

THE NEGRO AND THE AMERICAN NATION

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(A DISCUSSION ARTICLE)

DURING THE PAST sixteen years, ever since the adoption of the "Resolution on the Negro Question" in 1930, American Marxists have interpreted the Negro question as that of an oppressed nation, pointing to the attributes of "nationhood" being developed by the Negro people in the Black Belt territory (where in 1930 they constituted a slight majority of the population), and to the "national minority" characteristics of the Negro population outside the Black Belt.

The immediate practical program of the Communist Party throughout this period called for vigorous struggles against white chauvinism and all forms of anti-Negro discrimination, in both the North and South, for the attainment of full Negro democratic rights. However, the theoretical premise that the Negro people in the Black Belt constitute an oppressed nation led the Party to posit, as the necessary ultimate program for the liberation of this Negro nation from oppression, the establishment of its *right* of self-determination. The sys-

tem of ideas associated with this view was popularized through the slogan "Self-Determination in the Black Belt."

Communist theoretical writings and discussions on this question have consistently implied or clearly expressed the view that the ultimate destiny of the Negro people (*i.e.*, "self-determination") lies in some separate form of statehood, with the *right* even to secede from the United States. The 1930 Resolution, for example, called for "establishment of the state unity of the Black Belt," for bringing "together into one governmental unit all districts of the South where the majority of the settled population consists of Negroes."

Thus, ultimately at least, the Black Belt territory was to be organized into a separate, autonomous governmental unit, *following which* the Negro majority in that area would exercise its "right of self-determination"; that is, it would determine whether to remain as an integral part of, or to federate with, or to secede from, the larger American nation.

THE NEED FOR BASIC RESEARCH

It should be noted that "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" has never been advanced by the Communist Party as an immediate program of action. As a general theoretical approach to the Negro question, however (except during the period of Browder revisionism), this

program of ultimate state autonomy has been warmly defended against all who questioned its validity.

It has recently been proposed that the Communist Party now revive the slogan of "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" and reaffirm as its theoretical position on the Negro question the system of ideas heretofore associated with that slogan. For the many reasons set forth in the following pages, I am of the opinion that any such action would be theoretically incorrect and, therefore, tactically disastrous.

Having thus defined my point of view at this stage of our discussion, I hasten to add that neither I nor any of the other participants in this discussion appear to have the necessary factual information for a conclusive, scientific resolution of the issue. We are throwing our opinions and speculations back and forth at each other with a fervor and skill worthy of the scholastics of the Middle Ages—and with but little more factual basis for our polemics. This is not the method of science.

The Negro question in the United States is a fundamental question; and its concrete manifestations during the recent period of profound and significant change should be approached in a genuinely scientific manner. This we have not yet done. Even so simple a task as tabulating the 1930-to-1940 population shifts in the 477 Black Belt counties used as a basis of James Allen's study a decade ago (*The Negro Question*

in the United States. International Publishers, 1936) appears still to be carried through. Precise and comprehensive data are lacking on the status and trends of the Negro population in the North and South, the development of the Negro bourgeoisie and proletariat, industrialization in the South, the mechanization of southern agriculture, political potentials and participation by the southern white and Negro masses, and a host of other questions germane to our present speculative discussion on "Self-Determination in the Black Belt."

We cannot, and must not try to, resolve this issue finally without a far more systematic and definitive investigation of the facts than is reflected by this and the preceding contributions to our current discussion of the Communist position on the Negro question. Our Party must yet take steps to guarantee a truly scientific approach to this question.

It would be logical to end my discussion at this point, and to devote all of the limited time I have available to helping to gather and interpret the many facts which we all need as the basis for conclusions of tested validity. There may be some value, however, in setting forth my admittedly tentative conclusions about the proposal to reaffirm the "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" slogan and program as the theoretical position of the Communist Party on the Negro question in the United States. Subject to the basic qualification which inadequate data

impose upon our entire discussion of this question, here are my views.

THESES ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

On the basis of such fragmentary data and superficial observations as are at hand, it is my opinion that the strongly separatist program expressed by the "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" slogan does violence to the concrete manifestations of the Negro question in the United States, and therefore is undialectic, un-Marxian; and further, that this program militates against the unity of the *whole* Negro people and tends to aggravate existing divisions between the white and Negro masses of the South, and therefore is inadequate to promote that maximum working-class unity and strength which the economic and political struggles of this period so urgently require. I believe that we should discard the slogan and develop an entirely new approach to the Negro question.

