever it shows itself within the labor and progressive movement.

By its own actions, the Communist Party must set an example before the whole labor movement. Every influence of white chauvinism within its ranks, whether it manifests itself openly or in concealed form, must be systematically combatted and expunged. It is the over-riding responsibility of white Communists to fight white chauvinism relentlessly.

Negro Communists should systematically combat separatist tendencies and distrust of white workers among the Negro people, while building working class unity and alliance with other nationality groups also suffering from discrimination, such as the foreign born, the Jewish people and Catholics.

Towards this end, the Communist Party will develop constant educational work within its own ranks, as well as on a broader scale. As part of its constant fight for Negro rights, it will strive to uproot false theories and ban race prejudice from the labor and progressive movement. This is imperative for welding firmly the alliance of the labor and progressive movement with the Negro people in the common struggle against reaction and the threat of fascism.

remarks of

William Z. Foster

NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, COMMUNIST PARTY, U.S.A.

I DID not expect to speak in this discussion but inasmuch as an announcement was made that I was to speak I will say a few words extemporaneously.

One thing that must strike all of us here is the high level of this discussion on the question of self-determination. I have participated in many discussions in our Party, but I do not recall any that was on a higher theoretical plane than this. Such a discussion, it is hardly necessary for me to add, could not have taken place under the Browder regime. Then we would have had a ukase from above and God help him who challenged it. Now, however, we have had a free, open and comradely discussion. It has been such that it will cause us all to leave this meeting with a better understanding and a greater unity in the Party on this question than we have ever had.

Some of the comrades who have spoken against the resolution would probably not make the same speech now if they were to speak again. The discussion goes to show that Comrade Davis' report and the resolution before us have stood up.

What have we been saying in this discussion? We have been re-examining the whole theoretical basis of our approach to the Negro question, not simply the application of the self-determination slogan. During the course of this discussion, we have clearly established three or four fundamental propositions regarding the mooted question of self-determination in the Black Belt of the South.

First, that the Negro people in the Black Belt are a nation, that they possess the essential qualities of nationhood, as elaborated in the works of that great expert on the national question, Stalin. This lays a firm basis for the self-determination slogan. So I will not deal further with this basic matter of whether or not the Negroes in the Black Belt are a nation.

Secondly, we have made an important contribution in answering a question that has puzzled our comrades for the past twenty years, namely, why, if the Negro people are a nation, don't they put forth

the slogan of self-determination. Fundamentally, the reason is that they are essentially a young nation, a developing nation. A nation has to be at a certain stage of political growth before it advances the demand for self-determination. As a number of comrades have pointed out, all over the world there are to be found peoples who do not advance the slogan of self-determination. We have had one illustration from India. I might add further that there are some 18 distinct peoples in India, with very few of them advancing the slogan of self-determination. Nevertheless, the Communist Party of India does advance this slogan in their name.

Nations are a matter of growth, of course. Our own nation took some 150 years at least before it had developed a real national consciousness, until it advanced the slogan of self-determination, backing it up to the point of separation from Great Britain. Of course, the Negro people in the United States are developing under far more complicated and difficult circumstances than did the 13 American colonies.

It has been pointed out in this general connection (and I think this throws much light on the question) that some of the nations of India are advancing their self-determination slogan under the guise of religion. It is also true that in certain circumstances national slogans are put out by other peoples in primitive or in distorted forms, for example, as racial slogans. One of the characteristics of the American Negro people has been that they, too, have put out what are basically national slogans very largely in a racial sense. Hence we have to look more closely than we have in the past at these racial slogans and at the conceptions the Negro people have with regard to race and racial oppression. Behind these prevalent concepts of race are actually developing national concepts. I think the discussion has proved that it is no decisive sign that a people does not constitute a nation if it does not advance clear-cut slogans for self-determination.

Thirdly, our discussion has shed considerable light on another very elementary matter, bearing directly upon the central question of whether or not the Negro people in the Black Belt are a nation, and on the slogan of self-determination. Some comrades in the discussion have said that the Negro people are not only not now a nation but also that they are not moving in the direction of becoming a nation. To help clear up this matter we have pretty clearly shown in our discussion what the orientation, or general course of development of the Negro people, really is. This orientation is developing along two general lines:

First, the Negro people most distinctly feel themselves to be

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Americans in the fullest sense of the word and they are fighting resolutely for full participation in all phases of American life on the basis of complete economic, political and social equality. The second main trend in the orientation of the Negro people is to unify their own ranks on a national basis and to develop more and more systematically a definite national consciousness. One of the most important developments in this respect has to do with the change that has already been noted by some comrades, namely, that the Negro people no longer speak of themselves so much as a race, but rather as a people. When the Negro people begin to designate themselves as a people rather than as a race, they are already taking a long stride in the direction of national consciousness.

There are many other signs, of course, of the developing national consciousness of the American Negro people. They are building up many movements that are definitely of a national liberation character. They are also closely identifying themselves with the national liberation struggles of colonial peoples all over the world. They feel a kinship with these movements. Very significant in this general respect was the demand made by the National Negro Congress to the United Nations to take up the grievances of the Negro people in this country. This demand, I understand, was very favorably received by the Negro masses and intellectuals. Such an act was essentially that of a nation appealing over the head of the American government to the peoples of the world for justice, much as almost any other colonial or oppressed nation might do.

Let me sum up on this general point: that is, the orientation of the Negro people is first, toward full participation and full equality in American life, and second, toward the development of their national consciousness. Comrade Ed Strong made a good contribution when he stressed the basic harmony between these two streams of courses of development. One of the major difficulties we have had to contend with has been a tendency of our opponents to pose one of these currents to the other, thus making it appear that the demand for self-determination slogans is in contradiction to the proposition that Negroes fight for the fullest rights as Americans. Comrade Strong knocked this nonsense on the head when he pointed out so forcefully that it is impossible for the Negro people to achieve their full economic, political, and social equality as Americans unless they organize as a nation, unless they forward the slogan of self-determination for the Black Belt of the South.

The foregoing three major points in our discussion, relating to the reaffirmation of the basis of Negro nationhood, the clarification

of the question of the Negro people not putting forward the self-determination slogan, and the analysis of the orientation of the Negro people, lay a solid basis for our theoretical development and use of the slogan of self-determination. From which we may conclude that the soundness of our Negro resolution has been proved and its adoption by our National Committee justified.

Even with these things said, we have, however, by no means exhausted the matter. There are numerous aspects of this general problem to which we have to pay more attention in the immediate future than we have done in this discussion. First, there is the question of the whole concept and role of race, which I have already alluded to. In past years the tendency in the Party was to brush this entire matter of race aside, on the assumption that it was some sort of distortion that had no significance except as an obstacle to the Negro people's acquiring a national consciousness. But the question cannot be evaded so easily. I am sure that if you ask the Negro people on what grounds they are oppressed, 99 out of 100 will give you a "racial" answer, in spite of the fact, as I have indicated, that they are beginning to develop, more and more, a national consciousness.

We know, of course, that science has shattered the "race theory." Nevertheless the term "race," loosely used, has served as a powerful instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie for the oppression of the Negro people, and we have got to trace much more carefully than we have in the past this relation of the concept of race to the whole question of the brutal oppression of the Negro people.

Secondly, there was another point that was not very well developed in our discussion, and it is one to which we also have to pay much more attention if we are to grasp the essence of this complex question and to make headway. I refer to the relation of the national minority of Negroes in the North to the main body of the Negro nation in the South. The connection between these two sections of the Negro people is a very close and a very vital one. We must pay very close attention to the material inter-relationships of one with the other, not the least because the leadership of the Negro people as a whole is developing chiefly among the national minority in the North. This is not to ignore the very striking new development that the Negro people in the South are courageously beginning to develop real leadership right in the heart of the Black Belt itself.

Another important question we shall have to study much more than we have done in this session is the concrete relations of the Negro nation to the American nation as a whole. In the past, when

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we first developed the self-determination slogan, we also brushed this question aside very cavalierly. There was a tendency to plump for a Negro Republic. But the situation is much more complicated than that. Talk of an American Negro Republic has no foundation in present-day reality. The relation of two or more peoples to each other within broader states is an extremely complicated one and assumes many forms in different nations. We have to become very familiar with these forms, especially as we begin to popularize the slogan of self-determination among the Negro people. I, for one, have no doubt that before very long, when we find the way of advancing the slogan more skillfully, the Negro people will begin to accept it. Especially I felt this when I listened to our brilliant young Negro Marxists discuss this question at this National Committee meeting.

The last point I want to touch upon is the practical use of the self-determination slogan in the national liberation struggle of the Negro people. We did not deal with this practical question sufficiently in our discussion. What we have done mostly has been to establish the validity of the slogan. The practical use we are going to make of the slogan in the struggle is going to take much more study than we have given it here. There are two things I am sure of: first, that this slogan is not going to be put on the shelf as one comrade indicated; and second, that we are not going to go to the sectarian extreme of using it to propagandize for the setting up of a Negro Republic. We have got to find the proper methods of using this slogan. In my opinion, our use of it will be pretty much in an educational sense in the beginning. But experience will teach us in this matter. Slogans are often two-edged swords. They can do great harm if wrongly applied, and this slogan can only be of value to us if we use it properly.

