

THE 1928 COMINTERN RESOLUTION AND THE BLACK NATIONAL QUESTION

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I. Introduction

For the U.S. Communist movement then and now, one of the most significant resolutions to come out of the VI Congress of the Comintern was the resolution concerning Blacks in the United States. This report summarizes briefly how this resolution was developed and how it differed from previous policies. It then evaluates the arguments for and against which were put forward at that time with a view toward determining the validity of the new Comintern line. My own conclusions about these arguments are summarized at the end of the paper.

A. The 1928 Resolution

The 1928 and 1930¹ Comintern Resolutions on the "Negro Question" in the United States presented the first developed analysis which said that Blacks in the Black Belt of the United States constituted a nation and thus that the Black struggle was a national liberation struggle. The new analysis was expressed in points 3, 4, and 5 of the 1928 resolution. The key line is:

While continuing and intensifying the struggle under the slogan of full social and political equality for the Negroes, which must remain the central slogan of our Party for work among the masses, the Party must come out openly and unreservedly for the right of Negroes to national self-determination in the southern states, where the Negroes form the majority of the population. (The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolution on the Black National Question in the United States, p. 14)

Most of the 1928 Resolution deals with other aspects of party work with Blacks: union work, the fight for equality, etc., all of which also needs evaluation. But its introduction of the national question in relation to Blacks in the United States is what separated it from all previous analyses and policies put forward by either the Comintern or the CPUSA.

B. Analyses of the Black Question Prior to 1928

In 1921, when the Workers Party² was formed, it took a small step forward from the positions of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party, which in no way recognized the special oppression of Blacks³, by adopting the following statement:

The Workers Party will support the Negroes in their struggle for liberation, and will help them in their fight for economic, political, and social equality. It will point out to them that the interests of the Negro workers are identical with those of the whites. It will seek to end the policy of discrimination followed by organized labor. Its task will be to destroy altogether the barrier of race discrimination that has been used to keep apart the black and white workers, and weld them into a solid union of revolutionary forces for the overthrow of the common enemy. (William Z. Foster, The Negro People in American History, p. 455)

This statement did not acknowledge any fundamental differences between the Black struggle and the general working class struggle, but at least acknowledged Black people's lack of democratic rights, widespread discrimination including in organized labor, and so on. The Party's activities and programs in the 1920's have already been reported on in "Summary 1922-1928".

Under pressure from the Comintern and some elements of the Workers Party (Foster for one), the party recognized during the 1920's the need to step up its work with Blacks. It realized that besides the "traditional" exploitation of Blacks as workers, there were a few matters like lynching, Jim Crow, etc. which made the situation of Blacks different. Thus the emphasis on full social, political, and economic equality. Another factor which undoubtedly influenced the Workers Party to take a second look was that Garvey was attracting tens of thousands of followers among the Black masses during the early 1920's. The Party was weak among the masses of Blacks, with only about fifty Black members in 1928.

The Socialist (and early Communist) position had been clearly shown incorrect. Most Blacks could not be considered just another part of the working class. Not only because their situation was quantitatively worse (the worst jobs, the lowest pay), but qualitatively they lacked even elementary democratic rights and were subject to murder and other violence, destruction of their property, were denied even nominal participation in the political process, and so on. A majority lived rurally eking out a living in various types of sharecropping. Blacks had no escape from all these kinds of repression, being part of an always identifiable group, a factor which also distinguished them from white workers and farmers. Failing to recognize the special oppression of Blacks merely reflected the white chauvinism in the Party and their isolation from the masses of Black people. Although putting somewhat more emphasis on work with Blacks in the 1920's, the Workers Party still did not address the fact that white chauvinism was pervasive not only in the United States as a whole, but in the Party as well.

By 1928, the year of the Comintern resolutions, there was still not a suggestion of the Black question as a national question in the Party's line. In May of that year the Plenum of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the Workers Party adopted a resolution which included in Section 4, "Our Negro Work", a stress on the importance of the Party's work among Negroes and the need to organize the unorganized. It also said:

- a. The Negro question is a race question and the Communist Party must be the champion of the oppressed Negro race.
- b. The Communist Party must especially be the organizer of the working class elements of the Negro race.
- c. The Communist Party must fight for the leadership of the working class in all Negro race movements.
- d. The work among the Negroes is not only a special task of the Negro comrades, but it is the task of the entire party. (The Communist, July 1928, p. 418)

C. The Development and Implementation of the 1928 Resolution

The view that Blacks in the Black Belt South constituted a nation did not arise from the Workers Party, nor did it arise, as such, from the Black movement in the United States. Draper writes, approvingly, that nationalism was the "rejected strain" in American Black history, that in the United States the struggle of the Black has always been for equality. (Theodore Draper, American Communism and Soviet Russia, p. 317) The instances where nationhood was referred to, as such anyway, had been sporadic: Martin R. Delaney in 1852; the "Negro Exodus" to Kansas in 1879-81; the African Emigration Association

formed in 1881; "Back to Africa" leader Bishop Henry M. Turner in the 1890's, and other pressures for an independent Negro republic or predominantly Negro state in Oklahoma or Texas; and of course Garveyism in the 1910's and 1920's. The closest view to the Comintern's was put forward by Cyril Briggs in the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) who called for a Negro self-governed state, either in Africa or in the United States, preferably in the Western part. (Much of the ABB leadership, including Cyril Briggs, was eventually recruited into the Workers Party.) In any case, the Comintern did not use any of these examples to justify its position. They were generally researched and pointed to as examples of indigenous national feeling much later (by Aptheker in 1949 and Foster in 1954). (Draper, p. 315)

The new line developed in Moscow in the Comintern with the backing of Stalin. In 1920, at the II Congress of the Comintern, occurred the first recorded discussion of the question at the Commission of the National and Colonial Question headed by Lenin. The II Congress has been covered in other reports, but it should be noted that John Reed from the United States categorically denied all national aspirations on the part of Blacks in the United States.

A letter from Lenin to the Workers Party in 1921 stressing the importance of Party work among Negroes made no mention of self-determination.

At the IV Congress (Nov.-Dec. 1922), the leading role of U.S. Blacks in Africa's liberation was emphasized. The Negro Commission appointed at this Congress wrote a "Thesis on the Negro Question" which said "The history of the Negro in America fits him for an important role in the liberation struggle of the entire African race." The IV Congress stressed the concept of a world Negro movement with the United States Blacks playing a leading role because of their location in an industrially developed country. (Draper, p. 327) This line of reasoning led to statements like "Africa, the home of the most exploited people, must be added to the battle line. The American Negro, by reason of his higher education and culture and his greater aptitude for leadership, and because of the urgency of the issues in America, will furnish the leadership for the Negro race." This was written by Israel Amter, a U.S. Comintern representative, in an article in the Communist International. (Draper, p. 328)

At the V Congress in 1924, the applicability of self-determination to American Blacks was discussed in connection with the Draft Program of the International, and rejected. Pepper, a white delegate from the United States, claimed U.S. Blacks had no interest in self-determination. Thalheimer, of the Program Commission, said that in the United States, "the slogan of the right to self-determination cannot solve all national questions." Fort-Whiteman, a Black delegate from the United States, agreed but stressed the special "racial aspects" of the problem.

