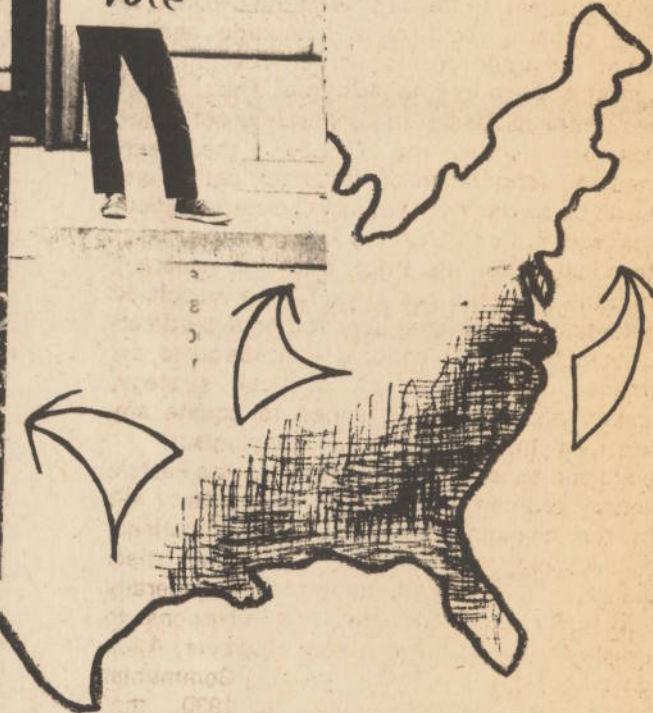


# Dogmatism, Revisionism, & the National Question



In the fight for revolutionary theory and the further struggle to win the masses to a consistent working class stand, a major task is the exposure and defeat of revisionism. This is no less true in the realm of the national question. Our dogmatists are rendering Marxism-Leninism a serious disservice, in that their sterile theory and bankrupt practice concedes so much of the terrain of battle to the revisionists. At the same time, the dogmatists weaken the struggle against revisionism by misunderstanding its nature and distorting its actual content in relation to the national question.

#### THE FIGHT AGAINST OPPRESSION IN THE CPUSA

Historically speaking, one of the compelling reasons for the strength of the Black Belt nation line among Marxist-Leninists is that the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA) opportunism on the national question was bound up with the question of the Black nation and its right to self determination. Under the regime of Browderite revisionism, the CPUSA took the absurd position that Black people had *already exercised their right to self determination* during the New Deal period and had opted to remain within the U.S.

Browderism prettified U.S. imperialism by suggesting it was "solving" the question of Black oppression in the framework of peaceful, liberal reform of capitalism. In the late 1940s the CPUSA, as part of its general rectification campaign against Browderism, returned to its earlier revolutionary position after a sharp internal struggle. Then, in the late fifties, in the context of the general consolidation of revisionism within the CPUSA, the party abandoned the formulation of the Black nation and withdrew its slogan on the right to self determination.

Because within the CPUSA the attack on the line of self determination for the Black Belt has generally come from the right and has always been associated with liquidating the national question or subordinating the struggle against national oppression to the requirements of a reformist political strategy, revolutionary elements have tended to equate any departure from this position with opportunism.

The opportunist nature of the attacks on the Party's revolutionary position served to blind the Party left wing to the changing character of the national question. This was evident as early as the late forties. In this period, James Allen undertook a generally correct defense of the Black nation line in response to opportunist assaults on this position. However, Allen mistakenly continued to insist, as the Communist International had correctly done in 1930, that industrialization would not alter the character of the Black Belt and that southern agriculture could not modernize.

Allen also, consistent with the Party's characterization of the coming period as one of contraction, stagnation and economic crisis, predicted the period of migration from the Black Belt was over. In his ardor to uphold the revolutionary line on the national question, Allen misunderstood the demographic and economic trends of the period and, to the extent he grasped them, underestimated their potential impact.

In 1959, when the CPUSA changed its line and

repudiated the Black nation and its right to self determination, it was not the result of the recognition of these changes. Instead, it was part of a general refurbishing of the Party's line to bring it in harmony with the tenets of modern revisionism. The CPUSA was in the process of consolidating a generalized reformist outlook. The negation of the Black nation and the withdrawal of the slogan of the right to self determination was an adaptation to the integrationist-minded section of the Black petty bourgeoisie.

Significantly, the CPUSA did not take the position that the Black nation had been assimilated (which would have been correct) but rather that there never had been a Black nation in the first place. The elements missing, both historically and currently, from the Black people were stability and *culture*, according to the revisionist theoreticians. The CPUSA was clearly trying to minimize the national differences between the Black people and the white majority, a project that coincided with the dominant tendency of the Black petty bourgeoisie, which had only criticized the Party's line as "segregationist" and "nationalistic."