Now, comrades, this is all I have to say on the question of self-determination. In this meeting, although we have not discussed all phases of the question, we have certainly discussed the fundamental ones. This is very important. In my opinion we have established a correct and basic attitude toward the general question during the course of the discussion. We should, therefore, on the basis of our discussion, endorse Comrade Ben Davis' report and our draft resolution.

summary remarks of
Benjamin J. Davis, Jr.

MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL BOARD, C.P.U.S.A.
COUNCILMAN OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

I THINK it would be somewhat anti-climactic to review all the points developed in the course of the discussion. The remarks of Comrade Foster practically eliminate the need for a summary. I would like, however, to make a few brief observations.

I think that this is the most important political discussion in our Party since the July, 1945, convention. It is the highlight of our Plenum, and, I am certain, contributed to the political understanding of all of us. Its importance rests in the fact that the Negro question, the question of the Negro people as an oppressed nation, of their national liberation, is in the center of all the problems today facing the American working class and its allies. It is also in the center of all questions in respect to the final, socialist emancipation of the American working class.

The report which I made was the basis of perhaps the richest political discussion I have ever experienced; it was deepened considerably by the contributions of all of the comrades. All of us have, I am sure, a certain inner glow of pride in being a Communist, and especially because of the tremendous contributions made in the discussion by younger Negro comrades—Comrades Jackson, Strong, Berry, and others. The fact that these three comrades are veterans should impress something else on our minds, namely, that the almost one million Negro veterans who have come back are going to go a long way in developing further the sense of internationalism of the whole Negro people. I also think that the contributions of other comrades—Comrades Bittelman, Weiss, and Allen—certainly were outstanding in the discussion. I believe that some of the comrades who spoke would probably make a somewhat different report or remarks if they spoke now. But they also contributed to the discussion because they have shown that in many respects we have not said everything that there is to be said on some of the questions raised. As Comrade Foster pointed out, there are still questions to be studied and worked out and related more intimately to the actual trends and

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developments which are taking place among the Negro people generally.

It is my opinion that the adoption of this resolution, the position which it maintains, and the report which is based upon it, is going to mark the formal and final defeat of the remnants of Browder's revisionism and bourgeois liberalism on the Negro question—a question in which revisionism did so much damage to our Party's work among the Negro people, and also to our Party's work generally.

As has been pointed out, it is interesting to note how democratic has been the discussion which has taken place on the right to self-determination. No such full and open discussion on this question, or on any other question, took place during the period when Browder was the General Secretary of our Party.

But we have had a year of discussion, with all of its imperfections, and the opportunity during this discussion to draw upon the rich creativeness of our Party comrades, a very important feature of the action that I am confident we will take on the resolution.

It is my belief that the National Committee here tonight is in a position to settle this question in so far as the basic approach of our Party is concerned. The discussion we have had for the last year, the reports and documents circulated at least to our Party leadership in the states and districts, the document sent out by the Negro Commission, the series of articles in *Political Affairs*, and the discussion on the report and the resolution at this Plenum, fully equip us to make a decision on this question now. We must so act now, in my opinion, because in the present period, which is going to become more critical as sharp class battles develop, we cannot continue to work without a Marxist-Leninist perspective on this question, for this affects the form and content of our work. It is the basis for the formulation of our program for the Negro people on the day-to-day issues. In order to formulate this program we must know where we are going, what slogans and demands correspond to the level of the work at any given moment. All our Negro work has suffered in the past period, notwithstanding certain progress which we have made, because we did not have a firm grasp of the Marxist-Leninist compass provided by the resolution which is presented here tonight for your action.

I think that the position taken in the resolution is a sound position, which, when it is properly mastered and fought for within the ranks of our Party and carried to the masses of the Negro people and the white workers, will be accepted by them.

As I see it, the main arguments made here in opposition to it have not been sound. The discussion has demonstrated that, and I do

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not propose to go into them because I think they have been well answered by many of the comrades who have spoken on the question.

The position on self-determination as put forward in the resolution avoids two main dangers. First, it does not state, in a sectarian manner, as we did in the past, what the form and the exact manner would be in which this self-determination would be realized or exercised. This sectarian position or attitude or approach to self-determination is adequately and correctly avoided in the resolution before you.

Secondly, I think that the resolution avoids tailing after events, after history, as some comrades place it, and does not leave everything to take care of itself in the future, which in my opinion was the main Right danger developed in the discussion by those comrades who were opposed to the adoption of the slogan.

It should also be added that this resolution shows the basic relationship of self-determination, that is, the concept of the Negro question as a national question, to all of the current struggles for Negro rights as we face them today.

I think there is something new in the resolution, in the approach which has been argued for by those comrades who support it. That something new is the formulation of this position on the basis of what is taking place in the struggles of the Negro people, and the trends among them, the objective conditions, the actual status of the Negro people, the facts of life existing outside us. That approach is definitely reflected in the resolution, and that was the approach of the report. It offers a basis, not only for a correct theoretical position with regard to the Negro question but also, in my opinion, a correct approach and theoretical stand with regard to all questions on which we have formulated basic policy and fundamental positions.

It is interesting to note that in the opposing arguments that have been raised, the question of the land, the guarantees that the Negro people will acquire the land rightfully theirs, and the highest form of those guarantees, of self-government, were questions which were not answered, with no adequate substitute offered, with no alternative presented which was realizable, which could offer to the Negro people a real guarantee that they will be able to determine their destiny and own the land which constitutes the heart and seat of their nationhood.

I also believe that some of the positions argued for certainly tend in the direction of the Social-Democratic position, that is, the view of the Negro question in this country as a narrow class question. The resolution correctly rejects any such position, and I think the discus-

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sion shows that there must be a fight for correct thinking on the Negro question as a national question and not just as a narrow class question.

I think, further, that the resolution will be one of the heaviest blows against white chauvinism delivered by our Party since our July, 1945, convention, prior to which time, because of Browderism, white chauvinism developed and was not sufficiently combatted, and our Party lost much of its sensitivity on this question.

As to many questions and doubts which have been expressed that the slogan of self-determination will be harmful to Negro and white unity, I think these are doubtings due to the fear of really tackling the white workers, showing them their common interests with the Negro workers, and of supporting this slogan in the South. I feel that it will help us to cleanse our own ranks mercilessly of white chauvinism which manifests itself in so many different ways—the question of mobilizing our Party as a whole and the white workers as a whole in struggles for Negro rights; the question of promoting Negro leadership, in line with the example set by our National Committee at its last session with the election of Comrade Winston as Administrative Secretary of the Party; and the question of fraternal and social relations among our Negro and white comrades, of actually making our Negro comrades feel much more at home in our Party.

The resolution will also help us in revitalizing the Marxist position of our Party that the white comrades take the initiative on all questions relating to white chauvinism, to education on questions of struggles, in public discussions, writings, and in actual leadership of day-to-day work. This will immeasurably strengthen the fight of our Negro comrades against Negro nationalism.

As we apply in practice this resolution on self-determination, one of the results will be certain immediate applications with respect to the fight for Negro rights. I think, for example, that we have not grasped sufficiently the epochal symbol of the struggle of the Negro people in the South, in Mississippi in particular, in the "Oust Bilbo" movement. We should realize that this "Oust Bilbo" movement represents a tremendous lever for further developing the national consciousness of the Negro people, for characterizing it and accelerating it as a real national liberation struggle of the Negro people.

The heroism being shown by the Negroes in the rendering of testimony against Bilbo has not been fully seen by our Party and therefore we have not transmitted its full significance to the American working class, the labor movement, and the allies of the labor movement. What the Negroes are demonstrating is in keeping with

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the highest traditions of the American working class, of the struggle for democracy in our country.

I would propose that our Plenum find the way to express publicly its solidarity with the Negro people in Mississippi in this anti-Bilbo movement and really to estimate it in line with the new spirit and the new concept which our Party, I am confident, will put forward as a result of the action to be taken here tonight. This movement to oust Bilbo, it seems to me, is a movement which we already see challenging the "white supremacy" advocates who dominate the governments in the deep South, developing further the self-unification of the Negro people and their unity with their white allies, and also showing very distinctly their desire for self-government and for representative government in the deep South.

I think that we can regain the moral strength on this question which was sapped to such a large extent by Browder's revisionism. This resolution gives us an instrument which we can immediately use in all of our work, within the Party as well as without. I therefore move, comrades, that the National Committee adopt this resolution.

excerpts from concluding remarks of
Eugene Dennis

GENERAL SECRETARY, COMMUNIST PARTY, U.S.A.

EVEN though we have acted officially and terminated the discussion at this meeting of our National Committee on Comrade Ben Davis' report, I wish you would bear with me for just a few minutes for a couple of observations.

There is no question that the report of Comrade Davis and the very rich discussion of it mark the high point of this Plenum and a high point in the work and thinking, in the Marxist maturity of most of our leadership. And surely the conclusions we have arrived at constitute a major contribution to the theoretical clarification of the Party on the Negro question as a national question.

Notwithstanding the viewpoint of some comrades, our conclusions here and the position we have adopted will serve to mobilize the Party to fight more effectively for all the immediate and partial demands and rights of the Negro people. There were, of course, many significant individual contributions in addition to those which were made tonight. I particularly want to single out from last night's discussion, in addition to the report, the remarks of Comrade Bittelman and especially of Comrades Jackson and Strong. I think that our Party, just as it will feel proud of the Marxist conclusions we have arrived at, will also and equally be proud of the role of these comrades in this connection.