In 1925, the Comintern asked the Workers Party to send a Negro delegation to Moscow's University of the Toilers of the East (KUTVA). Towards the end of 1925 Otto Hall and four others came to Moscow for that purpose. Shortly after arriving, they met with Stalin with Radek to interpret. Apparently Stalin wanted to know why there were not more Blacks in the Party as they were the most oppressed section of the working class. Hall attributed it to prejudice and discrimination within the Party and gave examples. At this point Stalin questioned their whole approach and characterized Blacks as a national minor-

ity with some characteristics of a nation. The initial reaction was unfavorable as it was perceived as another form of Jim Crow. (Draper, p. 334)

A year later another U.S. Black from the Workers Party, Harry Haywood, brother of Otto Hall, arrived in Moscow to attend KUTVA. Later he transferred to the Lenin School where he renewed his friendship with N. Nasanov, a Russian Communist youth leader he had previously known in the United States. Nasanov discussed the question often with Haywood, advocating self-determination strongly and with the obvious approval of his Party. Haywood, in turn, became the foremost American advocate of the national position. Otto Hall, on the other hand, was consolidating his views that the Black question was a racial one. He and James Ford were heavily influenced by Endre Sik, a Hungarian exile in Moscow who taught at KUTVA. Sik became interested in the question, studied it extensively, and became the leading theorist for the anti-self-determination position. (Haywood, Black Bolshevik, p. 162)

In 1926 and 1927 Stalin developed further his view that American Blacks are a nation. Draper says that a thesis read at the Institute of Red Professors in support of self-determination had the approval of Stalin. And Joseph Zack, another American at the Lenin School, was confronted with the new line by Lozovsky, head of the Profintern, who said he was speaking for Stalin.

Preparations were made for the VI Congress to be held in July and August of 1928. In early 1928 the Comintern's Anglo-American Secretariat appointed a sub-committee to draft a resolution for the Negro Commission of the Congress. Nasanov, four Black students (including Haywood and Hall), one white student (Clarence Hathaway), plus some unofficial members composed the committee. In a report for the committee on Garveyism, Hall concluded that there was no objective basis for Garvey's nationalism, that it was a foreign notion brought in from the West Indies by Garvey. In the discussion which followed, Haywood consolidated his own view that nationalism was an indigenous trend in the United States. In his own words,

In the discussion I pointed out that Otto's position was not merely a rejection of Garveyism but also a denial of nationalism as a legitimate trend in the Black freedom movement. I felt that it amounted to throwing out the baby with the bathwater. With my insight sharpened by previous discussions, I argued further that the nationalism reflected in the Garvey movement was not a foreign transplant, nor did it spring full-blown from the brow of Jove. On the contrary, it was an indigenous product, arising from the soil of Black super-exploitation and oppression in the United States. It expressed the yearnings of millions of Blacks for a nation of their own.

As I pursued this logic, a totally new thought occurred to me, and for me it was the clincher. The Garvey movement is dead, I reasoned, but not Black nationalism. Nationalism, which Garvey diverted under the slogan of Back to Africa, was an authentic trend, likely to flare up again in periods of crisis and stress. Such a movement might again fall under the leadership of utopian visionaries who would seek to divert it from the struggle against the main enemy, U.S. imperialism, and on to a reactionary separatist path. The only way such a diversion of the struggle could be forestalled was by presenting a revolutionary alternative to Blacks. (Haywood, Black Bolshevik, pp. 229-230)

Nasanov and Haywood wrote up their conclusions and submitted them to the Anglo-American Secretariat as a minority report from the committee. (Though Haywood says Hall was the only committee member who firmly opposed them.) In early July when the U.S. delegates to the VI Congress arrived in Moscow, Haywood outlined the position to the Foster faction of the Workers Party. Bittelman and Foster supported the new line immediately, but Haywood remained the only Black U.S. Communist to support it. (Haywood, Black Bolshevik, p. 261)

The Congress opened on July 17; at the 23rd session on August 6 a Negro Commission was appointed to report on the question of U.S. Blacks and the South African question. The Commission had twenty-two members from eighteen different countries. The U.S. delegation was made up of five Blacks: Hall, Haywood, Mahoney, Ford, Williams; and two whites: Bittelman and Lovestone. The Commission was chaired by Kuusinen of Finland. There was general agreement in the Commission that the Workers Party's work with Blacks had been weak, but one position attributed the problem to an incorrect line (that is the failure to call for self-determination), and the other attributed it to failure to energetically apply the current line. The latter position was most sharply put forward by Otto Hall, the former by Nasanov and Haywood.

Four articles for discussion were published in the Communist International while the Commission met. Two of them opposed self-determination, one written by A. Sheik (Endre Sik, the Hungarian teacher in Moscow previously mentioned) called the "The Comintern Programme and the Racial Problem" published in the August 15, 1928 issue.⁴ Haywood called Sik the chief theoretician of this position. The other article was written by James Ford and William Wilson, Black U.S. Communists, and called for a "revolutionary racial movement" with a sort of united front of working class and lower middle class Negroes fighting for equality. (Draper, p. 346) Ford also spoke against the line at the Congress with the support of Fort-Whiteman and Huiswood, two other Black U.S. Communists. A third article by John Pepper put forward the thesis that the Black Belt was a colony and called for a Negro Soviet Republic. (Pepper had once rejected all nationalism on the part of U.S. Blacks, but was quick to change his position when he saw which line would prevail.) Pepper received little support and the call for a Negro Soviet Republic was rejected by the Comintern. Haywood pointed out that it was actually a negation of self-determination for Blacks "by making the Party's support of it contingent upon the acceptance by Blacks of the Soviet governmental form. Secondly, it was an opportunist attempt to skip over the intermediate state of preparation and mobilization of the Black masses around their immediate demands." (Haywood, Black Bolshevik, pp. 266-267) The fourth article was written by Haywood and was the closest to the final Comintern position. It was not printed in English, but Haywood has elaborated his views fully in articles and books since then. The two main positions (excluding Pepper's) will be discussed in more depth later in the report.

In addition to these articles the Commission studied the documents prepared by Haywood and Nasanov and also a paper prepared by Endre Sik.

The end result of these discussions was a resolution from the Congress defining the Black movement in the United States as national revolutionary, and calling on the U.S. Party to put forward the slogan of right to self-determination.

A full discussion of the implementation of this resolution by the Workers Party is outside the scope of this report, but it should be noted that at best the implementation was uneven. One has only to read the 1930 resolution, which expanded and clarified the 1928 one, to see the confusion, resistance, and "lack of clarity" on the line which must have existed in the first two years. Apparently the slogan of the right to self-determination was counterposed to the slogan for equal rights, rather than pointed to as the basis for true equality in the North and South, which is what the Comintern had intended. The 1930 resolution also said:

Furthermore, the Communist Party must resist all tendencies within its own ranks to ignore the Negro question as a national question in the United States, not only in the South, but also in the North. (The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Black National Question in the United States, p. 27)

Yet articles from The Communist (official organ of the Workers Party) in 1930 pay only the briefest lip service to the new policy; some comrades were obviously not won over to it, some distorted it or confused its meaning. Because of its incomplete and confused implementation, it is difficult to evaluate the correctness of the 1928 Comintern resolution by evaluating the practice in the Workers Party it gave rise to.

What an evaluation of the conclusions reached by the Negro Commission does require is an understanding of how Stalin defined a nation.

II. The Stalinist View of Nations

Stalin wrote "Marxism and the National Question" in 1912-13. With the defeat of 1905 in Russia there was a resurgence of nationalism among the various peoples of Russia. Stalin here attempts to confront this trend with a sober, scientific definition of a nation which ties it to economic and historical reality, rather than the subjective feelings of representatives from groups which had been much oppressed, for instance the Jews.

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. (Selections from V. I. Lenin and J. V. Stalin on National Colonial Question, p. 68)

And, "It is only when all these characteristics are present together that we have a nation." (Selections, p. 68) Stalin distinguished a nation from a race, a tribe, an empire, and a state. He refuted Otto Bauer's⁵ definition, "A nation is an aggregate of people bound into a community of character by a common destiny" as something "mystical, intangible, and supernatural." (Selections, p. 71)

Stalin described nations as historical entities that develop with rising capitalism. In western Europe nations formed as feudalism disintegrated and formed nation-states (France, Britain, etc.). In eastern Europe, where the demise of feudalism was delayed and uneven, the more developed nations (Germany, Russia, Magyar) formed multi-national states into which they organized less developed nations. As capitalism developed in these nations, so did

national movements for independence. But in many cases they were too late. The dominant nations had consolidated their control of the state.