The CP left wing, which was eventually to split and form the Provisional Organizing Committee (POC) fought against this reformist line. But these forces could only counterpose to the new line the old position. The left wing failed to measure up to the challenge and come forward with a theory that upheld a revolutionary position while incorporating into this position a correct understanding of the changes wrought in the social character of the Afro-American people since 1930. For the CPUSA was *right* in its new formulation that Black people were a national minority, but for the *wrong* reasons. It was not this formulation, but the analysis that lay behind it that constituted their opportunism. This failure on the part of the left wing was generalized and carried over into the POC which, gripped by dogmatism, never was able to create a Marxist-Leninist alternative to the now degenerate CPUSA.

The legacy of this failure is ours today for the anti-revisionist forces, with the exception of RU, have similarly failed to counter the revisionism of the CPUSA with anything more than warmed-over versions of the Comintern line of 1928. If that failure was understandable in 1959, especially given the history of the struggle against opportunism on the national question within the CPUSA, it is inexcusable fifteen years later in a movement that has a different history (we have enough baggage of our own without taking up the burden of the CP's) and at least should have more historical perspective.

#### HOW THE DOGMATISTS FIGHT REVISIONISM ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The dogmatists today define revisionism on the national question as the negation of the Black nation and the right to self determination. By so doing they castrate the struggle against revisionism. They place it on the terrain most favorable to revisionism. Why? Because in point of fact the revisionists are not wrong in regarding Black people as a national minority. As we have seen, science is on the side of

this formulation and the plain facts can only embarrass our dogmatists (which is why we find so few facts in their polemics).

Also, it is actually not the case that the revisionists repudiate the right to self determination for the Black people. Their present program forthrightly states: "Even though Black people do not now constitute a nation, we do not place any limitations on their struggle to satisfy their aspirations up to and including their right to develop self-government and to exercise the right of self determination." Thus, ironically the revisionists take the *same position* of some of our dogmatists, who divorce the question of the right to self determination from the objective character of a people.

By equating revisionism with any departure from the line of the Communist International in 1930, the dogmatists mistake the character of revisionism and confuse its essence. We do not shrink with embarrassment because we hold the position that Black people are a national minority in common with the CPUSA. It is infantile to think that every formulation of the revisionists is incorrect. The CPUSA also holds that the industrial working class is the leading force for proletarian revolution—should we also reject this as revisionism?

In fact, revisionism is dangerous precisely *because* there are elements of Marxism-Leninism in their line, or at least its public face. If every position of the revisionists was nakedly opportunist, then the struggle against revisionism would be simple indeed. But it is because revisionism is a sham Marxism that makes this struggle complex and difficult. Revisionism shields its bourgeois essence behind a screen of Marxist phraseology and formulations.

Also, revisionism did not descend full blown from the head of Nikita Krushchev. It is the product of a whole historical period—the rotten fruit of a corrupted Marxism. And even a corrupted Marxism carries over elements of truth, correct insights that co-exists with alien bourgeois ideas that have penetrated and come to dominate the official ideology of the revisionist parties. It is this understanding of revisionism as a sham, deformed Marxism that must guide us in the struggle against it. A mechanical attitude that does not see revisionism as the sum total of its parts but rather every formulation of the revisionists as wrong on its face can only set the struggle back. Such an attitude underestimates revisionism and weakens the credibility of its enemies.

Another error in the approach to revisionism is to equate their line today with that of the Lovestoneite opportunists in 1928. The OL holds that the essence of revisionism on the national question is the "theory of productive forces" which they describe as the idea "that the national question disappears peacefully through the development of industry in an oppressed nation." The Lovestoneites held in the late twenties that the industrial revolution in the South would solve the national question. The Comintern correctly opposed this line. They argued the coming of industry would not alter the plantation system. Today the plantation system has disintegrated and the Black peasantry has been proletarianized out of existence.

Does this mean the Lovestoneites were right? Of course not. Their prognostications were focused on expected developments in the twenties and thirties, not the fifties and sixties. Furthermore, and most importantly, the Lovestoneites saw the industrialization of the South and the subsequent proletarianization of the Black masses as putting an end to the national question. Clearly this has not been the case. Rather, the character of the national question has changed with the transformation of the dominant form of national oppression from the oppression of the cropper to the super-exploitation of the Black worker. The special exploiting rights of the slaveocracy have not been eliminated, but simply transferred to the monopolists to exercise directly.

While there is a unity between the position of the Lovestone opportunists and the modern CPUSA—in a faith in peaceful development and capitalist reform as the salvation of oppressed peoples—the OL, by equating the two positions on the basis of their "theory of productive forces," neatly sidesteps the whole question of the impact of industrialization of the Black Belt on the national question. In order to buttress their own dogmatist line, they jump together the RU, certain Trotskyites, the modern CP and the Lovestoneites together under the "theory of productive forces." This is absurd, as even a cursory reading of the actual positions of these groups will reveal. The OL equates *any* degree of recognition of the profound impact of industrialization of the national question with the line of liquidation of the national question through the peaceful development of capitalism."

In fact, it is quite possible to recognize the changes wrought by industrialization without tripping into the swamp of opportunism. But the failure to recognize the implications of these changes, a failure OL is guilty of, can lead nowhere else.

OL must develop its "theory of productive forces" in order to provide cover for their own dogmatic reading of the national question and to gloss over half a century of change. They are forced to distort the essence of revisionism on the national question so they can tar RU and others who reject the Black Belt nation line with the revisionist brush. In so doing they make their own contribution to undermining the struggle against revisionism.