We also have to take note of the fact that this discussion must alert us to the immense job we still have to educate our Party to a clearer, Marxist-Leninist understanding of the national question in general and of the Negro question in the United States in particular. This discussion has emphasized further that the major work has to be done among our white comrades, just as it has to be done particularly among the white masses outside of the Communist movement.

All the comrades who originally opposed the report of Comrade Davis and the resolution accept, and agree with, the main slogan of action which our Party champions nationally in behalf of the Negro people, namely, the right of full political, economic and social equality for the Negro people. But these comrades have not yet

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grasped the cardinal fact that if this basic democratic slogan and Marxist principle is to mean what it says, then its application in the Black Belt—where the Negro people constitute not only a majority of the population, but have the fundamental characteristics of an oppressed nation—requires the exercise of the right to self-determination.

To talk of full equality for the Negro people of the South without advancing and fighting for their right to land and to the free determination of their own destiny, would be a denial of the struggle for equal rights for the Negro people, not only in the South, but also in the North. It would be a negation and abandonment of the great national liberation movement of the Negro people. At the same time it would also deprive the American working class and people of this powerful anti-imperialist movement which aids and promotes their immediate as well as ultimate aims.

In our resolution and in Comrade Davis' report we have not merely reaffirmed our Marxist-Leninist principle of the right of the Negro people in the Black Belt to self-determination. We have, as comrades have noted, avoided the errors we committed in the past. For one thing, we did not enter into an academic debate or fruitless speculation on *when or how* this right will be realized, or precisely *in what form*. It is incumbent upon us scientifically, as Marxists, to state this fact.

I would just like to remark in passing that because we do not draw a blueprint and give all the answers here, we should not approach the question—that is, one aspect of the question—as put by one comrade. I don't want to get into the realm of speculation on this matter, but I think we would make a serious and harmful mistake if we were to associate the realization of the right of self-determination solely with the realization of socialism in the United States. If the American people, the labor movement in alliance with the great Negro people and all progressive and democratic forces, can check and defeat the onslaught of pro-fascist monopoly reaction, and bring into power, as an important phase of that struggle, a progressive presidential ticket and Congress in 1948, with all that this would entail, many things will be possible, including, at least, tremendous strides toward the full realization of equal rights of the Negro people in the Black Belt.

Further, in contradistinction to the past, we do *not* present the slogan of self-determination as an immediate slogan of action, but as the affirmation of a historic right which guides and establishes the direction of all our work in the South. We must and can convince far larger sections of both Negro and white masses in the South that

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the struggle for the national liberation of the Negro people, including the fight for land, as well as for all other immediate economic and democratic demands, is the key to breaking the grip of monopoly capital in the South. It is the key to overcoming the industrial backwardness of the South, the one-crop system and all semifeudal relations, the curse of pro-fascist Bourbon reaction which enslaves the Negro people and also impoverishes, holds down, and degrades the masses of the white population.

Finally, it seems to me that our entire Party, and all advanced workers and progressives, must realize that today, in the struggle against the growth of pro-fascist reaction, the fight for equal rights for the Negro people in every aspect of their economic, political, and social life, including the struggle for the equal rights of the Negro people in the Black Belt, is a central task as well as a most powerful weapon in the struggle against reaction. It is a central part of the united people's movement to halt the rise of fascism. As such, it must be resolutely and skillfully supported and fought for in every part of the nation, and by every labor, anti-fascist and progressive element and organization.

excerpts from discussion

1. James E. Jackson

STATE CHAIRMAN, COMMUNIST PARTY OF LOUISIANA

IT SEEMS to me that the function of the resolution is to arm the Party with a basic theoretical weapon with which we can have a correct perspective and orientation for formulating, in the development of events, temporary and tactical programs to guide the day to day struggle of the Negro people for liberation, and to insure the preparation and coordination of this struggle with the historical mission of the working class.

In preparation for a discussion of this kind, we cannot excuse ourselves by discrediting or closing out from our own inspection and examination, world experience and the compiled crystallized experiences of our revolutionary movement through many scores of years of progress. Marx says, in the *Manifesto*, "The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement."

Reflected in tonight's discussion there has been considerable confusion between a tactical, temporary program and the question of a fundamental, theoretical position of our Party. Without such a fundamental policy in regard to Negro liberation it will be impossible to develop proper and "ripe" immediate programs of action.

Some comrades express great concern that there is so much prejudice attached to the term "self-determination," that we must develop an alternative. Nowhere in the writings of Lenin that I have seen does he insist on the use of a term. As a matter of fact, in a discussion—I believe it was in 1916—on the national question, Lenin said that certain points in the program of the Polish Social-Democrats were acceptable, though they omitted and did not use the term "self-determination." But Lenin insisted that the omission of any

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particular term of scientific Marxist usage must not at the same time represent a vulgarization of the principle.

It is possible, in my opinion, if the comrades are convinced that the term "self-determination" is an obstacle, that we could state negatively the same objective. I am just thinking out loud on the point. For example, self-determination as applied to the Black Belt might also be expressed, "against forcible suppression of the growth and realization of the national aspirations of the Negro people and of the Negro majority in the Black Belt of the South." We are against forcible suppression of their national aspirations, which means precisely that we are for self-determination.

I want to speak for a moment in defense of the concept of self-determination. The meaning given to the treatment of the Negro question outside of the South is this—we view the problem as that of national minorities, that is, the cornerstone of the concept is the *individual*. On the other hand, the concept of the Negro in his heartland territory in the Black Belt of the South as that of an oppressed nation has as its cornerstone the *mass*.

Marxism teaches us that the emancipation of the mass is the main prerequisite for the emancipation of the individual. Therefore, according to Marxism, the emancipation of the individual is impossible without the emancipation of the mass. And hence, the validity of our emphasis upon the *mass* expression and reality of Negro oppression as it exists in the Black Belt.

Lenin elsewhere gives a definition of the right of nations to self-determination, which, I think, bears repetition. He says, in *Vol. XIX*, p. 50: "The right of nations to self-determination . . . is merely the logical expression of the struggle against national oppression in every form." I don't see how the comrades can argue with such a definition or fail to see its application to the problem of Negro liberation in the South. "The recognition of self-determination," Lenin said, "is not the same as making federation a principle. One may be a determined opponent of this principle . . . and yet prefer federation to national inequality as the only path towards complete democratic centralism." And, as Communists, we have the responsibility, in drafting a program for a long or short-term perspective, of distinguishing between the *rights* of nations and the *duties* of Communists.

The Communists in the Black Belt would of course work for the cementing of national working class unity. With a progressive government in power, certainly the Communists in the Black Belt would propagandize strongly against any separatist tendencies.

Nonetheless, we must not confuse the duties of Communists with what we Communists hold out as the rights of nations; and one of the rights of nations is certainly self-determination. In a nutshell, all the old polemics against self-determination are based on the argument that it is "infeasible" under capitalism and "unnecessary" under socialism.

Self-determination is one of many democratic demands. And we know that nowhere in any country, under capitalism, and certainly not in the present stage of American imperialism, is any single democratic demand able to be realized except in a very warped form. And so it is with *this* democratic demand of self-determination. But certainly, we would be a poor vanguard if we begin dropping from our program the struggle for other democratic demands which are not fully realizable under capitalism.

As Lenin said: "It is a fundamental theoretical mistake to speak of *one* of the forms and of *one* of the demands of democracy as 'infeasible'." (*Vol. XIX*, p. 273.)

I would like to make one further observation. "Progressively increasing self-conscious community of Negro Americans" is claimed by its inventor, to be a new "Marxist" invention to characterize the status of the Negro people in the United States. This is nothing new. This is not Marxism. It is Proudhonism; it is "Bundism"; it is a rehashing of the theory of Otto Bauer, of national-cultural autonomy. It is an absurdity to say that people no matter where they dwell, constitute a nation because they are bound merely with national and religious affinities.

We are a nation, existing in a common territory, and there is a Negro nation that exists as a fact in the South, in the heartland of the Negro majority in the Black Belt. It is not required that this Negro nation shall be conscious of its full national character, nor is it required by our theory or by the reality of the situation that the Negro people in their majority concentrations in the Black Belt shall have a full-grown development in every one of its national characteristics.

There is already a Negro bourgeoisie in the Black Belt. If anyone knows anything about Durham, N.C., and other industrial and business centers, they know this fact. Durham is a banking and insurance center of the South for Negroes, where there are Negro business men and petty capitalists. If we want further documentation—take the fact, for example, that a professor at Howard University has written a book on Negroes as capitalists. And I think it is clear that all of the characteristics of nationhood are seen

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reflected in the Negro territory of the Black Belt, though the one of common economic life is not full blown but still one characterized by commodity exchange in the main. Contrary to what one comrade said, nowhere is it required that a nation shall be in its economic life lifted to the stage of industrial development to qualify as having a common economic life. If that were so, there would be very few nations abroad.

As Comrade Lenin said, in reference to certain Polish Social Democrats: "Subjectively the Polish Comrades want to make Marxism 'more profound', but they do it very awkwardly. *Objectively*, their phrases about infeasibility are an expression of opportunism. . . . All of the demands of democracy in general are infeasible under imperialism." (*Vol. XIX*, p. 273.)