The reasons for this judgment and the lines along which I think a more fruitful program needs to be developed are set forth in the following eight "theses on the Negro question."

First: *The Negro people have taken on the characteristics of a nation only in rudimentary form; they are still in a very early stage in their development toward nationhood.*

Historically, throughout two cen-

turies of slavery and seven decades of severely limited "freedom," Negro Americans have always been the victims of acute exploitation and oppression. The fundamental motivation for this oppression lies, of course, in the drive of the ruling landlords and bourgeoisie for super-profits based on unpaid or grossly underpaid labor.

This super-exploitation of the Negro workers has been facilitated by the factor of "race." Physically differentiated in appearance from the rest of the American population, the Negro could more easily be isolated and subjected to special oppression. It was for precisely this purpose that the rulers of our society invented the many slanderous myths and stereotypes about the Negro people, nurtured attitudes of white chauvinism, and sought to perpetuate the Negro-white divisions thus created by the artificial device of "racial segregation."

The factor of "race" operates also as a unifying force among the Negro people themselves. They recognize the superficial attribute of skin-color as the basis of their oppression. The Negro masses, therefore, have come to be highly "race-conscious." There is a strong feeling of kinship among Negroes everywhere—so much so that a Negro businessman in Chicago senses a sort of personal identification with a Negro sharecropper murdered by landlords in Mississippi; and a Negro worker in Florida gets deep satisfaction out of the election of

a Negro Congressman and a Negro Councilman from Harlem.

This unifying influence of a common racial origin has been further strengthened by centuries of common struggle against anti-Negro oppression in America. Traditions and attitudes of peculiar significance to the Negro people have developed and find expression through various forms of art. A Negro small bourgeoisie has emerged, dependent largely upon and seeking hegemony over the Negro market. A strong Negro proletariat has been developed, especially in the great industrial centers of the North. Powerful Negro organizations with varying programs have been built, entirely or predominantly Negro in composition and universally dedicated in some manner to helping to extend the boundaries of Negro democratic rights.

Thus, three centuries of common experience in America have transformed the Negro population from an agglomeration of separate African tribesmen, coming from widely different cultural backgrounds and speaking different languages, into a social-political group characterized by a greater degree of homogeneity than any other large sector of the American population. A common medium of expression (English) and concentration largely in a common territory (the Black Belt) have enormously facilitated this process. Through force of harsh circumstance and common experience, a definite

community of Negro citizens—"the Negro people"—has been developing within the American nation as a more or less unified and distinct component of the total population. This development is still in process. It is symbolized, in part, by ever-growing use of the term "the Negro people."

Marxists understand this development as the emergence of a new nation, still in the early stages of growth and not yet conscious even of its own nationhood. It is correct, therefore, to characterize the Negro population in the Black Belt as an "oppressed nation," and the Negro population outside of the Black Belt as a "national minority," subject in varying degrees to those same basic patterns of discrimination which have grown up around the feudalistic slave-survivals in the agrarian South. Moreover, there are political insights of major importance which flow from this understanding of the Negro question as a *national* question. It is this theoretical premise that leads Marxists to recognize the *special* character of the Negro question, and thus to avoid the Socialist Party's error of viewing the oppression of the Negro people as merely a part of the larger class struggle of our nation. It is on this conceptual basis that we view the whole Negro people (not merely the Negro proletariat) as natural allies of the working class. It is on this basis also that Marxists work to strengthen both the Negro liberation struggles and the more

general working-class struggles by hastening the developing collaboration between the two.

It must ever be borne in mind, however, that we are here dealing with a nation in embryonic form, far less developed *as a nation* than any of the other oppressed peoples for whom Marxists justly raise the demands of self-government and independence as an expression of their inherent right of self-determination. It must also be borne in mind that the existence of a Negro nation in the Black Belt, generally admitted to be in a very early stage of development, by no means leads necessarily to the inference that the future of that nation lies along the path of continuing maturation *as a nation*.