#### THE TAMING OF THE BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLE

What, then, does constitute revisionism on the national question? At the heart of revisionist ideology is the idea of the peaceful, parliamentary transition to socialism—expressed by the CPUSA in its strategy of the anti-monopoly coalition with its two-stage, constitutional path to socialism. This strategy aims at making "Marxism-Leninism" as inoffensive as possible to the bourgeoisie. Its reformist coloration serves to paint the CPUSA in attractive hues for the petty bourgeoisie. While superficially the anti-monopoly coalition seems similar to the United Front Against Imperialism, in that they both aim at mobilizing similar social force, in fact they are quite distinct.

First of all, the anti-monopoly coalition is almost purely a united front "from above." The CPUSA aims at building its grand coalition through drawing in the more progressive sections of the trade union bureaucracy, the leadership of the various reformist mass-organizations and the politicians representing the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. The program of this united front is shaped to make it acceptable to these forces. The united front "from below," the appeal over the heads of these leaders directly to the rank and file, is firmly subordinated to the task of accommodating the leadership, which is exactly the reverse of a Leninist policy on the united front. The independent vanguard role of the communist party is lost in the shuffle.

Secondly, the CPUSA distorts the character of the forces in the United Front. They subscribe to a "broad view" of the working class that includes professionals and other petty-bourgeois elements. They gloss over the contradictory aspects of the petty bourgeoisie's interests and tend to exaggerate their potential as allies of the proletariat. They further exaggerate the importance of the split in the bourgeoisie between the monopolists and the non-finance sections of the bourgeoisie, constantly urging the working class to unite with the "progressive" wing of Capital against monopolist "reaction."

Finally, they do not carry out any resolute struggle for working-class leadership of the United Front, thus effectively reinforcing the political and organizational hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the mass movements. This amounts to a policy of tailing the bourgeoisie and liquidating the vanguard role of the proletariat.

Thirdly, and most decisively, *the anti-monopoly coalition does not aim at the overthrow of the bourgeois state and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.* Instead, the revisionists conceive of a period of anti-monopoly rule, a separate stage, standing between the rule of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat. During this period, the anti-monopoly forces "renovate" and "overhaul" the state apparatus in order to make it a fitting instrument for anti-monopoly reforms. This process, all within the framework of bourgeois legality, will lead to the eventual expropriation of the monopolies and the rule of the working class. This conception violates every elementary Leninist principle regarding the state and stands in gross contradiction to the revolutionary experience of the working class from the Paris Commune to the recent coup of the Chilean fascists.

All three of these elements of the anti-monopoly strategy stand as monuments to the CPUSA's attempt to tame the revolution in order to render it respectable to the petty bourgeoisie and to convince the monopolists that they have little to fear in allowing political legitimacy to the CPUSA. We might say with Lenin:

**Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon—**

The CPUSA's approach to the national question is colored, indeed permeated, with the fear of revolution and the servile courting of the petty bourgeoisie. The essential features of revisionism outlined in relation to the building of the anti-monopoly coalition are present in their approach to Black Liberation.

The CPUSA places winning the leadership of the reformist civil rights organizations, Black politicians, and Black trade-union officials to the anti-monopoly coalition as the primary task, subordinating independent activity among the rank and file of those organizations to that aim. They virtually eliminate the existence of a Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, reducing these classes to 3.2% of the Black people. Ministers, according to CP theoretician Victor Perlo, are part of the upper strata of the working class (Joe Hill to the contrary).

The CPUSA aims at bringing the forces of Black Liberation into its anti-monopoly coalition and sees the achievement of Black freedom in the framework of the peaceful, parliamentary strategy. The main form of the anti-monopoly coalition projected is a mass electoral party in which the leadership of civil rights organizations will take their place with the heads of the trade unions. To realize this aim the CPUSA must take the rough, revolutionary edges off the Black Liberation movement. They must tame it and constrict its development. The anti-monopoly strategy restricts the political development of all popular forces by seeking to limit the terrain of struggle to the boundaries dictated by bourgeois legality. While there are definitely ultra-leftist and adventurist currents within the Black Liberation movement that Marxist-Leninists must combat, the CPUSA counterposes to these trends not a path of revolutionary struggle but its own pathetic reformism.

Finally, the CPUSA liquidates the national question as a revolutionary question. It puts forward the line that super-exploitation can be eliminated under capitalism—that monopoly can survive without the super-profits it reaps from national oppression and the divisions it is able to spawn on that basis. This proposition must stand with the revision of Marxist-Leninist teaching on the inevitability of war under imperialism and the necessity for the overthrow of the bourgeois state as a prime example of revisionist "creativity." This perspective coincides with the conception of an anti-monopoly government reforming the evils out of capitalism in a piecemeal fashion. The notion that super-exploitation and thus racism can be eliminated under capitalism robs the Black Liberation struggle of its revolutionary content and reduces it to a struggle for capitalist reform.

This is the essence of revisionism on the national question and it is here we must draw the line and make our fight—a fight to draw out and defend the revolutionary character of Black Liberation.

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