As to the present and ultimate worth-whileness of the concept of the Negro in the South as a nation, Lenin said: "Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede."

Some of the comrades object that the present use of the concept of self-determination is undialectical, but if dialectics are needed they are needed in application to the solution of the national question, and they are certainly expressed in this quotation just read from Lenin. He says further: "The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the present division of mankind into small states and all national isolation, but also to merge them." I think we can take that as authority enough to dispel any doubts and fears of some comrades that our Party, or those who support this draft resolution as a basis for a full-blown theoretical position, have any illusions about what we are fighting for.

We know we are fighting for socialism. And in our country, the oppressed Negro nation in the Black Belt constitutes a major ally.

2. James S. Allen

AUTHOR OF "THE NEGRO QUESTION IN THE UNITED STATES"
AND "RECONSTRUCTION: THE BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY"

AT THE heart of our debate on the question of self-determination is, of course, our analysis of the status of the Negro people, whether they are a nation or not. And naturally, those who deny that the Negro people are a nation, also deny the validity of the slogan and program of self-determination. These have been the two principle points of debate. What I have had to say about this I have said in two articles recently published and I don't mean to go over the material given there. (*Political Affairs*, Nov. and Dec. 1946.)

I want to devote my time to taking up some of the arguments in opposition to our interpretation of the Negro people as a nation and our program for self-determination as the ultimate solution.

Two principle counter-propositions have been advanced. First that a national program must at all times be subordinated to the interests of socialism, and to the interests of the working class, and that being the case—with which we have no argument—the specific situation in this country is such that advancing the slogan of self-determination is in opposition to the interests of socialism and to the interests of the working class. Let me ask the comrades to think back over the history of the debates on the question of self-determination not only in our Party, but internationally, and see if that is not the argument which was put forth by the Austrian Social Democrats, by the Polish Social Democrats, by the Bund in Russia, in order to deny the validity of self-determination with respect to the numerous nations which made up the Austro-Hungarian empire and in all of Central Europe at that time, and also of the old Russian empire. And has not history shown that they were completely erroneous, that when the Austro-Hungarian empire was broken up it was not on some vague cultural autonomous communities, or some other similar vague groupings, but on the basis of national groupings formed solidly on a territorial basis. The same thing took place in the old Russian empire, and in Russia it was

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a socialist development, while in the Austro-Hungarian empire it was a capitalist development.

Now some of the specific points raised in opposition to the draft resolution in respect to the Negro nation. The first point is that the Negro people as well as Southerners as a whole are fleeing from the South. Yes they have been fleeing from the South ever since the days of slavery and after the overthrow of slavery, and particularly since World War I. But has that changed the situation in the South fundamentally in any sense? Has it wiped out the share-cropping plantation in the South? Has it done away with the actual base of reactionary political power in the South which contributes to reaction on a national scale in the form of the Bourbon Democrats? It has brought about some important changes creating an important Negro proletariat situated in the North in close association with white workers, but it has not wiped out these persistent semifeudal remnants of the South. We would be guilty of very harmful illusions if we thought that these remnants of feudalism can be so easily wiped out and if in conjunction with that we also thought that the upshoots of this system, and particularly white chauvinism among all layers of the population, can be so easily destroyed by such automatic tendencies without the active intervention of the class forces and of the Negro people which alone can bring about such changes.

Furthermore, we cannot assume that social development in the South, nor elsewhere, is a static proposition. Changes naturally go on and among these are changes in the relation of the people brought about by nation-wide factors such as industrial booms or crises. When there is an industrial boom in the country as a whole the tendency is for the labor supply in the present agrarian area of the South to be tapped and when there is a crisis the tendency is the opposite—for these workers to return to their towns and villages and share-cropper shacks. That we have seen from the history of our country for many years.

Another matter raised by one or two comrades is that the Negro people have not developed a national consciousness. I wish to point out the difference between national consciousness and a national slogan. First of all, a national consciousness may not always be expressed in a national form. We see that happening everywhere. With respect to the Negro people, the form of the expression of their identity as a people, which is simply another way of saying their national consciousness is expressed in ways which are not at all clearly national, such as race consciousness. Certainly in many parts of the world, particularly as the upsurge against imperialism has

developed, many people were swept into national movements as a development of their resentment against imperialist domination. This was manifested in terms of the present upsurge and struggle for democracy, the struggle against imperialism, and these do not always start as national struggles. They develop in that direction and very quickly reach that stage in this period.

For instance, the Moslems in India have developed national slogans only in the past 5 years, since 1940 when the slogan of Pakistan was put forth. Until then it was considered as a communal and semi-religious question and British imperialism took advantage of it to split the peoples of India. That is quite a historic development. And why should we assume that in this country a national movement among the Negro people should not develop in forms different from elsewhere, when actually it is.

Another idea advanced is that Stalin stated in his book, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, that a nation during a period of capitalist development has its national slogans expressed by the bourgeoisie. And one comrade argued that since there is not a well-developed Negro bourgeoisie, and there is not, therefore a national consciousness cannot be developed among the Negro people. But is it true that in all periods of history it is always the bourgeoisie which carried forward national slogans? That is not true. Who is fighting for Chinese independence? Is it the Chinese landlords and capitalists? Or the Chinese peasants? Or to mention the Soviet Union where it is obvious that it is the proletariat which is advancing the development of nations.

A rather unusual, unscientific conception was introduced into the discussion—that of national racial minority. I am sure that many of us remember the whole period of previous discussions on this question. I always found that where someone who opposes our position of the Negro people as a nation, tried to present an alternative position to be in accordance with realities, to be scientific in its basis, tied up with current issues and struggles of the people, he has not been able to do so in scientifically correct terms. He has had to fall back in his discussion of the Negro question on really outmoded concepts such as race or pure class or labor or castes. And what else is the meaning of national racial minority? Because as Marxists we certainly cannot accept a racial category as a point of departure.

We have also talked a great deal about equality. Sometimes I think that where this term is advanced as a very generalized term in the course of a discussion of this kind, it lacks concreteness and lacks validity. One must stop to think what we mean by equality

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for the Negro people. Is that equality to be attained as a result of a general educational program, as a result of a general propaganda program? Is it to be attained through the winning of certain equal rights here and there?

In order to obtain this equality for the Negro people it is necessary to overthrow a whole system of oppression, to root out the very real and concrete base of that oppression which in the South is the semifeudal land system that exists there in combination with the trusts and monopolies. And also a question of utmost importance to us is that we cannot think of attaining real equality for the Negro people without at the same time carrying on a consistent struggle against white chauvinism.

Here, also, I wish to refer to the relation of self-determination to socialism. We have a responsibility to think not only in terms of our immediate situation, but also in terms of our ultimate solutions. Is there anyone here that thinks that with the winning of socialism in the U.S. we will be able automatically, without special attention to the question, to uproot all the prejudices which have been left over from capitalism, among them, white chauvinism? Therefore, the program of self-determination is necessary not only from the point of view of the giving of direction to our present movement and our present struggle, but from the point of view of the ultimate solution of the question.

I just want to close on one point. One comrade remarked that he thought the resolution before us was merely for the record, that nothing serious was going to be done on the basis of this resolution. I certainly don't think that is our intention. I think that it will be necessary on the basis of this draft resolution, as it is improved and revised, to launch a really systematic and well-organized discussion within the Party on the whole problem of our concrete present tasks and also our general theoretical approach.

3. *A. W. Berry*

STATE EDUCATION DIRECTOR, C. P. OF MICHIGAN

THE struggle for equal rights for the Negroes must be understood as the struggle against American imperialism. If the working class is to defeat American imperialism, if it is to achieve socialism, it cannot do it by itself, but only in alliance with the Negro people. It can do it only by advancing proper slogans at the proper time, and having a correct theoretical understanding of the relationship of the Negroes to the American nation. I think our resolution gives our Party a real weapon for combatting a lot of erroneous ideas—many of which are current in the labor movement.

The question of the imperialist character of Negro oppression is the central core of our Party's position and the question of the Negroes as a nation is based, not on any speculation, but on factual data, on history. I want to present my comments to this discussion on that basis.

Let's briefly trace one or two aspects of the development historically of the Negro people in the United States. We know very well that the State of South Carolina, for example, stretched at one time to the Mississippi River and we know that all of that territory from the Mississippi River on back, including Tennessee, large parts of Mississippi and Alabama, were cut up only when slavery spread to the Mississippi River after the invention of the cotton gin and the spinning wheel. We know that the slaveholders did not comprise a majority of the population in those areas and that these states were broken up to form a slave empire. One of the comrades asked, what was the relationship of the Negroes to the American nation at the time of the signing of the Constitution? The answer is that the Negroes bore the relationship of slaves and didn't participate in the formation of those states. They had nothing to do with the state boundaries and only had something to do with them when the federal government, during Reconstruction, established a federal region of the territory and administered it under a military dictatorship.

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When that military dictatorship was dissolved, these old state lines were reconstituted and the Negroes assumed on a different level, practically the same relationships that had been enforced before as slaves, only now, as sharecroppers and croppers. It is in that sense that we have got to view our fight now for democratic rights, because that situation which existed in 1867, or more precisely, 1877, is for the most part in existence today in that same region. In that same region of the Black Belt the Negro people comprise a majority.