What classes were active in these struggles? The bourgeoisie always had the leading role. The bourgeoisie wanted its home markets and thus became nationalists against the bourgeoisie or semi-feudal ruling classes of the dominant nation. The struggle also involved the urban petty-bourgeoisie and the rural bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations in some cases. And of course the oppressor nation usually moved to restrict and arrest the activities of the potential competitors. But if the national bourgeoisie had the leading role, the strength of the movement (as always) depended on the participation of workers and peasants. And,

Whether the proletariat rallies to the banner of bourgeois nationalism depends on the degree of development of class antagonisms, on the class consciousness and degree of organization of the proletariat. The class-conscious proletariat has its own tried banner, and had no need to rally to the banner of the bourgeoisie.

As far as the peasants are concerned, their participation in the national movement depends principally on the character of the repressions. If the repressions affect the 'land', as in the case of Ireland, then the mass of peasants immediately rally to the banner of the national movement. (Selections, p. 73)

Except for Ireland, Stalin does not discuss colonies here. He does say in regard to all these national struggles in Europe that the political content differs from one place to another. The question of language predominates in one place, land in another, religion in another. But never the question of "national character" (in reference to Bauer again) because it is intangible and (he quotes J. Strasser here) "a politician can't do anything with it." (Selections, p. 74)

But even if the proletariat supports the struggle, thus involving the whole nation, it is national only superficially. "In essence it is always a bourgeois struggle, one that is to the advantage and profit mainly of the bourgeoisie." (Selections, p. 74)

The first question is, was Stalin's definition correct? The second question is, if the criteria are correct, did the Black people in the South meet the criteria?

To begin with Stalin's formulation. Although the relationship of Communists to national movements has developed and changed since the October Revolution, Stalin's definition of what constitutes a nation has never been modified by Marxist-Leninists. Certainly the Marxist-Leninists in the Comintern and the CPUSA of that period accepted his criteria. Stalin was considered the "greatest living expert" on the national question. (Foster, History of the Communist Party of the United States, p. 267) His greatest opposition (when he wrote the article "Marxism and the National Question") was from cultural nationalists who tried to make the criteria something less and at the same time failed to uphold the right to self-determination. Stalin, in arguing for the right to self-determination, defended his concept of nationality in the article cited and other writings. He addressed the Bund, who viewed Jews as a nation, and, in my opinion, gives a good example of

how concrete such an analysis must be.

Bauer held that Jews were currently a nation, though without a future as one. Stalin pointed out that there was not a stable Jewish class connected to the land (only three to four percent of the population) which would bind the nation and provide a market. Ninety-six percent of the Jews were urban, active in trade and industry, and spread throughout Russia. Objectively they were assimilating; subjectively they were reacting to being Jewish minorities in various regions, leading to a demand for national autonomy. However, the Bund could only press for cultural autonomy, territorial and political autonomy being impossible. This cultural autonomy was to guarantee Jewish rights as a national minority. But the establishment of democracy is the best protection in guaranteeing rights, said Stalin, national institutions under the oppressive regimes being meaningless (as the Polish Diet under Russian Czarism showed). What happens is that without territorial, etc. conditions for nationhood, groups (the Bund in this case) end up pressing for backward features, customs, etc. to preserve "the nation" from assimilation. For example, the Bund supported the maintenance of the Sabbath. Such a policy also ends up in nationalistic support for one's own language, democratic rights, etc. and neglect of or antagonism towards the language, democratic rights, etc. of other nationalities. Again as an example, the Bund pushed for Jewish hospitals, observance of religious holidays, and so on. This leads to the splitting of the working class along national lines at a time when increasing proletarianization under the development of capitalism should be unifying the working class more than ever. Almost all of Stalin's article is devoted to the concrete ways national autonomy or cultural autonomy (as opposed to the right to self-determination for nations) has concretely divided the working class and vainly attempted to go back in history.

Stalin's theory is clearly more scientific and makes an important contribution by tying nationhood to territory, economic life, language, and psychological make-up. These characteristics give a concrete basis for a people to develop together, as well as a concrete basis for the peasantry and working class in a nation to struggle in unity.

The importance of Stalin's view for later Marxist-Leninists in the United States was that it did require a scientific approach to the national question. It forced them to look closely at the South and the Black people in it, and to begin a concrete analysis of the conditions there.

III. The View of Blacks as an Oppressed Racial Minority to be Mobilized Under the Slogan of Full Economic, Political, and Social Equality.

Most of the arguments against the national formulation of the Black question said essentially that: 1) it divides the working-class, 2) Blacks do not want self-determination, but rather full equality, 3) it is another excuse for segregation, 4) the root of the problem is racial, and 5) the Black Belt does not meet Stalin's definition of a nation or Lenin's views on the development of nations for that matter. Oddly enough, this last point gets the least attention, at least in this period.

A. The National Position Would Divide the Working Class

With respect to the first argument, James Ford stated at the VI Congress that, "It seems that any nationalist movement on the part of the Negroes does nothing but play into the hands of the bourgeoisie by arresting the revolutionary class movement of the Negro masses and further widening the gulf between the white and similar oppressed groups." (Draper, p. 348)

And Endre Sik wrote:

But this does not alter the fact that all such movements (separatist, which is how he characterized a movement calling for self-determination--ed.) objectively play into the hands of the American bourgeoisie inasmuch as they separate the masses of the colored petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat from the class struggle and from the real struggle for their emancipation as an oppressed race, the struggle for social equality. Instead of tearing down the Chinese Wall existing between the races, especially between the Black and white workers, Black and white farmers, each separatist movement consolidates this wall and deepens the chasm, sows the seed of race hatred and animosity. (Quoted in The Communist, April 1930, pp. 303-304)

In other words, nationalism leads to separatism, even "race hatred". It actually holds back the class struggle because national consciousness and class consciousness are mutually exclusive; revolutionary movements cannot be based on both. Further, this position did not distinguish between national movements led by the bourgeoisie and those led by the proletariat with the support of the peasantry, nor did it acknowledge the possibility of an alliance between the U.S. working class and revolutionary Black movement.

B. Blacks Did Not Want Self-Determination, but Rather Full Equality

The second argument was the most commonly employed: Blacks did not want self-determination, their aspirations were for full equality. Said Otto Hall at the Sixth Congress:

The historical development of the American Negro has tended to create in him the desire to be considered a part of the American nation. There are no tendencies to become a separate national minority within the American nation. (Draper, p. 348)

This was certainly the view of bourgeois historians and liberal activists. But it was also the first reaction of many Communists. In 1920 John Reed, a white U.S. Communist, told the II Congress of the Comintern that:

The Negroes have no demands for national independence. All movements aiming at a separate national existence for Negroes fail, as did the "Back to Africa Movement" of a few years ago. They consider themselves first of all Americans at home in the United States. This makes it very much simpler for the Communists. (Draper, pp. 320-321)

And Sik belittles the struggle for self-determination in the Black Belt with the statement:

The struggle of the Negroes of the Black Belt for self-determination is nothing but a struggle against political and social inequality of the Negroes which interferes with the toiling Negro population, the farmers who constitute the majority, in abolishing the relics of semi-slavery which still press upon them. The self-determination slogan for the Black Belt is a slogan of the Agrarian revolution. (Quoted in The Communist, April 1930, p. 302)

This position agreed with Draper that "national" feeling in the history of Black struggle has been slight. Aside from the previously mentioned instances (Turner, Garvey, etc.), most mass Black struggles have taken place around issues of equality. Some of the Communist Party's most effective work, for instance, was around the railroading of the Scottsboro boys. Black art and literature and also Black political struggle do indicate a strong sense of "peoplehood". But the "equal rights" position declines to interpret this as "national" feeling, seeing it rather as a reaction to racism.

C. Self-Determination is Another Excuse for Segregation.

That self-determination was another excuse for segregation, according to Draper, was the first reaction of Otto Hall and others when Stalin broached the subject with them. (Draper, p. 334) Sik also referred to this when he said: "At the same time the struggle for self-determination in the ordinary sense of this term is nothing but a struggle for the right to voluntary segregation." Sik and others interpreted the call for self-determination as a "cop-out" in the struggle for equality and integration in the rigid caste system of the South, where demands for equality were ferociously opposed by whites, including workers.