Second: *Marxist theory recognizes that the problem of each nation may call for a unique solution; and it by no means implies some form of independent statehood as a necessary means to the exercise of the right of self-determination.*

Several principles which are basic to a Marxist approach to the national question are (1) the right of a nation freely to determine its own destiny, (2) the need for a flexible approach to the varying manifestations of the national question at different times and in different places, and (3) the probable necessity for a specific solution to the problem of each oppressed nation, developed in the light of the concrete historical and contemporary conditions under which it lives. The

following quotations from Joseph Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question* (International Publishers, 1942) are illustrative in this regard:

A nation has the right freely to determine its own destiny. It has the right to arrange its life as it sees fit, without of course stamping on the rights of other nations. That is beyond dispute. (P. 24.)

A nation has the right to arrange its life on autonomous lines. It even has the right to secede. But this does not mean that it should do so under all circumstances, that autonomy, or separation, will everywhere and always be advantageous for a nation, for the majority of its population, for the toiling strata. (*Ibid.*)

But what solution would be most compatible with the interests of the toiling masses? Autonomy, federation, or separation? All these are problems the solution to which will depend on the concrete historical conditions, in which the given nation finds itself. Nay, more. Conditions, like everything else, change, and a decision which is correct at one particular time may prove to be entirely unsuitable at another. (P. 25.)

It follows from this that the solution of the national problem can be arrived at only if due consideration is paid to historical conditions in their development.

The economic, political, and cultural conditions of a given nation constitute the only key to the question of how a particular nation ought to arrange its life and what forms its future constitution ought to take. It is possible that a specific solution of the problem will be required for each nation. If, indeed,

a dialectical approach to a question is required anywhere it is required here in the national question.

In view of this we must declare our decided opposition to a certain very widespread, but very summary manner of "solving" the national problem, which owes its inception to the Bund. We have in mind the easy method of referring to the Austrian and South Slavic Social-Democratic parties, which supposedly have already solved the national problem and whose solution the Russian Social-Democrats should simply borrow. It is assumed that whatever, say, is right for Austria is also right for Russia. (Pp. 25-26.)

Thus, it is quite incorrect to assume that Marxist theory holds that any nation, under whatever circumstances, can find a solution of its problem as a nation only through some more or less separatist or autonomous form of political organization. Yet this is precisely the assumption which has been dominant in Communist interpretations of "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" for more than a decade.

Thus, it is also incorrect to assume that the highly successful national policy of the Soviet Union, which has liberated and enriched the lives of the once sorely oppressed nations of Czarist Russia, is applicable to the American scene. The theoretical Marxist principles on the national question there developed and tested through experience are, of course, universally valid. Their application to any particular national question, however, must always be made in

full accord with the concrete manifestations of the problem at a particular time and place. Indeed, to do otherwise would be highly undialectic, un-Marxian. Yet most past interpretations of the slogan, "Self-Determination in the Black Belt," have been heavily weighted by what appeared to be a more or less mechanical application of Soviet policy and experience to the national question as it affects the Negro people in the United States.

Third: *The perspective for the Negro people in the United States is neither toward disintegration as a people nor toward statehood as a nation; it is probably toward further development as a national minority, as a distinct and increasingly self-conscious community of Negro Americans.*

The "integrationist" theory of Browder revisionism on the Negro question would imply the gradual disappearance of the Negro people as a distinct sector of the American population. Ultimately, in the case of the Negro and other peoples, there will come a trend toward the amalgamation of nations; but this will not happen until long after the advent of socialism as the dominant form of the world social order.

Present and probable future trends are in precisely the opposite direction. The Negro people are building up their national organizations for ever more militant struggles as a people. They are becoming increasingly conscious of their oneness as Negro

Americans. They are struggling with ever greater unity and power to attain their full stature as a people. The perspective is for continued development along this line. The Negro people clearly are not moving toward disintegration, or toward the loss of their identity (as in the case of Polish-Americans or Italian-Americans) through the process of integration and attendant assimilation.

Neither are the Negro people moving toward statehood. The perspective of a separate Negro republic, autonomous region, or other separate form of political organization in the Black Belt is inconsistent with the concrete social, economic and political realities and trends of the American scene, of which the Negro people are increasingly an integral part.