During this period other developments have come about wherein the Negro people have developed capitalist relations, and the very fact of owning a piece of land, of growing cotton and owning cotton to sell constitutes the development of capitalist relations. The comrades who confuse feudalism with what exists in the South are confusing a term which we use quite loosely with what actually is the economic situation in the Black Belt today. The relationships that exist in the Black Belt, while they are in part semifeudal, are basically capitalist relationships. The relationship that the cropper bears to the landlord is a capitalist relationship, and the relationship of banker to the plantation is a capitalist relationship. This set of relationships exist in the Black Belt for the Negro sharecropper, Negro day laborer and Negro tenant and farmer. While they are not developed in a full and well rounded sense, nevertheless, the struggle which is to be carried on in the Black Belt, is to be carried on within the limits of those relationships and for the purpose of changing those relationships which are in the main capitalist, but also intertwined with a feudal character.

We have got to see exactly in what way this struggle is developing in the deep South. We are not going to just sit by and wait until the struggle develops and then take a position. The Negro people are beginning to fight now for the right to hold office. That was what that struggle was about with Victor Ash in Norfolk, Rev. Simpson in Houston, and Scott in Atlanta running for public office. That was what the struggle is about now in Mississippi, in the trial of Bilbo. In that trial, I think we have an example of just exactly how the Negro people feel toward the question of their relationship to the United States. Let us bear in mind that in the United States the sovereignty of the citizen is expressed not through the government at Washington, except when you are abroad, but through your state government. You vote in a state. If you move from Illinois and come to New York, you have got to establish citizenship in New York State.

In that sense, the Negro who is in Mississippi is denied the right

to express his sovereignty through the state, the sovereign state of Mississippi. The result is that he appeals on the basis of his national citizenship. The Negro feels that he is an American and I think that every Negro feels that he is an American. But does that contradict what our resolution says? Not at all. He feels he is an American, he appeals to the Federal government, the government of the several states, to intervene in his behalf to give him the right to express his sovereignty. In that sense, I think we see the relationship of the Negro people at the present time to the American nation, and we get some idea of what the Negro people feel, how they feel toward the American nation.

We also understand why the Negroes don't want any separation. They can't understand it, nor do they want to indulge in separatist movements. Now, if we see the Negro people as a nation, then we can see the development towards the ultimate expression of nationhood from all of these small developments that are taking place in the country today.

If that is so, then we have got to begin developing our concrete position. When we put out the slogan of the right of self-determination, we accept that slogan as the apex of a whole program for the liberation of the Negro people. In my opinion, that program includes, for example, the change of the land tenure in the South, the fight on the credit system, to undo this system of usury that is in existence, the abolition of crop liens, for the right to vote, the struggle against the poll tax, and a whole set of other demands.

We who have lived in the South—I happen to come from Texas—know that the enforcement of the laws is not in the hands, let us say, of Mississippi as a state as much as it is in the hands of the county. The county is in a certain sense supreme, or at least it is the first unit of local government. Therefore, if we see the development of the Negroes towards nationhood, then our whole position toward the development of self-government in counties has to be given some immediate attention. And as a part of our work, the question of Negroes seeking office in counties and localities must be fought for by our Party in the South and further advanced.

If we don't have a program which leads towards the attaining of forms of self-government for the Negro majority in the Black Belt, then we are just simply kidding the Negroes and kidding ourselves. We are not mobilizing anybody to fight American imperialism, and we are never going to attain the full equality of the Negro people. That is the thing that we have got to get across to the working class

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and that is what we have got to get across to the Negro people. Unless we do develop this kind of a program, it is going to bring about demoralization, and a stalemate in the struggle.

4. *Homer Chase*

STATE CHAIRMAN, C. P. OF GEORGIA

I WILL very briefly go into a few points concerning the South which I think are of the utmost importance. The South has the lowest standard of living of any section of our country. The per capita income is something like \$750 a year, \$150 less than any other section of the country. From one end of the South to another there are closed down and empty war factories. Out of a population of about 36 million in the 13 southern states, almost 10 million are Negroes with a lower standard of living. The South is dominated by Wall Street finance capital. For example, 85 per cent of Georgia's wealth is owned by capitalist forces outside of the state. Florida is largely controlled by the du Ponts. The South is witnessing its youth leaving for the North and other sections of the country. As they graduate college, if fortunate enough to go to college, they go to the North to work for the big corporations.

The South is a land of the crop lien system, which also affects the landlords and makes them dependent on the Wall Street corporations. We should understand just how dependent these landlords are on the Wall Street corporations. For planting, harvesting and selling the cotton crops the landlords have to rely on the banks from year to year. Without going into this any further, the South has many features of a semi-colonial nature.

Let's examine some of the methods used to keep the South in bondage. There is freight discrimination and the tariff policy. There are few prospects for home consumption factories in the South. The standard of living of the South must be much lower than the rest of the country. It is stymied by higher interest rates and monopolistic credit practices. There is white chauvinism and the financing of such fascist organizations as the Columbians by the monopolists. The big corporations also buy up such professional Southerners as Bilbo and Talmadge. Tens of thousands of dollars were poured in by Wall Street railroad and power interests and other reactionary forces, to

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assure the election of Eugene Talmadge in the 1946 primary in Georgia.

The South is a source of great wealth to the big corporations and monopolies and a source of strength to them. But it is also evident that the South is a potential Achilles Heel to American imperialism. It is possible to win the Negro and whites together on an anti-monopoly program, concretized on certain demands, for jobs and concrete proposals for industrialization of the South, for the opening of the war plants, for peace-time production, for federal loans, etc.

We have to consider the point made by Comrade Dennis, about concretizing the fight against the monopolies. We must engender a hatred against the monopolies, du Ponts, Morgans, etc. We must learn from the Party in France which succeeded in instilling in the people a tremendous hatred of the 200 families. We can do something of that type in the South. Certainly one of the great needs of the South today is the organization of the share-croppers, and it seems to me this must be done by the C.I.O. We must have specific ideas on organization and a program—on the commissary stores, the right to plant gardens, and such demands. Then, loans to share-croppers, so that they can buy machinery. But they must be organized in order to fulfill any such schemes.

In connection with the Negro question our greatest need is to tie up our theory with practice. This means first of all to differentiate sharply between the problems of the Negro in the South and the Negro in the North—they are not identical—and to avoid at all costs discussing any question by ourselves apart from the struggles of the Negro people and apart from their mass organizations. My contention is that the basic question of the South is a program of agricultural and industrial reforms throughout the South and that these bourgeois-democratic reforms are the first step in the solving of the problems of the Negro.

5. *Alexander Bittelman*

NATIONAL COMMITTEE, C.P.U.S.A.

I SHOULD like to make a few observations on the arguments against the draft resolution. The argumentation that the Black Belt is not a stable community has not been proven. The reference to Lenin's analysis of the agrarian conditions in the U.S. and Russia in which he analyzes a tendency of the peasantry to leave the villages and go to the cities proves precisely nothing as far as this argument is concerned. Because the same Lenin who analyzed this tendency of peasants leaving their villages for the cities did not leave the solution of the peasant problem to this tendency. He formulated a program of agrarian revolution as part of the democratic revolution and led the fight to victory. On the other hand those who argue against the draft resolution apparently intend to leave the solution of the Negro problem in the Black Belt to this tendency. This is not Leninism nor is it Marxism.

It is true that the Negro nation in the Black Belt has not developed all its national attributes to the classical form. The Negro nation is in process of development. But it has all the attributes of nationhood and not one opponent of the resolution tonight or in the discussion in *Political Affairs* has managed to successfully deny this fact.

Lastly, the statement that the Black Belt economy is feudal, therefore it cannot have national attributes, since national attributes can only be built on capitalist economy, is confusion, not clarification. The economy in the Black Belt is not feudalism, and Comrade Berry has argued this point well. It is a distinct national economy though not in full form, not classical, which has some feudal characteristics, remnants of feudalism and slavery, but as part of the capitalist economy of the entire world. Therefore, the argument that the economy in the Black Belt is feudal and therefore can give no rise to national movements is entirely invalid.

In tonight's discussion, I personally was impressed most with the arguments of Comrade Chase and I should like to discuss the matter

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as he raised it. It was very fruitful to do what he did, namely, to approach the question from the standpoint of liberating the South and the needs of the South. True, that isn't the only standpoint from which the problem can be approached, but it is an important standpoint. But I think he is making a number of theoretical and political mistakes.

What is it that is at the basis of the undeveloped condition of the South, its underdeveloped condition, its backwardness? Is it only oppression by northern monopolies as Comrade Chase said? It is that, to be sure. But is it only that? (Interpolation by Comrade Chase: "Basically that.") No, it isn't. The next factor is the survival of feudal and semi-slave relationships. That is point No. 2—of equal importance. But what is perhaps of even greater importance is that these two factors—Northern monopolies and their oppression and exploitation of the South, and the exploitation of the South by the Southern landowners and feudalists or semifeudalists, do not run parallel. What you have there is a combination of the two—a steady integration of the two, while at the same time there is friction within this combination. In other words, what the South has been suffering from for decades is this peculiar combination: an integration of Northern monopoly capital with the remnants of feudal and semi-slave relationships of the South itself, and you cannot separate one from the other, and you cannot counterpose one against the other. That is the basic cause for the backwardness, the degeneracy, for everything that is reactionary and evil in the South.