D. The Root of the Black Question is Racial.

To sum up their position, the bourgeoisie used race to keep farmers and workers divided and out of that had developed tremendous racial oppression. But the solution was to combat that oppression and build unity as one class of workers and one class of small farmers or peasants. Sik refers to their "real struggle for their emancipation as an oppressed race, the struggle for social equality." Sik does recognize the development of a Negro nationalism and attributes its existence to the petty-bourgeoisie. He saw them furthering their own class interests by promoting nationalism to ensure loyalty to Negro capitalists, etc. It was an effort to appropriate the Negro market for themselves, and also to provide a base of support for Negro politicians, church leaders, etc. The implication was that there was no benefit in any of this for the Black working class or small farmers.

The race question exists as a social question thanks to the physical differences between peoples and to the fact that racial prejudices arising on this basis are often utilized by the exploiting class for guaranteeing and strengthening their privileged position. (Quoted in The Communist, August 1930, p. 707)

From the beginning, some of the Black party members did seem to have a slightly different perspective in their opposition than did Sik. That is, their opposition was not merely negative. Huiswood, Ford, Hall, etc., all wanted to see the Party take up an active struggle against racial oppression; they em-

phasized the special oppression of Blacks in many ways. They wanted to see high priority given to the struggle and saw that unless it was tackled, unity between Black and white workers would be impossible. Even before Ford was won over to the national position, he wrote:

The Negro proletarians as a rule understand their racial oppression, but they do not realize their class solidarity with the white workers. With very few exceptions, the most progressive Negro proletarians, those who are to a certain extent already class-conscious, still regard themselves as Negroes first and workers second. . . . If Negro workers have no faith in the white man, no matter what his programme this is the more so true of the Negro farmer who suffers from the survivals of a system of the worst form of exploitation, based on racial grounds, the system of slavery. (Quoted in The Communist, April 1930, p. 305)

But all agreed with Sik that the oppression was racial, that the driving force behind this racial oppression was the desire of the bourgeoisie to keep the working class and "toiling masses" divided, with a section which could be more exploited, more impoverished because of this division. And the class interests of both Black and white lay in unity based on full equality.

E. The Black Belt Does Not Meet Stalin's Definition of a Nation or Lenin's Views on the Development of a Nation

The fourth argument asserted that Blacks in the Black Belt did not meet Stalin's criteria for nationhood or Lenin's writings on how nations develop. But there were few attempts to take up Stalin's definition and scientifically refute its applicability to the Black Belt. The only contemporary discussions of it I found were by Sik and Huiswood.

In the matter of language and culture Huiswood contrasted the Blacks in the United States to the Africans. In contrast to the Africans:

. . . the Negro in America has a) no distinct language and culture from the dominant racial group; b) it is a minority of the population; c) its only distinguishing feature is its racial origin. (The Communist, February 1930, p. 133)

There is no attempt to compare this with Stalin's definition and it seemed to represent more of a general feeling among Communists that Blacks ought to have had a more distinct language and culture in order to be considered a distinct nationality.

With regard to territory and economics, those who opposed the Comintern resolution generally emphasized the tremendous migration of Blacks from the farm to the cities, including the cities in the South. Also emphasized was the growing industrialization of the South, which was proletarianizing the Black population and thus making them part of a multi-racial working class. There was agreement though that about three-fourths of the Black population in the South did live on the land, farming or share-cropping. In the view of Huiswood, etc. there was no essential difference between poor white share-croppers and Black ones, or between white workers and Black workers.

The crux of the difference between Sik and Haywood was around the de-

velopment of nations. Sik said that according to Lenin nations were formed during the period of the development of capitalism. These national movements were led by the industrial bourgeoisie in order to establish markets for themselves. Obstacles to communication and transportation had to be removed, etc. This was the proper economic foundation for the development of a nation, and an industrial bourgeoisie clearly did not exist in the Black Belt. (Of Blacks anyway.) The proper foundation

. . . is not a movement of petty-bourgeois producers who are themselves a market for themselves. . .

We cannot speak about national antagonisms between whites and Negroes in the U.S. in the ordinary sense of that term, because the American Negroes are not a nation. Apart from the complete absence among them of a national language, a national culture; in their racial conflicts with the white Americans, the fundamental economic content and sense of national antagonisms is absent; the presence of two economic systems standing at different stages in social economic development. (Quoted in The Communist, August 1930, p. 705)

Sik seems again to be referring to the theory that nations form in the struggle to throw off feudalism and become capitalist. National movements in Europe developed in nations which were becoming capitalist but found themselves incorporated into multi-national states which were dominated by other nations. Again not the situation of Blacks in the Black Belt. In the same article Sik says,

Among American Negroes there is no developing industrial bourgeoisie, hindered in its economic development the struggle of which (for its free economic development) for the winning of internal markets and for the removal of obstacles standing in the path of economic progress, could give these national movements a progressive character. . .

Where then is the need for markets, about which Lenin spoke? Where then is the necessity for the removal of all obstacles? (Quoted in The Communist, August 1930, p. 708)

Sik rests his whole argument on this conception of how nations develop. Whether other Communists who shared his opposition shared this argument is impossible to tell. Huiswood does not tackle the question in those terms. The opposition to the Comintern resolution was not necessarily unified or even openly expressed. There was considerable passive resistance, but the resolution was at least nominally supported by the leadership of the Party after a couple of years.

IV. The View of Blacks as an Oppressed Nation to be Organized Under the Slogan of Full Social, Economic, and Political Equality and the Right to Self-Determination in the Black Belt.

There is much more extensive explanation of the "oppressed nation" thesis. It was new in 1928 and many comrades had to be won over. The burden of proof lay with the supporters of the Comintern resolution and Haywood wrote then and since many articles and a book, Negro Liberation, which is probably the most thorough discussion. Unlike the opposition, the supporters referred to Stalin's definition often and made attempts to apply it to the Southern Black Belt con-

cretely. Their main arguments were: A) Lenin characterized Blacks in the United States as a nation, B) Blacks in the Black Belt had a common territory, C) Blacks in the Black Belt had a common economic system, D) Blacks in the Black Belt had a common language and culture, E) the history of the Black Belt was consistent with Lenin's views on the development of nation, and F) a racial analysis of the Black question is incorrect.

A. Lenin Characterized Blacks in the United States as a Nation.

There are two passages in Lenin which refer to Blacks as a nation. A third passage compares Blacks with Russian serfs in their economic position, but does not specifically call them a nation. The first passage is in a study called "Statistics and Sociology" which was never actually finished. (It was begun in 1917.) He seems to be explicit on the subject.

In the United States, only 11.1 per cent of the population consists of Negroes (and also mulattoes and Indians) who must be considered an oppressed nation, insofar as the equality, won in the Civil War of 1861-65 and guaranteed by the constitution of the Republic, has in reality been more and more restricted in many respects in the main centers of the Negro population (in the South) with the transition from the progressive, premonopolistic capitalism of 1860-70 to the reactionary monopolistic capitalism (imperialism) of the latest epoch. . . (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 23, pp. 275-276)

Draper thinks this is invalidated by a further paragraph which refers to the "smoothing out" of national differences in America. Haywood assumes this second paragraph refers to immigrant workers only, which seems to be a more correct interpretation. In any case this was published long after the 1928 Comintern resolution and had no bearing on the policy.

The other reference is in the "Thesis on the National and Colonial Question" prepared for the Second Congress.

. . .and, second, that all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies. (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 31, p. 148)

Draper questions the translation of the phrase "dependent and underprivileged nation" and goes into the history of its inaccurate (to his mind) translation. The difference he found does not seem to be significant. Certainly Lenin did not spell out his view and at the Second Congress, as has been mentioned, Reed rejected a national perspective unequivocally without contradiction from Lenin. On the other hand, Lenin did not remove the allusion to Blacks as a nation from his thesis. Katayama, a member of the 1920 National and Colonial Commission, in 1928 said that in Commission discussions Lenin definitely considered Blacks a subject nation in the same category as Ireland. (Draper thinks Katayama is lying about this because he did not mention it for eight years until it was needed to bolster the Comintern 1928 resolution.) It seems likely, but not proved, that Lenin did consider Blacks in the South an oppressed nation.