The very tenuous Negro population majority in the Black Belt a decade and a half ago ($3/10$ of 1 per cent) has probably been dissipated already by the known decrease in the number of Negro-majority counties, from 189 in 1930 to 172 in 1940. The coming mechanization of Southern agriculture will hasten and extend this trend. The concentrated Negro population in the Black Belt territory will probably continue to spread out to other parts of the South, and in lesser degree to the North and West.

Parenthetically it should be noted that our great emphasis in the past upon the Negro population "majority" in the Black Belt was ill-advised,

because it incorrectly seemed to make the whole concept of the "Negro nation" hinge upon a slender statistical margin. We should understand, however, that the theoretical validity of this concept cannot be undermined merely by showing that Negroes constitute something less than one-half of the population in a more or less arbitrarily defined area. At the same time we must also understand that persistent and significant trends toward greater dispersion of the Negro population would, indeed, undermine the very existence of the Negro nation in the Black Belt.

The Negro bourgeoisie is still an insignificant factor in the American economy, and a very minor factor in the economic life of the Negro people themselves. Even Negro life insurance companies, which represent the strongest sector of Negro business, hold only about three per cent of the life insurance in force for Negro families. The Negro bourgeoisie will continue to grow, but there is little likelihood that, at this stage in the development of American monopoly capital, it will yet emerge as a dominant economic force in the life of the Negro people.

The Negro proletariat is far more substantially developed than the Negro bourgeoisie, a fairly unique feature of the Negro question as compared with national developments elsewhere in the world. This fact is a positive asset for the Negro people's movement and for the working-class movement as a whole be-

cause it raises the possibility of the Negro proletariat achieving hegemony over the Negro liberation struggle, a most salutary development which even now is well on the way toward maturity. It must be borne in mind, however, that the Negro proletariat is mostly without the Black Belt area of the Negro nation, and, further, that its orientation is toward increasingly close and organic relations with the white industrial workers of our country.

The highly developed cultural (*i.e.*, artistic) expressions of the Negro people, likewise, are now for the most part outside the territorial area of the Negro nation. This aspect of Negro life will unquestionably flourish still more in the period ahead, and it will tend increasingly, as at present, to merge with and enrich the cultural life of the American nation as a whole. It must be understood, however, that such a development, although expressing the deep-set emotions and aspirations of all the Negro people, will for a long time be shared but meagerly by the oppressed Negro masses in the towns and on the plantations of the Black Belt.

The growing political maturity of the Negro people shows no tendencies toward development along separatist lines. Rather, Negro voters, in both the North and South, are developing as an increasingly important sector of the broad labor-progressive coalition upon which the future of American democracy depends.

As the C.I.O. southern organizing drive grows in power, as the Negro-Labor alliance becomes increasingly firm, and as the polltax and white primary barriers to Negro suffrage are overcome, the Negro people of both the North and South will more and more take their place as an integral part of that progressive political movement which will one day find organizational expression through a third political party of national proportions. They will play a major role in the struggle to defeat American imperialism and strengthen democracy; and in this very process they will hasten their own liberation from Jim Crow oppression.

Thus, the most significant recent trends in the development of the Negro people appear to be away from, rather than toward, the further maturation of the Negro nation in the Black Belt. Indeed, it is highly probable that the Negro people in the Black Belt have already reached their maximum stage of development *as a nation*, that the future growth curve of this Black Belt nation is downward, and that the Negro people of that area will become increasingly integrated into the even broader liberation struggles of the entire Negro people throughout the country, all fighting for full democratic rights for Negro citizens in every section of the United States.

It is toward dignity and equal status *as Americans* that the Negro people are moving. As they grow in unity and political maturity, their

consciousness as a distinct and organized component of the American population will be enhanced. They will, in time, assert political demands commensurate with their growing maturity and strength—perhaps even for the shifting of county and state boundary lines to achieve full political expression in local areas of Negro majority population. But they will raise these demands as Negro Americans, and within the federated state structure of the United States.

It is not along the line of a separate Negro republic or autonomous region, even in the Black Belt, that the probable future development of the Negro people lies. It is, rather, along the line of an increasingly organized and self-conscious *community of Negro Americans*, functioning as an integral part of the larger nation, and struggling with ever greater unity and power for the destruction of Jim Crow barriers of all kinds, for the attainment of full economic, political and social equality *as Americans*.