And what is the most dramatic expression of the South's troubles? It is the national oppression of the Negroes. In it everything is epitomized. Every bad feature, every reactionary feature, every evil feature of Southern life is epitomized in the national oppression of the Negroes.

And the American working class may as well make up its mind to it—there will be no free South as long as there is a nation oppressed in the South, and of course there will be no free America as long as there is a South in slavery.

Nor is it true that there is a contradiction between organizing a united Southern people's front against Northern monopoly capital on all these issues which I have enumerated, on the one hand, and the struggle of the white workers and white people of the South in support of the Negro liberation movement. I say no contradiction exists whatsoever. More than that, I maintain that only to the degree that the anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly forces move against this and begin to gain conscious support of the Negro liberation move-

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ment in the South, to that extent will that movement really become powerful and succeed—which the South must achieve to become free.

One more point. Is there a contradiction between carrying on a struggle for the most elementary equal rights of the Negroes in the South and elsewhere, and the fight for national liberation or national self-determination? No contradiction whatsoever. If we know anything from our experience and from our studies, we know this much, that only to the degree that the Negro liberation movement acquires full national consciousness, only to that degree will they become powerful enough, in alliance with the white workers, to achieve their objectives.

Now a few words on some other points raised in the discussion. One comrade said that it doesn't follow that a community which possesses the four necessary attributes of nationhood must necessarily become a nation. I think it is true. We know examples where communities having all four attributes, even though in elementary form, did not develop them fully into a nation. But those nations remained backward in other respects. Allow me to say, for example, that in Russia—the classical example of the old empire of the Czar—there were literally dozens of nations of whose existence nobody even suspected. What was their condition as we know it now? They were stable communities, having all attributes of nationhood, but were prevented from developing them by the Czarist empire. And the result was a reactionary development under Czarism.

The point I wish to make is that the development of the American Negroes in the Black Belt into a full-fledged nation in the classical sense is a basic requirement for the progressive development of the United States. I say that as long as the growth of this nation into full nationhood is retarded, the entire progressive temper in the United States is thereby weakened. The reasons why I think so are the following. The Negro national liberation movement, as we all agree, is one of the most powerful allies of the anti-imperialist struggle of the American working class, which means eventually of the socialist struggle. The development of the Negroes in the Black Belt into full nationhood means a strengthening of their struggle against American imperialism, for the overthrow of the rule of the American trusts and the Southern feudalists. It means as a result of this struggle the unfolding of the most fundamental and the most profound struggles for democracy in the United States, anti-imperialist struggles leading to socialism.

That is why I believe that the policy of our party, as expressed in the resolution and in the report of Comrade Ben Davis to stimu-

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late the struggle of the Negroes for national liberation, to deepen their national consciousness, means to deepen and strengthen one of the most important detachments of the whole anti-imperialist struggle. And to deepen this struggle is to fulfill in this situation the most basic requirement for our historical development toward socialism. And in this sense the draft resolution, far from being an obstacle to socialism, is one of the most powerful instruments to promote that struggle, historically speaking.

6. *Ray Hansborough*

SECRETARY, NATIONAL NEGRO COMMISSION, C.P.U.S.A.

THE further extension of democracy in the United States is restricted almost exclusively to the degree in which democracy is extended to the Negro people. This is especially true of the South. The development of democracy in the South lags far behind that of other sections of the country. The unfinished task of the bourgeois democratic revolution, restricts the development of the democratic processes in the South, and, at the same time, endangers the democratic gains in the North and other sections of the country.

The former slave economy left strong remnants of feudalism in the South. This is expressed in the backward plantation agriculture, which helps to retard the industrial expansion of the South. The state power of the several Southern states rests in the hands of finance capital and the landlord class. The several states of the South stand out almost as autonomous states, based on the one party system, which was so ably explained by Comrade Smith yesterday. The principle of "states' rights" negates, almost entirely, the jurisdiction of the federal government over the states of the South. At the same time these states, while disfranchising millions of Negroes and poor whites, send a large bloc of Congressmen and senators to the Congress of the United States. At will they block or defeat all progressive, social and labor legislation.

The backward, semifeudal system of the South is not only detrimental to the oppressed Negro masses. It is detrimental to the poor whites, the middle classes, yes, it is even detrimental to sections of the local Southern capitalists, and certainly to the nation as a whole. While there is a sharp differential between the political, economic and social status of the Negro and poor and middle class whites of the South, there is also a sharp differential between the poor and middle class whites of the South and those of the North. It is general knowledge that wages and social security, educational and health standards of the South are lower than that of the North and other sections of the country. Housing and sanitary conditions

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are the worst in the nation. The rate of unemployment, illiteracy, sickness and death is the highest in the entire country.

In the name of "white supremacy," the white ruling class of the South impoverishes a whole section of the nation's population. This is possible, only because of the deep rooted white chauvinism in the South. For generations the white masses have been indoctrinated with hate against the Negro masses. This factor must be kept in mind, if we are correctly to approach a solution to the Negro problem and the problems of the South generally.

The slogans for Negro rights and for self-determination in the Black Belt must not be raised in a separate and abstract manner. These slogans must be associated with issues that effect all sections of the toiling masses of the South, around which the broadest section of the population can be united against the common enemy, the Bilbos, Rankins, Talmadges and Crumps. Therefore, we must seek to raise issues and slogans around which can be built the broadest possible people's anti-fascist, anti-imperialist front, for the further extension of democracy in the South.

Only by the further extension of democracy in the South, for all the people, will it be possible to realize the demands of equal rights for the Negro people and for self-determination in the Black Belt. I emphasize this point, precisely because the strength of the white ruling class of the South lies in their ability to deceive the masses of poor and middle class whites, to make them believe that the demands of the Negro masses can only be realized at their expense. This concept must be shattered, and it can be done only by the correct application of the tactics of the united front.

The struggle for the further extension of democracy in the South, must be led by the working class, in alliance with the oppressed Negro people, the poor and middle class whites, and the liberal bourgeoisie. The main driving force must come from the working class in which the Negro workers constitute a sizable sector. The chief duty of the white and Negro Communist is to struggle for the unity of the Negro and white workers and for the unity of the labor movement in the South.

The Negro liberation movement, in my opinion will not be confined to the scope of any one Negro organization, but will take the form of a united Negro people's front, embracing all organized sections of the Negro people, around a common program of liberation. While the leadership of such a movement must represent all sections of the Negro population, the Negro workers must constitute the main driving force. The Negro workers must strive to build and

strengthen the alliance between the organized labor movement and the Negro people.

The strength of the Negro people's movement will be only so strong as the strength of the Communists within the ranks of the Negro people. Therefore, the present situation demands that we take steps seriously to build our Party and circulation of our press—the *Worker* and the *Daily Worker*—among the broadest sections of the Negro people.

7. *Max Weiss*

SECRETARY, NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION, C.P.U.S.A.

I WOULD like to speak about the objections raised against the position advanced in the resolution.

One comrade advances an argument from the standpoint of formal logic. I will answer it on the grounds of formal logic. He says that it is true that a community of people, to be a nation, must have those characteristics which Stalin indicates in his definition. However, this comrade says, the existence of these conditions among a people does not mean it is a nation. I think if we develop the essence of this argument, it can be made to have substance only if we are prepared to question the scientific validity of Stalin's definition of a nation. This argument means the following: "A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in community of culture." At the same time it is possible for a historically developed and stable community of people with a common territory, language, economy and psychology to exist and yet not be a nation.

Therefore, this comrade propounded a riddle to the National Committee: What is it that is a historically developed community of people with a common territory, language, economy and psychology, which is not a nation? And, as always when such riddles are proposed, I say: I'll bite, what is it? When a community of people has all the characteristics of a nation it is a nation and nothing else. Otherwise, we must declare that the definition above is not an adequate definition of a nation because it does not fully describe the phenomena which it sets out to describe. For example, if I give an inadequate definition of a man as an animal that walks on two feet, then it would be possible to find an animal that walks on two feet which is not a man, but the reason for that is that my definition of a man was inadequate. Similarly if our definition of a nation is inadequate, then it would be possible to find a community of people which fits the definition but which is not a nation.

Now, I want to pass on to some of the other objections raised.

One comrade says that the Negro people in the Black Belt are not a nation because they lack two of the characteristics of a nation. He asserts that the Black Belt is not a stable community, but does not prove it. When we deal with stable phenomena we are not dealing with static phenomena. A stable community may grow or decline, may expand or contract, but it is a stable community because it persists, regardless of whether it grows or declines, increases or decreases, during certain periods.

Statistics are quoted. No attempt is made to show the counterforces to the movements away from the Black Belt, etc. What is the history of the Black Belt? This stable community has existed for more than 200 years. Up to the end of Reconstruction it was a community which was growing, expanding. After Reconstruction and up to the present day there has been a continual but small and steady shrinkage. It is the shrinking of the Black Belt in this later period and the statistics proving it which is advanced to demonstrate the fact that this is not a stable community.

But what accounts for the fact that in this period the Black Belt has shrunk? And what is there in the future which gives assurance that this shrinkage is only a temporary and transient phenomenon?

By the way, this same argument about the disappearance of the Black Belt is put forward to get us coming and going. We hear the argument in the first place that it is the mechanization of agriculture in the Black Belt which is destroying the Black Belt. And now we hear, on the contrary, that it is the backward, pre-capitalist conditions from which the Negro masses are fleeing, which results in the disappearance of the Black Belt. Well, you can't have it both ways.