B. Blacks in the Black Belt Had a Common Territory.

A nation is formed only as a result of lengthy and systematic intercourse, as a result of people living together generation after generation. But people cannot live together for lengthy periods unless they have a common territory. (Stalin, Selections, p.67)

Although the 1928 resolution called for self-determination, it was not until the 1930 resolution that a specific area was referred to, an area which could be said to meet Stalin's 1913 definition. Haywood wrote a book called Negro Liberation in 1948 which puts together much of the information about the Black Belt which supports the Comintern position.

The Black Belt derived its name from its fertile black soil which grew cotton, tobacco, peanuts, sugar, etc. Not surprisingly, there had developed a heavy concentration of Black agricultural laborers to grow the crops and in many places they were the majority of the population.

The Black Belt shapes a crescent through twelve southern states. Heading down from its eastern point in Virginia's tidewater section, it cuts a strip through North Carolina, embraces nearly all of South Carolina, cuts into Florida, passes through lower and central Georgia and Alabama, engulfs Mississippi and the Louisiana Delta, wedges into East Texas and Southwest Tennessee, and has its western anchor in Southern Arkansas. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 13)

It is 1600 miles long and 300 miles deep. Because it cuts into several states, one must get at its population statistics by counties.

The Black Belt is arbitrarily broken up by a mass of state or county boundaries and administrative, judicial, and electoral subdivisions. These divisions in no way correspond with the economic and political needs of the oppressed majority population and are artificially maintained and gerrymandered by the real rulers of the South. Their avowed purpose is to perpetuate the political impotence of the region's predominant Negro population. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 13)

A point about the statistics in this paper. They almost all come from the United States Bureau of Census (compiled and extracted by other writers), which has its shortcomings. It is almost certain that Blacks were undercounted, especially in rural areas. Census-takers are often local people hired by the government, in this case they were undoubtedly white. Inaccessibility of some Black homes, reluctance to go into Black areas, incomplete registration of births and deaths, reluctance to count Black children among agricultural workers (where they certainly were), etc., were a few factors.

Both nationally and in the Black Belt, the Black population had grown absolutely but declined as a percentage of the total population from colonial days up through the 1930's.

1790	1 million Blacks, or 19.3% of the total U.S. population
1940	13 million Blacks, or 9.8% of the total U.S. population
(1928-35)	10.0% of the total U.S. population)

One reason was the vast number of immigrants from Europe, of course. The other factor was that until about 1930 the reproduction rate for Blacks was lower. (By 1940 it was somewhat higher.) Reproduction rates take both birth and death rates into account. Since the birthrate for Black women was higher (136/1000 compare to 122/1000 for whites) from 1928-1932, clearly many more Black babies died. Death rate differences between whites and Blacks were even greater for older children and adults. In 1930 when the Comintern resolution was approved, life expectancy for a Black child was 48.5 years. For a white 60.9. (Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, p. 161)

According to Paragraph 2 of the 1928 Comintern Resolution: "2. The bulk of the Negro population (86%) live in the southern states; of this number 74 per cent live in the rural districts and are dependent almost exclusively upon agriculture for a livelihood. Approximately one-half of these rural dwellers live in the so-called 'Black Belt,' in which they constitute more than 50 per cent of the population." (The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Black National Question in the United States, p. 13) The following population statistics for Black Belt counties (compiled by James Allen and used by Haywood in Negro Liberation) show a stable Negro population, growing slightly, though going down as a percent of the total population.

<u>Census Year</u>	<u>Total Pop.</u>	<u>Negro Pop.</u>	<u>% Negro of Total</u>
1940	10,256,289	4,993,612	48.7
1930	9,525,865	4,790,049	50.3
1920	8,968,132	4,806,565	53.6
1910	8,387,958	4,842,766	57.7
1900	7,498,900	4,488,991	59.9
1890	6,465,307	3,866,792	59.8
1880	5,750,410	3,466,924	60.3
1870	4,431,597	2,560,263	57.8
1860	4,362,009	2,461,099	56.4

The following statistics are from 1940, but the same trends were present in 1930. The Black Belt contained 490 counties of which 180 (from 50-85%) had a Black majority. Populations, of course, do not stop at county lines. Therefore, it is significant that there were another 290 counties having 30-50% Black populations, making what Haywood calls a "well-defined, compact and stable community."

There was a steady decline in the number of counties with Black majorities. In 1900 there were 286 counties; 1910 had 264 counties; 1920 had 221; 1930 had 191; and 1940 had 150. (However in 1950 the number of Blacks in the Black Belt was greater than the population of 23 nations in the United Nations.) It is interesting that even Huiswood, who opposed self-determination, referred to the Black Belt when discussing the condition of Blacks in the South, because of its particular plantation-type of agriculture.

Opponents of the 1928 Comintern line emphasized the reduction of the Black population as a percent of the total population, while proponents stressed the stability of the population absolutely. But how stable the population actually was (other than in total numbers) depends on a number of economic factors which must be explored further, particularly the question of emigration from the Black Belt.

Haywood's view was that the decline of the Black population in these counties mostly occurred from 1920 to 1930 during the "great migration" when the war boom and post-war prosperity were present. Blacks fled the backward, oppressed regions to take advantage of the general industrial expansion which required tremendous numbers of workers. But when the depression hit, the migration decreased, and the population of the Black Belt increased, at least absolutely. According to Haywood, to suggest that the concentration of Blacks would continue to break up was to suggest that capitalism would have an uninterrupted period of expansion and prosperity.

C. Blacks in the Black Belt Had a Common Economic System

. . .an internal economic bond to weld the various parts of the nation into a single whole. (Selections, p. 67)

Most of the following information is from Haywood's Negro Liberation and Victor Perlo's The Negro in Southern Agriculture, 1953. Much of their information is about the 1940's but was certainly essentially the same system referred to as "the most ruthless exploitation and persecution of a semi-slave character" in the 1928 Comintern resolution.

Both views on the national question agreed that the agrarian question was key in the Black Belt in this period. And the relationship of the Blacks to the land was determined by the plantation system which predominated throughout the South and particularly in the Black Belt.

In the Black Belt the main agricultural crop was cotton, as in most of the South. In 1940 more than one-half of the South's cropland was in cotton, the South's chief money crop, and the main cotton-growing region lay in the Black Belt. In general Negro owners and share-croppers cultivated no more than a tenth of Southern farm land in 1929. But they produced in the Black Belt almost one third of the nation's cotton. Black farm laborers on white farms produced more in addition to that. (Myrdal, p.233) The incredible profit to the capitalists from the cheap, virtually slave labor on these plantations was the basis for the contention that super-profits (such as are extracted from an oppressed nation) were at stake here.

The tremendous profit garnered from Negro plantation workers is similar to the imperialist tribute extracted from backward colonial labor--all of which goes to support a vast swarm of parasites on the back of the lowly soil cultivator. These range from the overseer, local planter, country banker, and time-merchant up to the Wall Street financier and coupon-clipper. To this shining array must be added, of course, the professional cotton broker or speculator. The size of their "take" is reflected in the fact that the actual cotton producer receives but fifteen cents of the consumer's dollar spent on cotton products. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 22)

Generally, even by 1940 mechanization in cotton-farming was slight. It was a labor-intensive crop, requiring twice as much labor per acre as corn, five or six times as much as oats or hay. The planters faced competition from cotton substitutes produced in the United States and cotton imported from countries such as Egypt and Brazil where abundant cheap labor also existed. This exerted continuous pressure on the planters to maintain the plantation

system. Cotton was also an unstable crop.