In short, the probable future growth of the Negro people in the United States is not toward further maturation as a nation, but rather toward further development as a distinct national minority.

It should be pointed out that this perspective of the Negro people as a developing national minority fully conserves all of the strategic advantages which arose from Marxists' original characterization of the Negro question as that of an oppressed

“nation.” Within the theoretical framework of the Negro people as an oppressed “national minority,” the *special* character of the Negro question remains intact, and the whole Negro people are still correctly viewed as the natural allies of the organized working class.

It should also be pointed out that the further development of the Negro people as a national minority, rather than as a separate nation, is fully consistent with the political traditions and structure of the larger American nation of which they are an integral part. Unlike the Soviet Union, whose many peoples, in already more or less advanced stages of nationhood, led naturally to the adoption of an over-all *federated republics* pattern of political organization, the United States was not built upon an already existing group of nations, but rather upon a population consisting of many nationality groups which, in time, came to be welded into one nation. The over-all *federated states* pattern of political organization is the one which evolved for our nation; and it would be quite inconsistent with this whole political development for the small, almost completely surrounded Negro nation in the Black Belt, unique in all America, to mature as a separate republic or autonomous region within the borders of the United States. Indeed, such a development is difficult to conceive. Far more natural, and probable, is it that the young Negro nation in the Black Belt will in time disappear, and that

the Negro population of which it consists will develop increasingly as a part of the organized *national minority* of Negro people throughout the country, struggling for full democratic rights and dignity for the Negro people everywhere.

Thus, the strongly separatist program expressed by the slogan of "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" is inconsistent with the probable destiny of the Negro people in America. It does not conform to the concrete historical, economic, political and cultural conditions of this national question in the United States. It is, therefore, undialectic, un-Marxian.

Fourth: *The overwhelming majority of the Negro people abhor and reject any proposal that they separate—in any form whatever, even temporarily—from the American nation as a whole.*

There are many historical and current evidences of a strong antipathy among Negroes toward any separatist solution of their problem as a people.

The successive colonization schemes proposed even during the dark days of slavery were all decisively rejected by the articulate spokesmen of the Negro people.

During Reconstruction, when the Negro people in the Black Belt held some power of decision, their choice was clearly to join hands with their white fellow-citizens to build democratic state governments in the South

as an integral part of the U. S. A.

When reduced to a state of virtual slavery during the late 19th Century, the Southern Negro masses chose to join hands again with the white masses in the Populist Movement's vain bid for a Democratic South.

The Garvey Movement of the early 1920's, when postwar reaction so thoroughly disillusioned the Negro people, was a substantial development along separatist lines. It unquestionably tapped deep roots in the freedom aspirations of the Negro people during that period. But even at its height the Garvey Movement never commanded the sympathy of most Negro Americans, and its two or three present-day organizational heirs are but isolated and insignificant sects with no real mass support.

The important Negro mass organizations are all committed to a program of full democratic rights for the Negro people as citizens of the U. S. A.; never do they call for attainment of separatist goals. Recognized non-Communist leaders of the Negro people, the extensive Negro press, representing all shades of political orientation, and the informal discussions of Negroes in their homes and local groups—not only in the North, but also in the plantation South—all point to the deep-seated desire of the Negro people to exercise their full democratic rights *as Americans*, "without discrimination on grounds of race or color." They reject any proposed solution of the Negro question through some form

of organic separation from the United States.

Thus, the strong separatist implications of the "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" program are not only theoretically incorrect; they are also a source of irritation to the Negro people, serving only to alienate from the Communist Party many Negro workers and intellectuals who would otherwise be among our staunch supporters.

In this connection, it should be pointed out that the rapidly growing popularity of the Communist Party among Negroes during the early 1930's was by no means based upon our slogan and program of "Self-Determination in the Black Belt." It developed in spite of that slogan and program—which, fortunately, relatively few Negroes knew about anyway, and fewer still understood. The prestige of the Communist Party among the Negro people was originally built, and is now being rebuilt, primarily on the dual basis of (1) consistent Communist leadership in militant struggles for Negro democratic rights, and (2) the progressive national policy of the Soviet Union.