What is there, despite the tendency toward shrinkage of the Black Belt under present conditions, which fully justifies our statement that historically this is a stable community, that it will persist? Not only the historical fact that it has persisted, but also the fact that we have the perspective in the Black Belt of the break-up of the plantation system. And the destruction of the plantation system will be accompanied by division of the land among the sharecroppers. When that is done we will see not a continuation of the flight from the Black Belt but on the contrary a slowing down or an end to this out-migration. We may even see the beginning of an immigration into a free Black Belt by the Negro farmers taking advantage of the division of this land, a migration which on a smaller scale, under different historic conditions, will be similar to the migration to the public domain in the west when the homesteads were opened

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up. When the future is considered, when the agrarian revolution is kept in mind, a free Black Belt is a guarantee of the persistence and the expansion of the Black Belt and not the disappearance of the Black Belt.

Some comrades deny that there is a common economy in the Black Belt. On this there is an incredible confusion. It is made to appear that a common economy has the following meaning: that the national bourgeoisie of a certain nation exploits that national proletariat. In other words, there would be a common economy in the Black Belt if there were a Negro bourgeoisie exploiting a Negro proletariat. And the argument is advanced that such a situation does not exist because what Negro bourgeoisie there is, is outside the Black Belt. Hence, the comrades conclude that there is no common economy in the Black Belt.

But this relationship of exploitation of the working class by a capitalist class of a given nation is not an economic tie which unites a nation. It is, on the contrary, an economic relationship which divides a nation; it leads to the sharpest internal class struggle.

What does a common economic life mean? It means simply the abolition of pre-capitalist forms of economy. Why do we say that for a community of people to be a nation it is necessary to have a common economic life? Because prior to capitalism we also had historically developed, stable communities of people inhabiting a common territory, speaking a common language, having even a common psychology, but economically disunited. The reason for this was because feudalism was a system in which the feudal manors, duchies, principalities, were economically self-sufficient and had no economic relation one to the other. When capitalism developed, it destroyed the economic self-sufficiency of these individual duchies and principalities through the development of a distinct division of labor between town and country, between one region and another, because it developed exchange and therefore means of transportation and communication, making all parts of the given territory economically interdependent and united. From this point of view, it is clear that the Black Belt has a common economy. From this, in my opinion the only correct point of view, the Black Belt has a common economic life. It can be maintained that it has no common economy only if the meaning of what an economy is, is completely misunderstood.

Another comrade says that never before in history did any party ever raise the slogan of self-determination unless it came from the masses, unless it was raised by the masses. But this is not so. For in-

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stance, in 1903, when the Russian Bolsheviks formulated their program for self-determination, there was no national movement in many of the oppressed nations of the Czarist empire. Furthermore, in 1925 it was precisely this point which Stalin established in the polemic against Semich. In the discussions in the Yugoslavian party, Semich fought against the inclusion in the program of the Yugoslav party of the right of self-determination, because he claimed there was no demand for self-determination among the masses, that it was not an immediate issue. Stalin gave the example of the experience of the Russian people and showed how even when there was no national movement they had included the slogan, and indicated that in the future as a result of some war, it might become an immediate question. This is actually what did happen. Even though the movement at the present time in the Black Belt does not take the form of a demand for self-determination, we must include this point in our party program. Otherwise we do not have a Communist approach to the question.

8. *Edward Strong*

COMRADES, it is my firm conviction that the Negro people in the Black Belt constitute a nation, and that the struggle for Negro liberation and freedom arises from this fact. And that if the Negro people are to win their freedom in this country, the struggle must be waged as a struggle against national oppression. And the fact of the matter is that the reason we in America are failing at this time to win decisive victories on this front is because we are following a policy of liberalism in approaching the question.

We have heard a good deal tonight about equality, that the Negroes want equality, freedom, the right to vote, they don't want to be discriminated against, etc. So do all the other peoples in this country, the Jewish people and every minority that is discriminated against in America—they want this discrimination removed. If our fight is limited merely to this struggle of equality and freedom in this narrow sense, we will never have a program that will result in the liberation of the Negro people from oppression. Because, in addition to the discriminations which exist both against Jews and against Negroes and other minorities in America, the Negroes are faced with the problem of national oppression, and it is from this that arises the whole series of questions facing Negroes that are peculiar alone to the Negro people in America.

So the question we must answer is, what is the explanation for the fact that merely the struggle for equality and the right to vote, etc., are too limited to lead to the freedom of the Negro people? And it seems to me, that we cannot work on the theory on which a given slogan is popular at this time. Neither can we arrive at a position based upon a Gallup Poll of the program and demands of various organizations. Because if our position and approach to the question will be based on a Gallup Poll, then clearly at this time we would not be discussing socialism, because if we examined the various platforms, very few if any contain the demand for socialism. Yet we

believe and know that it is the only ultimate hope for the working class in this country.

That leads me to the point of examining the program of the Negro liberation movement in America, which at present is limited fundamentally to the specific immediate demands, whereas what is required is for us to raise the level of Negro liberation to qualitatively higher levels than what we see today. Otherwise we can go on endlessly winning gains, and for generations, ever since Reconstruction, we have talked about the gains we have made, gains which we promptly lost. We won gains here and lost them there. But the fact is that these gains constitute no threat basically to the capitalist system, and in my opinion it is essential for the liberation movement and the whole people's coalition movement in America to conceive of the struggles for Negroes' rights which fundamentally will lead the Negro people and liberation movement ultimately into head-on collision with our oppression.

This means that the program should be of such a character as to point the finger at monopoly capital and the big plantation owners of the South, as the fundamental enemies of the Negro people. It is not only not sufficient for a liberation movement to have merely a program for Negroes' rights, but the program must bring the Negro masses and their allies into struggle with the capitalist system, and consequently from this point of view the Negro liberation movement needs to be reorientated.

If we examine the situation in India, we will find it effective, because even the British and the capitalist press are telling us that there is a great colonial struggle going on in India. We are told that it is a struggle of religions and that these people just can't get together, that the British have handed them freedom in fact, if only they were to get together.

Now, British imperialism is not the only one which argues this way; certain dominant sections of the Indian bourgeoisie deny the fact that there are a whole series of nations in India. And it is because of the many different nations there that the whole question of Pakistan has arisen. Granted that at this moment a great deal of that struggle is reflected in religious terminology, but if we look beneath the surface, we will find in a number of the Indian states, nations, many of whom follow the Moslem faith. So basically it is not a struggle of religion, but groups that have come forward, national groups, demanding freedom in the only way they know how. They are not asking for equality, they are not asking for the right to vote, because they cannot put their faith solely in these

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rights. They are asking for the right to self-determination and they see their only hope of real freedom in a free India, and only on the basis of that development will there be a unified India.

Comrade Jackson has made a profound contribution in his observation that it is only as the Negro people have complete freedom to decide their own future and fate, will it be possible to unify America and realize the cherished dreams of the Negro people of being Americans. It has been asked: how can the Negro people want self-determination or nationhood if they don't raise this slogan? The fact is that this has been the most profound wish of the Negro people, and if we examine their aspirations, their literature and the demands of the Negro people, their demand has been to be Americans. The question before us, therefore, is how can this cherished hope, this aspiration, of the Negro people, be realized. This is the dialectics which Comrade Jackson spoke about. The cherished demand of the Negro people to be Americans can never be realized if we conceive of it as a question of integrating them into the American scheme. We have skipped the most basic Marxist concept of nationality and the problem of how to achieve full unity, which is required from the fight around the Negro people realizing the aspiration of being a nation. If we examine our position in the past we will find we have been following a policy of liberalism, and especially the most classical example of this is in the war plants. We hailed the fact that the Negroes made a number of gains here and there, and immediately after the war they began to lose their jobs. Thousands of Negroes who made these gains no longer have jobs. There was a struggle in the Party and in the unions as to what should be our position, and a big section of the union leadership took the position that the white workers cannot understand the special approach to seniority—that they are in favor of "equality." This position of "pure equality" for the Negro at the close of this war, which was the greatest and most progressive in history, led to the disemployment of large numbers of Negroes and their removal from industrial life. This was the result of this approach of liberalism and "equality."

Therefore, under no circumstances can that be a guide, because theoretically it is not a guide. The result will be the same as after this war; thousands of Negroes are out of jobs, because the trade unions were not mobilized to understand the fact of the special struggles for the Negro people.

This draft resolution contains the basic policy that we want to adopt even though, in many respects it could be improved. But

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that is a detail, fundamentally it gives us the orientation that we want. Finally, I believe this is one of the most important discussions which the Party in America has ever engaged in. And unless we arm ourselves with the lessons of this discussion, it will be impossible for the American Party to defeat the imperialist system. The whole working class movement is weak because we come from the strongest imperialist country, and because we have absorbed the ideology of the imperialists themselves, we have not come to see the relationship of the struggle for the freedom and liberation of the workers, to the struggle of the oppressed nations in the world, of the colonial people all over, and specifically of the Negro people in America.

9. *William L. Patterson*

NATIONAL COMMITTEE, C.P.U.S.A.

AT this historic moment the democratic struggle for Negro liberation becomes one of the most important phases of the proletarian revolutionary movement. In the development of the Negro liberation battle there are unlimited potentialities and it is not impossible that this struggle can spearhead the whole proletarian revolutionary struggle. What is today happening in Washington, D. C. in the hearing on Bilbo indicates that the Negro movement is ripe for the most far-reaching leaps forward and that the tempo of its development can be rapidly accelerated.