No other similar area in the world gambles its welfare and the destinies of so many people on a single crop market year after year. The gamble is not a good one. Few other crops are subject to such violent and unpredictable price variations as cotton. In 1927 cotton farmers got 20 cents a pound for their crops; in 1929 they got 16 cents; in 1931 they got 6 cents; in 1933 they got 10 cents. Only once during the last decade did the price of cotton change less than 10 percent between pickings. Three times in five years it jumped more than 40 percent--once up and twice down. (Report of the National Emergency Council on Economic Conditions in the South, 1938, as quoted in Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 23)

Because the Black Belt region was for the most part a one-crop economy, these fluctuations had devastating effects on the welfare of the inhabitants. In addition, production methods wasted the soil rapidly. Cotton, tobacco, and corn deplete soil much more rapidly than legume crops, especially if planted year after year. One sample study in 1933 indicated that about one-third of Southern land was eroded and about one-half of the nation's eroded land was in the South, especially in the Black Belt. Since 1860 the Black population had doubled, but available land had increased little; therefore sharecroppers were having more difficulty feeding themselves.

The key unit of land was actually the old plantation, though census figures concealed this. Haywood quotes a study by Karl Brandt which shows how the Census Bureau could conceal facts and interrelationships about land and production.

Paradoxically enough, it (the plantation) lives statistically under the disguise of its direct competitor and adversary, the small family farm. Because the census calls the sharecropper a farm operator, and calls a "farm" the average tract of 22 acres of crop land or 42 acres of all land on which he works, nobody knows how many plantations existed in the United States in 1920, 1925, 1930, or 1935. (Brandt, "Fallacious Census Terminology and Its Consequences in Agriculture", Social Research, February 1938.)

Eighty-five to 95 percent of good farmland in the South was controlled by a few thousand white planters, less than 10% of all white owners. So that across the Black Belt were huge plantations worked under various arrangements by mostly Black laborers, and on the fringes, on the less good land, would be family farms eking out a bare subsistence. According to the book Deep South by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, published in 1941, more than one-half of the South's farmers were tenants, 60% of whom must give up one-fourth, one-third, one-half, or more of their crop for the right to work the land.

The 1930's saw one change in this respect. Up until then tenancy was increasing but during the Depression thousands of tenants and croppers were evicted. However, although the actual number of tenants decreased, as a percentage share-cropping increased.

1925 Sharecroppers were 43.6% of Black Belt farm operators.
 1930 Sharecroppers were 45.6% of Black Belt farm operators.
 1940 Sharecroppers were 48.3% of Black Belt farm operators.

(Statistics from James S. Allen, "The Negro Question", Political Affairs, November 1946)

More details on the plantation economy of the Black Belt can be found in Haywood's book Negro Liberation. The following summarizes his major points.

Haywood emphasizes the functionless, parasitical nature of the planter class. The planters were considered an aristocracy in the South and they tried to keep their land intact through intermarriage and extended kinship relationships. As a rule they not only did not work, but even the management of the plantation was carried out by a hired overseer. Absentee ownership was not uncommon and perhaps a third of the planters devoted more than a quarter of their time to other occupations.

Although in the plantation areas there were a number of small family owned farms, they were usually heavily mortgaged, had the least productive soil, and many were wiped out altogether during the depression. The vast majority of Black farmers were attached to the large plantations either as tenants of one kind or another or as wage laborers.

The wage laborers were the poorest. "Wages" were usually a cabin for the worker and family and credit at the plantation store. Usually both parents and children had to work for enough to subsist. They received the poorest cabins and did not work any particular section of land.

The term "cropper-laborer" or "combination worker" referred to sharecroppers who in addition to sharecropping hired themselves out to work on their landlord's crop for wages. In fact a plantation owner might restrict a tenant's acreage so as to be sure of enough casual labor on the "home farm".

The most fortunate tenants were the cash renters. They owned their own tools and animals, paid cash rent for their land and supplied their own feed, fertilizer, seed, etc. Though mostly poor they had more social status and were not subject to riding boss supervision. Only 12.7% of Black tenants were cash renters. There were also "standing renters" who were like the cash renters except that they paid their rent in a set amount of the crop.

Most Black tenants were share tenants or sharecroppers. The share tenants provided their own animals, tools, etc. and paid one fourth to one-third of their crop in rent. The sharecropper had no animals, housing, seed, etc. and paid half or more of the crop to the landlord. Both kinds of tenants were subject to riding boss supervision. Haywood describes the sharecroppers' situation in the following way:

Close supervision over the sharecropper, his abject servility and blind obedience to the slightest whim of the landlord, are requisites of 'successful' cropper farming. The decision as to what shall be planted and when remains with the landlord. 'Furnishing' the cropper means that the landlord determines what food he shall eat and the amount.

He decides also the tools with which the cropper works, the amount of

fertilizer he uses, the mule he is allowed for plowing. The landlord also sets the length of the cropper's workday which, in the cropper's own language, is "from ken see to can't see." In many cases, the overseer is a "pistol-totin'" deputy, devoted to carrying out the landlord's edicts. The burden of the sharecropping, to a large degree, is carried out by the wageless labor of women and children. The family system is prevalent in both the cotton and the tobacco-producing areas of the South. The landlord prefers large families to meet labor demands of peak seasons. On the 38,000-acre Delta and Pine Land Company plantation in Mississippi it is taken for granted that all children six years old and over must help at least in the picking.

Actually, sharecroppers are tenants only in form. In reality, they are laborers paid with a share of the crop, lacking the legal rights of the modern tenant and the wage laborer's right to collect a cash wage and spend it in the open market. The sharecropping "contract," in most cases a verbal one, is only a fiction designed to conceal what is in effect a kind of slavery. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, pp. 34-35)

Haywood then explains the origins of sharecropping in Reconstruction and the role of credit and plantation stores, in keeping Blacks trapped as sharecroppers. He also describes the legal methods of subjugation and the use of "race" or "color" to create a caste system which made it extremely difficult for Blacks to buy land and which made Blacks economically weaker than whites similarly occupied. This included inferior housing, education, and literacy rates as well. Haywood concluded there was a clear distinction between the oppression and exploitation of Blacks and that of poor whites.

The stifling effects of the race factor are most strikingly illustrated by the drastic differences in the economic and cultural status of Negroes and whites on the same tenure levels. (Original emphasis.) This contrast which runs the whole scale of the agricultural ladder from landowner to the lowly cotton cropper is fully documented by Raper in his illuminating study of two of Georgia's Black Belt counties.

Raper found that Negroes were concentrated in the lower tenure groups. But this is not all. Within each group in each county (original emphasis) they were much weaker than the corresponding white group: the size of the farms, quality of the soil, amount of livestock and equipment, income, housing, and education.

In 1934 Negroes comprising 53 per cent of the population in Greene County and 68 per cent in Macon, owned less than 5 per cent of the land in both counties. One-seventh of the white owners held more than half of all the land. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 46)

After showing similar differences between Blacks and whites in cash income, housing, and amount of public money spent on education, Haywood comments,

From the foregoing, the reader can readily see that any attempt to place the status of southern 'poor whites' on a par with that of the Negroes is false. Beyond all doubt, the oppression of the Negro, which is the basis of the degradation of the 'poor whites,' is of a separate character demanding a special approach. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 48)

The plantation system was only one aspect of the economic system of the Black Belt. Haywood described a large subsistence-level peasantry attached to

the land. And it seemed well-established that from this peasant or small farmer population a proletariat was springing, as young people in particular left sharecropping and went to the cities in the Black Belt, as well as the North, to work in industry. But what of other classes? A common economic life, a "single whole" with a division of labor suggests the need for crafts-people, small businesses, etc. catering to a Black market. Stalin does not spell this out but most supporters of the "national" theory have endeavored to show a Black urban petty-bourgeoisie, and to some degree, a Black bourgeoisie. (These classes would obviously not be well developed because of the extreme domination of the "white" nation.)

Few would argue that at the end of the Civil War Blacks in the South were a large mass of peasants with little class differentiation. In the North and South there were a number of free Blacks who were craftsmen and artisans operating in a limited way. After emancipation there must have been still more skilled workers available whose services had been used on the slave-owners' plantations and farms. But the vast majority of Blacks were occupied in agriculture. The development of classes proceeded throughout the following 50 years.