Fifth: The present and probable future trend for the Negro people is toward more and more victorious struggles against the special forms of oppression to which they are subjected.

During the recent anti-fascist war the Negro people moved forward rapidly toward freedom and security

on many fronts. But this development has now been slowed down considerably, and in some respects reversed. The postwar upsurge of anti-Negro reaction—reflected by mass firings in industry, strengthened opposition to legislative reforms, and especially the revival of lynch terror in the South—represents a serious threat, indeed, to the further progress of the Negro people toward their historic goal of full democratic rights. The same is true, in somewhat lesser degree, of the threat which postwar imperialist reaction poses for the working class as a whole.

Any complete and sustained triumph of imperialist, pro-fascist reaction in our country now would, with certainty, sharply reverse the recent trend toward the extension of Negro democratic rights, and drive the Negro people backward to new low levels of oppression. Such a development might well give rise to another strong wave of anti-white, separatist tendencies such as engulfed large sections of the Negro people during the reaction which followed World War I. It might produce a greater readiness, even eagerness, on the part of the Negro people for some form of separate organization of their political life along autonomous lines.

Apparently on the assumption that this is the perspective for America as a whole, and for the Negro people in particular, some observers caution against discarding the "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" program

as the main theoretical approach of Marxists to the Negro question. Recognizing its "practical" limitations at this time, they envision the day when this separatist program will yet be on the agenda of history.

Let us be clear that *one* of the alternatives which this period of history poses for our country is, indeed, that of a fascist America with a horribly enslaved Negro people. *But where is the Marxist who actually holds to this thoroughly defeatist perspective?*

Our very lives are predicated upon the sure knowledge that the working class, not the imperialists, will triumph in the decisive struggles now shaping up in our country and the world. Without under-estimating for a moment the vicious offensives which pro-fascist reaction has already begun to launch against the Negro people and the whole working class, we are busy mobilizing the people for struggle with full confidence of victory.

Marxists understand that the capitalist roots of imperialist reaction are already in process of decay. Completely unawed by these still dominant and highly dangerous forces of reaction, we focus our attention upon and help to strengthen the new and emerging progressive forces in our own country and throughout the world. These forces were never more powerful and effectively organized than right now, and they are growing stronger all the time. Although serious struggles still lie along the way,

we know that the forces of progress will organize the future of our own country and all the world.

This is the broad political perspective, not that of triumphant reaction, in terms of which we must view the Negro question in the United States. And in terms of this perspective we can more readily see the Negro people continuing to move forward toward equality and dignity as Americans.

Even the wholesale discharge of Negro industrial workers during the past year has not completely wiped out the wartime employment gains of the Negro people—nor is it likely to do so.

Although gross disparities in educational opportunity still remain, the growing struggles of the Negro people and their allies are winning constantly improved public school facilities for hundreds of thousands of Negro youths.

Restrictions upon suffrage in the South are being weakened and broken down, and the Negro people are coming to form an increasingly important sector of the American electorate.

A truly major blow was landed against the whole rotten structure of Dixie segregation when eminent Negro attorneys won their recent Supreme Court case to bar Jim Crow travel arrangements on interstate buses.

Bars against Negroes in organized baseball have begun to crumble. Able Negro citizens are moving more and

more into important elective and appointive positions in government. At least four major plays of Negro life are shown on Broadway during the current season. The "American Mother of 1946" is a distinguished Negro woman from the South, with a family of which any mother would be proud.

In short, despite organized, still dominant, and now increasing reaction, the Negro people are continuing to make progress—in almost all areas of our national life. They are organizing and fighting with increasing militancy toward complete liberation from the shackles of Jim Crow oppression. And more and more they find effective white allies in their struggle.

The road ahead will surely present no unbroken chain of victories for the Negro liberation movement. On the contrary, some serious and sustained set-backs are certain to develop. But the path along which the Negro people are moving *does lead forward*. Moreover, in the over-all working-class and people's struggles now shaping up in our country and in the world, there are likely to develop situations in which the Negro people will hasten toward their goal of full democratic rights at a pace which pre-occupation with the threatening forces of reaction would never lead one to envisage.