Such a situation as this demands that we increase our work in the South manifold. We must formulate a clear program and perspective. We must not forget that at earlier moments of high political tension the Negro movement was diverted into a "Back to Africa" utopian gesture and a "49th state" monstrosity. Such abortions can take place again if the initiative is seized by Negro nationalist demagogues or if separatist movements are incited by American imperialist machinations. Monopoly capital is more deeply concerned by the unrest of the Negro people than some of us seem to realize.

A deeper study of the South is very urgent for our Party. Out of a thorough study of the "Report on Economic Conditions of the South," made to Roosevelt by the National Emergency Council, would come material for a whole series of realistic demands which would speed up the movement of the poor whites. It is action alone of the most realistic character which involves both poor white and poorer Negro that will cement the unity of all anti-imperialist forces in the South. During the Reconstruction era this unity was achieved around the struggle for the land. That battle was lost. But the land hunger remains as the revolutionary core of the Negro liberation movement. It is fundamental to a solution of the evils from which poor whites suffer. It can and must be made today the major point in our program in the South. Land is the road to freedom.

The plantation system must be broken up. Many white forces in

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the South now dormant will respond to such a drive as is now destroying Junkerism in Eastern Europe. Victory here means a destructive blow would be struck at one of the main forces of American fascism. The program of action demanded by this perspective has to be worked out at once.

The struggle of the Negro people for the land is inseparably related to the struggle for representative government. But representative government for Negroes in the South means in its real significance self-government. Representative government in the Black Belt is self-government because of the existence of a Negro majority and because of the demagogic control landlordism has on the thinking of the white population. Self-government is logical. It will come as a natural step under the present objective conditions. It will be acceptable to poor whites.

One comrade says the demand for the right of self-determination will create animosity between the poor whites and Negroes. The opposite is true. The demand for the right of self-determination will answer the landlords' lies that poor whites are threatened by the menace of Negro domination. By bringing forward the slogan of the right of self-determination the poor white is assured that the Negro desires only the land which of right belongs to him. There is no threat of domination here. By developing the struggle of the poor white for land, the poor white can see that he too can, in an alliance with the Negro, secure the land which of right belongs to him, and from which he was driven into the hills by the slave landlords. The poor white can be made to see that the right of self-determination brings the Negro directly against the landlord who is the poor white's historic enemy. The poor white can be shown that his rights in the Black Belt will be scrupulously respected.

Our slogans for the South must deal with the smashing of the remnants of a slave economy. Our program must deal with the break-up of the plantation system and the granting of representative government to the Negro people. Our draft resolution correctly holds that the white masses of the South are beginning to ally themselves on a significant scale with the Negro people in their common fight against the trusts and against the Bilbos, Rankins and Talmadges. That alliance will be quickened in tempo when the lies of the Bilbos, Rankins and Talmadges are smashed and the fears these lies have engendered in the white masses removed.

In the South the slogan for equal rights, used alone, obscures the revolutionary character of the Negro liberation movement. It becomes a tool of liberalism, guarantees no permanent gains, ultimately

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worsens the relations of poor whites and the Negro people, seriously weakens the Negro movement as an aid to the proletarian class struggle, and in fact emasculates the movement of the Negro people. It would be impermissible under the present conditions of anti-Negro hysteria to launch this slogan in the South unaccompanied by the slogan of the right of self-determination. Those who dismiss this slogan express distrust of the white masses of the North as well as South. It is a denial of the lessons of Reconstruction. It is therefore un-Marxian and can lead only to greater terror against the Negro people in the Black Belt and elsewhere.

To some of our comrades it has to be said that a nation can be a nation in itself and not be a nation for itself. The question of a nation becoming conscious of its nationhood is determined and conditioned by the character of its growth and maturity into nationhood. The Negro people became a separate nation in the process of an abortive struggle to be included as an integral part of the oppressing nation. That is a fact we must fully understand. Therein lies the dialectics of the question. The Negro people became a nation in the heart of a state for whose independence they as slaves had desperately fought. The freedom of the Negro was a task of the glorious revolutionary struggle against British toryism. Negro slaves fought for the realization of American independence. Out of that struggle a new state emerged and in that struggle a nation was developed. That nation was white. In the American state we saw the continued enslavement of the Negro as one of the means of creating a primitive accumulation. The Negro was not freed and did not nor could he at that historic moment and under those objective conditions become a member of this first American nation. This is in answer to the question concerning the development of the white nation and the American bourgeois state.

The Negro as a slave expressed the aspirations of all peoples for freedom. In fact in this early period the Negro gave to America some of its richest traditions of struggle. The Negro aspired not only for freedom but for full integration into the then only American nation. Even under slavery the Negro in America became more and more an amalgam of Europe and Africa in America. A new people were being born in this bourgeois state.

Slave economy was, by its division of labor, creating the embryo of classes among the slaves. Struggles for freedom were creating a common psychological outlook. The development of cotton culture in the Black Belt was creating a homeland for these new people. A common language was being learned. All of the historic factors—

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economic, political and social—which brought into being the white nation were imposing themselves upon the Negro. The maturing of the second bourgeois democratic revolution was creating the pre-condition for the absorption of the Negro into the American nation.

The second revolution also failed. It was betrayed. Whereas after the first bourgeois democratic revolution the forces of capitalism were not strong enough to eliminate slavery, to end the plantation system and thereby bring the Negro into the first nation, now the demands of the American bourgeoisie after the Civil War for raw materials, particularly cotton, brought an alliance of capital and the landlords. The Negro was again left out in the cold.

But a class structure had been prepared in the Negro ranks. From these classes emerged leaders who called for varied programs and the Negro went on to realize a common economic life, the last remaining attribute of nationhood needed to make of this new people a second nation in this American state. The betrayal by capitalism, led by the Republican Party, of some aspects of the second bourgeois revolution could prevent the Negro people being absorbed into the first nation developed here in America, but nothing could stop the process that was molding the Negro people into nationhood.

The aspirations of the Negro for integration into the existing nation obscured this fact. The Negro people had no consciousness of a realized nationhood because their eyes were fixed and remained fixed on integration. It is wrong, as one comrade does, to subordinate program to consciousness, negate a historical process because consciousness is absent. What kind of an argument is this? Applied to the class struggle it would lead to disaster. But we must recognize that applied to the Negro question it also leads to disaster, for a nation that oppresses another nation cannot itself be free. In America this means that the oppressed classes of the oppressing nation have no future unless they consolidate an alliance with the Negro nation in its struggle for liberation. At this historical hour the road to the internationalism, to the integration of white and Negro nation on the American scene lies through the realization of full nationhood by the Negro American nation.

It has been said here that there has been no expression of nationalism from the Negro people. I answer: analyze the Garvey Movement, analyze the movement for a 49th State, analyze more thoroughly the Negro liberation organizations, and in all of these you will find expressions of a nation seeking freedom. The movements were separatist movements against which we as Communists then

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and now turn our faces. This is not revolutionary nationalism. The demand for land is.

The development of the liberation struggles generally will sharpen all of the contradictions of American imperialism nationally and also internationally. Unfortunately the draft resolution ignores this feature of the Negro liberation movement. Yet here is one of the most vital features of the Negro movement today. As Comrade Ed Strong so eloquently pointed out here last night the Negro liberation movement can buttress the movement of the Indian people in South Africa, the fight for the freedom of the Chinese people, for it can expose the hypocrisy and absurdity of American imperialism to pose as a champion of world freedom and world democracy. We should approach the World Federation of Trade Unions to raise the question of the oppression of the Negro people in America as one of the most vital issues before world labor today.

The national ideology of American imperialism — its white supremacy ideology — the source of its hate campaigns which split white and black and develop religious hatreds will lose much of its force for evil if we expose the character of the Negro as an oppressed nation. We will thus weaken the ideology of Negro inferiority so prevalent in school and church, press and radio, theater and movies.

In the North the slogan for equal rights will be the basic slogan. A major feature of the program in the North must be the struggle to destroy the ghetto. One of the strongest expressions of white chauvinism lies in the failure of labor to make a real fight on the political front for Negro rights. For example, the continuation of Negro ghetto life which labor has accepted is a burden upon progressive America. The ghetto in the North is comparable in some degree to the land question in the South. The ghetto represents, not the remnants of slavery in the North, but the penetration of the slave ideology to the North and its acceptance there. This must be reflected in the resolution. The vitality of this lies in the fact that in exposing it, accompanied by a complete analysis of ghetto life and what it means, we will help the Negro people to see monopoly capital and its role more clearly. Here then comes the significance of the fight against restrictive covenants. We must smash the ghetto. The ghetto is tied to the South and to the issue of the right of self-determination.

Now for a few points on the resolution. We must help the Negro people to attain the full status of nationhood. The retardation of this march affects every phase of American economy, politics and culture. It weakens everywhere the struggles of the independent

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progressive forces in their struggle against imperialist elements. It prevents the full weight of this great liberation struggle to be thrown on the scales in the interests of world democracy. With this resolution we are opening up new vistas of struggle. We are releasing great reserves of progress, reserves not only available to the American movement but reserves as well for the international struggle for freedom and against world reaction.

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