The process of class differentiation developing against the background of Jim-Crow oppression, and in conditions of continued majority concentration of Negroes in the Black Belt, thus formed the main objective conditions for their emergence as an oppressed nation. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 142)

Unfortunately there are few statistics for that period. Haywood and Foster both assert that there was a small group of professional people [doctors, lawyers, teachers, ministers (the largest group), and social workers]. Most Negro colleges were and are located in the Black Belt. Also developing in Southern towns were Black shopkeepers, particularly in the service industries which had an all-Black clientele, such as undertaking, hairdressing, restaurants, etc. These were guaranteed markets (as far as white competition went) because white undertakers, etc. did not accept Black customers. And in such personal services Blacks were more apt to patronize other Blacks. In other sectors it was more difficult for Black businesses to develop. Location was a help (it always being more difficult for Blacks to go into white areas to shop), but white clothing stores, grocery markets, and so on were in a position to cater to both Blacks and whites more cheaply and with more variety. While the personal service businesses certainly pointed to economic cohesion, the latter businesses probably took more of the Black customers' dollar.

Haywood and Foster agree also that there was a Black bourgeoisie during this period. However, Haywood grants that this bourgeoisie had actually developed more successfully outside the Black Belt where repression was less intense. The bourgeoisie was to be found in the fields of insurance, banking (small-scale), and real estate. There were also a few wealthy farmers. Haywood does not clearly distinguish between the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie when discussing businesses. But there is agreement that there was not an industrial manufacturing class to speak of.

The class most rapidly developing in the Black Belt (and elsewhere) was the Black proletariat. Industrialization in the South had begun breaking down the agricultural economy. The uncertainty of crops (particularly cotton), the

extreme overcrowding of productive cropland, the backwardness of sharecropping life, the eviction of thousands and thousands of tenants during the Depression, caused many agricultural workers to go North, but also to the cities of the South. As in the North, Blacks had the worst jobs at the lowest pay under the most unhealthy conditions. In addition, in the South they still had Jim Crow and terrorism to contend with. Blacks worked as paid laborers in cotton and tobacco fields; they worked in coal mines, steel mills, sawmills, ginning and cotton seed oil mills, in furniture, turpentine, refining, in tobacco processing, in pulp and paper, chemical industries, longshoring, logging, and on the railroads.

In 1940, according to the Bureau of Census, only 5% of employed Black men (nationally) were in professional, semi-professional, proprietary, managerial, clerical or sales work as compared with 30% of all employed white men. Only 4.4% were in skilled crafts compared with 15.6% of white men. There were three million Blacks employed outside of agriculture in 1940, half of these were employed in service work, many of them women doing domestic work. Even in 1940, twelve years after the adoption of the Comintern resolution, 28% of Black men were still on the farms in addition to many women and children. These farms in the Black Belt continued to provide a seemingly endless reserve of cheap labor throughout the thirties.

In 1930 Otto Huiswood wrote about the conditions of the Black working class in the South. Between 1920 and 1925 the Black farm population had decreased from about 5,301,000 to 4,506,000 or 15%. (White farm population decreased 11%.) Of the 100,000 lumber workers in the South, over 50% were Black. Three times as many Blacks as whites worked in steel at 10 hours a day and more. Fifty thousand Blacks were in coal mining, tens of thousands in tobacco and cotton industries. Most waterfront workers were Blacks and textile plants were rapidly increasing their use of them. Women and children worked in tobacco, textiles, slaughtering, meat-packing, and in the canneries. (In the canneries, 29¹/₂% of the women earned less than \$4 a week.) In the cotton mills, women worked at least 10 hours a day. (Figures refer to the 1920's.) (The Communist, February 1930, p. 143)

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Report for 1928 farm laborers in the South were making an average of \$24.89 a month with room and board and \$35 without board. In the textile industry wages for 1927 were \$12.80 a week which was about one-half of the average wage throughout the United States. Women and children got from \$1.00 to \$12.00 a week, most getting about \$4.00 to \$6.00 a week. Generally wages in the South for unskilled Blacks ran from \$1.00 to \$1.50 a day. Segregation on the job was rigidly observed. One example, a law in South Carolina forbade Blacks to work the machines in textile mills. Blacks were either unorganized (the usual case) or organized into separate locals. The Ku Klux Klan was active in many industries. (The Communist, February 1930, p. 159)

Haywood also wrote of the role of imperialism in the Black nation, referring to the absentee Wall Street control of most of the South's economic life. Eastern banks financed the plantations, which like all farms, required an extensive credit system. The Morgans, Mellons, Fords, and Rockefellers controlled the South's coalfields. U.S. Steel owned the biggest steel center in Birmingham. Rockefeller and Mellon (Gulf Oil) had large stakes in Southern oil which provided two-thirds of the nation's supply. Tobacco was mainly owned

by non-Southern interests, all the major Southern railroads were in some way linked to the Mellon interests. Electric companies, transmission and distribution of natural gas were in the hands of Northern financial institutions. In the early thirties many of the largest textile mills were also in Northern hands. (In Alabama, for instance, 36% of the spindles and 37% of the looms were Northern owned.)

In discussing the role of the Southern managers, Haywood refers to The Revolt of the South and the West, by A. G. Mezerik. The job of these managers was obviously to protest their bosses' interests. They spearheaded anti-union activity. They fought to keep freight-rate differentials and high tariffs in order to keep the South dependent, without its own industry. They fought increased taxes for education, health, and public services as these were of no benefit to the North.

He commands the colonial outposts for Northern overlords who have never been averse to the maintenance of the entire South as a slum area, a gigantic sweatshop dedicated to the Northern profit. (Mezerik as quoted in Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 55)

In other words, as Haywood says, it was their job to maintain the "Southern lag", "an essential condition for the extraction of super-profits from the starvation wages of the Negro and white masses." (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 55)

The plantation credit system was the major basis for Northern control. The local country banks had direct links to urban Southern and Northern banks, who passed down their financial assessments while local banks assessed the state of the crops, local trade, etc. Financing was based on the crop-lien system. The landlord or plantation owner had a lien on his tenants' crop. This lien in turn was his collateral for financing. A lien on the tenants' livestock and tools was even better, expanding his credit. The federal government demanded these liens as collateral, as well as private institutions. Since over half (52%) of the landowners had to borrow to meet current crop expenses, (10% interest on government loans, 15% on bank loans), considerable amounts of money found their way North. From 1910 to 1928 the amount of mortgage quadrupled in the seven southeastern states. In 1935 an estimated 30% of Southern cotton lands were owned by insurance companies and banks.

The Depression, of course, aggravated the situation. Nowhere was the Depression felt more profoundly than in the rural South. Cotton growing was already in trouble in 1929 because of the boll weevil and exhaustion of the land. Prices had been going down. After 1929 domestic and foreign demand dropped even more sharply. Competition from Brazil and Egypt became stiffer. From 1928 to 1933 total farm returns from cotton and cotton seed fell by 70%. The area of cultivated land dropped from 43 million acres in 1929 to 29 million in 1932.

But the rural Black population declined little, only 4.5% from 1930 to 1940. (It had dropped 8.6% the previous ten years.) The census showed a decrease of 235,000 sharecropping families (Black and white). Most of these tenants were reduced to casual wage laborers.

Hoover invested federal funds heavily in the South in an effort to save

the whole structure. In 1933 over one-fourth of the farm mortgages were held by federal land banks. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation, a Wall Street dominated agency, financed large-scale farmers by disbursing federal funds, replacing country banks which had gone broke. But the provisions of the loans barred small cultivators (tenants and small farmers) from profiting by it. The other form of aid was feed crop loans which, even when tenants could get them, often ended up in the hands of plantation owners.

This generally was the economic state of the South in the period that the Comintern resolution was adopted. The development of the Black bourgeoisie, and the degree of integration of the Black and white economies of the South are questions which need further study, in our opinion.