Thus, our out-moded separatist doctrine of "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" cannot now be supported on the premise of a sharp

and long-sustained downward trend in the Negro freedom curve. The perspective is for quite the opposite. Let us not polemize on the basis of some *possible* course of history in which we, ourselves, do not believe.

Sixth: *A correct Marxist approach to the Negro question must contribute toward maximum unity of the Negro people as a whole.*

The Negro people throughout the country are, and will increasingly become, *one* organized community within the general population. They do not look upon themselves as "Southern Negroes within the Black Belt," "Southern Negroes outside the Black Belt," and "Negroes in the North and West," but rather as *Negroes*—all subject to much the same types of discrimination, despite important qualitative differences in different parts of the country. Their growing national organizations, embracing and fighting for the rights of Negroes in all parts of the United States, are an expression of this developing unity of the entire Negro community.

So, likewise, do the main oppressors of the Negro people regard them as one. Place of residence is quite irrelevant to the United States Government when it proceeds to segregate all Negroes in the armed forces. Although forced to temper their policies somewhat by the greater strength of the democratic forces and traditions in the North and West, big real estate interests, financiers and industrialists above the Mason and

Dixon Line continue their discriminations against Negroes *as a people*. Southern plantation landlords and industrial employers make no fine distinctions as to whether the Negroes they exploit are within or without the Black Belt, but wring from their labor all the special surplus value which the degree of Jim Crow discrimination in their particular localities permits.

It is true that the main base of Negro oppression lies in the Black Belt area, from which it extends in varying degrees throughout the country. It is also true that a fundamental solution of the Negro problem in the Black Belt is pre-requisite to the attainment of full freedom and dignity by Negroes in other parts of the South, and in the North and West. But it does not follow that the correct approach to a solution of the Negro problem calls for a sharp programmatic distinction between the one-third of the Negroes within the Black Belt and the two-thirds of the Negroes outside the Black Belt. Indeed, a program which clearly recognizes the basic common factors in the oppression of *all* Negroes, and which seeks further to weld unity among Negroes *everywhere* for effective struggle *as a people*, is one which can bring maximum strength to the Negro people's liberation movement and to the organized working class generally.

Thus, "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" as the *main* theoretical approach of the Communist Party to

the Negro question has the limitations, first, of direct reference to only a one-third minority of the Negro people, and, second, of failing to embrace and unify the whole Negro people for concerted struggle against their common oppressors. We need a much more comprehensive approach than is expressed by this slogan.

Seventh: *A correct Marxist approach to the Negro question must contribute toward maximum unity of the white and Negro masses, in both the North and South.*

The growing collaboration and unity of the Negro people with the labor-progressive movement as a whole is one of the most salutary developments in the political life of America. It has been strikingly evident in recent political campaigns, in organized labor's struggle to defeat the anti-union attacks of monopoly capital, in the campaign to maintain price controls, and in the struggle to reverse the imperialist war policy of the Truman Administration. It is of the utmost importance that this development be extended.

This is essential to guarantee people's victories in the elections of 1946 and 1948, to assure the success of labor's campaign to organize the South, to give Southern workers the necessary power to uproot the feudalistic plantation system, depose their oligarchic Bourbon rulers, and proceed to build a genuine democracy in the South.

This is essential to lay the basis for building a powerful third party in America, for checking our nation's drift toward imperialist war and fascism, for giving the working class the strength it must have to withstand the coming cotton crisis in the South, and the even more general and disastrous crisis which is coming in the American capitalist economy as a whole.

This is essential to guarantee the victory of socialism in our country.

The "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" program falls far short of what is required to build maximum unity between the white and Negro workers in the South, or even in the North. Indeed, considering the anti-Negro poison on which Southern white workers have been nurtured, the Negro majority-rule implications of this program serve but to drive an even sharper wedge between the white and Negro masses. In addition to being theoretically incorrect, this separatist program plays right into the hands of the Southern demagogues who maintain power largely through playing on the bogey of "Negro domination."

We need a theoretical and programmatic approach to the Negro question which more clearly embraces the common interests of the white and Negro masses of the South, and which is conceived deliberately to rally them and the white workers of the North in unified struggle *with the Negro people* toward those freedom and security goals which they all

hold in common, and which they can achieve only through joint struggle. Such a program would give maximum expression to the historic Marxist doctrine that "labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded."

