

SECTION VII: NATIONAL MINORITIES AND RACISM

I. Introduction to this Section of Study

This section of our study takes up one of the most crucial contradictions within U. S. monopoly capitalism: the contradiction of racism and the oppression of national minorities. Our study focuses on the racist oppression of Black people in our society. Though the historical development of discrimination and oppression against Blacks is the topic for our discussion, we do not intend to minimize the racism against other minority groups--Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians and Native Americans, etc. However, given our limited time, we felt it would be most beneficial to concentrate on the division between whites and Blacks and to use our analysis of this to further discuss the special oppression of all national minorities within the U.S. today. Certainly there are important similarities between the oppression of Black people and racism toward other minority groups, a thorough discussion of which is crucial for all Marxist-Leninist theory and practice. Furthermore, in some regions of this country, anti-racist work by Marxist-Leninists must be concentrated among Chicanos, Asian and Native Americans owing to the particular demographic importance of those national minorities in certain areas.

Our discussion this week of racism shares some common theoretical premises with the discussion next week of sexism. In developing an understanding of both racism and sexism, we feel that it is not enough to see these particular forms of oppression as emanating directly and mechanically from the "bosses" as many dogmatists tend to say. Whereas racism and sexism may have as their root-cause the contradictions of class division and capitalism, both develop a life of their own, a justification, within the thinking of the working class as well. Therefore, it is not enough to overthrow capitalism and thus assume that racial and sexual contradictions will disappear de facto, rather we must struggle against all manifestations of racism and sexism both within mass work and within the political leadership. In that sense, it is important for us to realize in our discussion this week that racism as a pervasive ideology under U.S. monopoly capitalism has to be struggled against in all aspects of our practical and theoretical work.

Historically the relationship between Black and white Americans has been the focus for a heated theoretical debate, particularly the "Afro-American National Question." The debate over the National Question has waged within the international communist movement. The positions on the National Question were originally raised in the European socialist movement and dealt primarily with the character of nations in the transition from competitive capitalist to monopoly capitalist social formations. The emergence of large imperialist powers brought forth a controversy in the socialist camp over the "right" of oppressed nationalities in Eastern Europe and Russia to secede from the nations into which they were incorporated. This question which originally focused on the oppression of Poles, certain Slavic groups, and the Jews in Eastern Europe was later (1928 & 1930) extended to include the situation of Afro-Americans in the U. S.

The Afro-American National Question most specifically revolves around a broad discussion of the development of the Black nation in the South of the U. S. in the years following the Civil War. Propo-

nents of the Black Nation thesis hold that the process of nation-building in the Black Belt (so named because of the deep black color of the soil in the Southern States) began with the introduction of African chattel slavery as a labor force on white-owned plantations. It was not, however, constituted as a "nation" until after the abolition of slavery, since the necessary "economic cohesion" and class structure was not formed under slave conditions and only arose during the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War.

II. Readings for this Week

Our reading for this week is a pamphlet by the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) on the national question. The pamphlet includes a long discussion of the historical rise of nations in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, a summary of the development and subsequent breakdown of the Black Nation in the U. S., and a polemical review of the positions of several existing Left groups who hold to different theses on the National Question.

The PWOC has put forth the position that the Black Nation no longer exists in the U.S. today, having been dispersed in the period following World War I and finally dissolved after World War II, when the majority of the Black people previously concentrated in the South migrated to the North to take positions in the fast expanding industrial plants of the cities. Whereas the PWOC document shows that the demographic predominance of Blacks in the South has radically altered in the last 50 years, thus rendering dubious the claim that Blacks continue to constitute a nation in the South, it does hold that there once existed a Black nation. This particular point is yet a locus for debate, since many Marxist-Leninists, committed to the principle that the struggle against racism must be primary, do not believe that a culturally, economically and politically cohesive nation was ever formed in the South of the U. S.

This question should be frankly and openly addressed by the members of the study group. Most particularly, we should attempt to discuss the importance of one or another position the existence of the Black nation, since the PWOC hold the position that to negate the previous existence of a Black Nation leads to a tendency for whites to reduce the importance of waging a struggle against the oppression of Black people. With this in mind, we should direct our discussion beyond the purely academic side of the argument concerning the existence or non-existence of the Black Nation and push for a full evaluation of what each position means for on-going political work that sees the elimination of racism as a primary focus.

III. About the Authors

The PWOC is a collective based in Philadelphia that has been a leader in the developing "anti-dogmatist/anti-revisionist" embryonic trend. A summary of the emergence of this "trend" was contained in the introduction to MLEP that was distributed prior to the initiation of the study groups; and MLEP itself was designed to be a part of this developing "trend". As stated before, the "trend" is made up of over a hundred collectives, organizations and study circles around the U.S. which have recently begun the process of developing a loose alignment so as to lay the basis for coordinating both theoretical and practical work and, eventually, from this basis to take steps toward building a

new "anti-dogmatic/anti-revisionist" communist party.

Those of us who have followed closely the emergence of this "trend" feel that there is a great deal to be learned from the stable and consistent practice of the PWOC. We are in particular agreement on the necessity for squarely addressing the question of dogmatism in the current "new communist movement" and feel that this pamphlet by the PWOC addressed the debate from the proper angle: as a document that sees dogmatism as a main danger in our political work. Despite this valuable contribution, we do feel that the questions regarding the existence or non-existence of a Black Nation may not be fully spelled out here and think that there is yet need for more clarification on this subject.

IV. The Discussion for this Week

In our discussion we should attempt to draw out the central points of analysis presented in the PWOC pamphlet. We should review quickly the theoretical arguments on the development of nations in general as presented in the section dealing with the transition from feudalism to capitalism and then, building on this argument, we should begin to analyze the development of the Black Nation as presented by the PWOC. In this way, we should be best able to critically judge whether the PWOC description of the formation of a Nation in the South really occurred, according to the previous outline of nation-building and dominated social formations that are discussed in an earlier section of the pamphlet.

We should also draw on some of the previous readings, most particularly the article by Amilcar Cabral in which he discussed the development of a cohesive culture that joins together the members of an oppressed nation. In addition, we should constantly draw on other experience and reading that individuals in the groups may have done apart from the study group which would be useful to answer some of the problems that the contradiction between races in this country has presented to the communist movement. Again, while the readings have dealt with the special oppression of Black people and the debate over the National Question, we should attempt to broaden our discussion to the particular contradictions between whites and all oppressed national minorities.

Finally, we should evaluate the pamphlet on the basis of its attempt to break with a dogmatic approach to this subject. Possibly we may need to review what dogmatism is and how it has been a dead-weight on the development of Left politics in this country. Whether individuals in the study group are in agreement with the conclusions expressed in the PWOC pamphlet or not, would not limit our evaluation of the method and the way in which the pamphlet has presented this question non-dogmatically. Of course, we need also evaluate whether the pamphlet really does break decisively with dogmatism or not.

V. Sum Up

In summarizing our discussion for the week we should speak openly about whether it was successful or not. The group will only have a successful discussion if all members speak frankly during the sum up, as throughout, and try to evaluate what was confusing, what clarified, and what remains to be discussed in the future.