Finally: *A correct Marxist approach to the Negro question must contribute toward maximum unity of theory and practice.*

There has long been an anomalous division between what we Communists have called our "theoretical position" on the Negro question ("Self-Determination in the Black Belt") and our "practical tasks" of day-to-day struggles for Negro democratic rights. We have commonly expounded our "theoretical position" with vehemence; and then, as if putting it on ice for safe-keeping, we have turned to the quite unrelated "practical struggles" of the moment. I say this practice is anomalous because Marxists, above all others, stress the necessary *unity of theory and practice.*

The situation here involved is not to be compared with our ultimate goal of socialism and the immediate struggles, short of direct agitation for socialism, which we undertake from day to day. In the latter case our practical struggles flow directly from, and contribute toward, our ultimate theoretical goal of socialism. Our day-to-day struggles for Negro democratic rights, however, are hardly expressive of the strongly separatist "state unity" interpretations

we have heretofore given to the slogan of "Self-Determination in the Black Belt."

Those immediate practical struggles for Negro democratic rights are, however, fully consistent with the objective realities of life about us and with the deep-seated aspirations of the Negro people. They are consistent with the imperative need of building democratic unity between the Southern white and Negro workers for common struggles to carry through the still unfulfilled democratic revolution in the South. They are also consistent with our need for a united working class for the achievement of socialism.

Life itself has forced us to adopt a correct immediate "practical program" in relation to the Negro question in the United States. Although the process is somewhat the reverse of what should be the case with Marxists, let us not hesitate longer to bring our theoretical position on this question into full harmony with the completely valid program of day-to-day struggles which we already embrace.

CONCLUSION

It was not the purpose of this analysis to outline a well-rounded positive program for the Communist Party on the Negro question, but rather to define and evaluate our previous theoretical position concerning the right to self-determination in the Black Belt, and to sug-

gest the general lines along which necessary revision of that program should now be developed.

The conclusions which flow from the analysis are, briefly stated, as follows:

First, the "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" program and slogan, interpreted with the strong separatist emphasis of the past, do not conform to the concrete historical, economic, political and cultural realities of the Negro question in the United States. Moreover, now to revive and attempt to reinterpret the slogan after more than a decade of misuse would be highly confusing. The slogan should be discarded.

Second, a new theoretical approach to the Negro question should be developed by American Marxists. Such an approach should:

1. Interpret the Negro people as a young nation in the very early stages of development;
2. Recognize that with the Negro people in the United States, as with all oppressed peoples, the Marxist approach to a solution of the national question must be flexible, and must grow out of the concrete economic, political and social conditions of the people concerned;
3. Raise the perspective of further development of the Negro people as a national minority within, and functioning as an integral part of, the larger American nation (rather than development as a maturing nation moving toward statehood);
4. Raise the perspective of contin-

ued progress of the Negro people toward full democratic rights;

5. Embrace the common needs of the whole Negro people, strengthening the unity and organization of all Negro Americans everywhere—within the Black Belt and without;

6. Recognize the common sources of the oppression suffered by both the white and Negro masses in the South, and call for maximum unity between the Negro people and the southern white workers, and between them and the workers of the North, in concerted struggles for the freedom, security and enduring peace of all Americans; and

7. Unify Communist theory and practice on the Negro question.

A theoretical approach to the Negro question developed along these lines would correct the Leftist errors which have come to be associated with the "Self-Determination in the Black Belt" slogan. It would point toward that form of "self-determination" which corresponds to the aspirations and probable destiny of the

Negro people in the United States. It would lay the basis for Marxist unity of theory and practice on the Negro question. It would promote the developing unity of the Negro people, draw closer the growing ties between the white and Negro masses, and enhance the prestige and influence of the Communist Party among both white and Negro Americans.

Such a theoretical approach to the Negro question would tend to strengthen the liberation struggles of the Negro people, enhance the unity and power of the working class as a whole, and hasten the coming victory of socialism in the United States. Let us proceed to develop such an approach.

Third, a systematic program of fundamental research on the Negro question should be undertaken at once. Only on the basis of far more comprehensive factual information than is now at hand can there be any final scientific resolution of the theoretical issues here drawn.