D. Blacks Had a Common Language and Culture

No one claimed that Blacks lacked a common language, but Nasanov and Haywood did find it necessary to explain that a separate language from the white majority was not necessary to establish that a separate nation existed. Stalin had commented on this in "Marxism and the National Question."

The question of culture was more controversial than now. We take for granted the existence of Black culture, partly because of the struggles of the sixties and the current popularity in the press and television of "ethnic" cultures. But remarks in contemporary articles indicate that the idea of a Black culture had been little considered. The supporters of the Comintern thesis had to call attention to the many facets of Black culture and psychological make-up. Haywood described that culture in the following way:

The entire development of Negro music, literature, poetry, and painting, churches, fraternal groups, and social societies, bears the imprint of this struggle for liberation. The psychological as well as the economic need for continuous struggle to gain and assume the upright posture of a free people--this is and has been the dynamic of Negro culture.

(Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 147)

E. The Black Belt Was Consistent with Lenin's Views on the Development of Nations.

When Sik wrote that the development of a Black nation in the South was not consistent with Lenin's view on the development of nations, both Nasanov and Haywood, in separate articles, answered with this quote from Stalin which had appeared in Bolshevik, No. 11, 12, 1925.

The quintessence of the national problem now is the struggle of the popular masses in the colonies and of the subjugated nationalities against financial enslavement and cultural extinction of these colonies and nationalities by the imperialist bourgeoisie of the ruling nation. Of what significance can the competitive struggle of the bourgeoisie of various nationalities be in this formulation of the national problem? Of course, not of decisive importance, and in some cases of no importance at all. It is quite obvious that it is chiefly a question here not as to whether the bourgeoisie of one nationality beats or can beat in the competitive struggle of the bourgeoisie of another nationality, it is rather a matter that the imperialist group of the ruling nationality exploits and

oppresses the basic masses and first and foremost the peasants of the colonial and subjugated nationalities, and in oppressing and exploiting them, draws them into the struggle against imperialism and makes them allies in the proletarian revolution. (Stalin, Works, 7.224-225)

Haywood wrote, in the imperialist epoch one does not look for two nations at different economic stages, one subjugated by the other. Imperialism penetrates all sections of the earth. All peoples are drawn into its economic system even where different economic systems also exist such as feudalism and tribalism. All are subordinate to finance capitalism.

It is obviously that in precisely this consists the economic content of the antagonisms between Negroes and the whites in the U.S., i.e. in the contradiction between finance capital which preserves and utilizes semi-slave forms of exploitation of the Negro masses in Southern agriculture and in this manner preserving the conditions for the super-exploitation of the Negro toilers all over the country, and the economic and cultural development of these latter. (The Communist, August 1930, p. 706)

Haywood and Nasanov pointed out that Stalin distinguished between nations forming in the early stages of capitalism, and nations forming in the imperialist epoch in other ways. Not only is it no longer a question of competing bourgeoisies, but under a world imperialist system, national liberation struggles have objectively become allies of the proletarian struggle on a world-wide scale. They are fighting the same imperialist enemy. The class most affected in a national struggle of this period is the peasantry, not the bourgeoisie.

To briefly summarize how Haywood saw the development of the Black nation in the Black Belt: North America experienced two bourgeois revolutions. The first was the war of independence where the colonies freed themselves from Britain. Capitalism was still weak here and existed along side pre-capitalist elements. Slavery was as yet no obstacle to the development of capitalism and in fact was necessary to it. But the contradictions between them developed and culminated in the Civil War or what Haywood calls the Second American Revolution. The Northern bourgeoisie needed a fully consolidated capitalist state unified under the industrial bourgeoisie.

Though led by the Northern bourgeoisie, the base for the democratic revolution in the South in Reconstruction was the freed Blacks. They were given suffrage, rights to sit in the Legislature, etc. by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, backed up by Negro militia and Northern federal troops.

The revolution was aborted, the Blacks betrayed. Slavery had been destroyed, which meant the conditions for development of capitalism throughout the South had been created. The plantation system was re-established and the agrarian revolution for Blacks was cut off.

Therefore, said Haywood, the bourgeois democratic revolution and agrarian revolution have still to be completed. This fact combined with the possibility for development of class differentiation, and the existence of a compact, defined, stable community in the Black Belt was the basis for the national liberation movement.

While admitting that a conscious movement for national liberation has been weak in the United States, Haywood attributes this to the fact that Blacks are a young nation whose political consciousness and strength have been held back by imperialist oppression. Elsewhere in the world, such as Central America, the development of national consciousness in young, very oppressed nations has also been slow and arduous. The ideology of racial inferiority has slowed the process here because it has deflected the struggle to racial issues.

Secondly, Haywood admitted the concept was a new one, when first put forward by the Communist Party, and outside traditional thinking.

Third, the Black Belt nation does find itself in the heart of the strongest monopoly capitalist nation in the world. (A Black playwright called it "The Big White Fog".)

Finally, because the national question in the era of imperialism is essentially a peasant question, it has been a serious matter that the Black peasantry has lacked the leadership of the industrial proletariat or bourgeoisie. These classes had developed relatively recently, particularly in the 1930's, and had been unable to play a leading role.

The question of the agrarian revolution was always brought forward most strongly by Haywood and other supporters of self-determination. Haywood emphasizes again and again that what is required in the South is a bourgeois-democratic revolution. He discusses little the question of socialism and seems to foresee a nation of small, independent farmers with "cooperative farming". That is Haywood discusses at length the kind of reforms needed in the Black Belt in terms of land redivision, reclaiming the soil, industrialization, etc., but avoids discussing the kind of state that would implement this.

F. A Racial Analysis of the Black Question is Incorrect

For those comrades who persisted in seeing the Black question in racial terms, Haywood insisted that such an approach was essentially liberal (or, in some cases, ultra-left), a denial of the importance of the agrarian struggle, a writing off of the tremendous revolutionary potential of the Black people, and an implicit acceptance of the bourgeoisie's ideology of racism. Racism is a particular form of national oppression. It is used, as religion may be used in one place, language in another, the better to divide and rule, the better to rationalize the subjugation of a people. The roots of racism go very deep in the United States. Racism is important to the ruling class because of the lack of other differences such as language and religion. It is an effective tool, because color is not a transient condition. And, Haywood claims, it has been most effective with Blacks.

The fog of racist obscurantism, thrown up by his oppressors, has made difficult clear political orientation, i.e., the job of locating and thus confronting the real enemy--the forces of monopoly capitalism. It is therefore not surprising that until quite recently Negro protest has been shunted off into the blind alley of a defensive "racialism". What is in reality an aspiration for identity as a nation has sought expression through false symbols of "race" foisted on him by white rulers. He has

perforce defined his fight for freedom as a fight for "racial equality", "racial opportunity". (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 139)

Haywood later wrote in Black Bolshevik:

This new line established that the Black freedom struggle is a revolutionary movement in its own right, directed against the very foundation of U.S. imperialism, with its own dynamic pace and momentum, resulting from the unfinished democratic and land revolutions in the South. It places the Black liberation movement and the class struggle of U.S. workers in their proper relationship as two aspects of the fight against the common enemy--U.S. capitalism. It elevates the Black movement to a position of equality in the battle.

The new theory destroys forever the white racist theory traditional among class-conscious white workers which had relegated the struggle of Blacks to a subsidiary position in the revolutionary movement. Race is defined as a device of national oppression, a smokescreen thrown up by the class enemy, to hide the underlying economic and social conditions involved in Black oppression and to maintain the division of the working class. (Haywood, Black Bolshevik, p. 234)

V. Conclusions

Blacks in the Black Belt South had at least some of the characteristics of a nation. That they had a common language, culture and psychological make-up was a fact apparent to anyone who investigated the question even superficially. (Although, as stated earlier, this was by no means universally accepted at the time, when it was commonly believed that Blacks had no culture.) That Blacks had a common territory in the 1920's and '30's was also fairly well established through the county population statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Census compiled by Haywood and others. The statistics were changing, however. Though out-migration decreased in the 1930's, it was still happening. If the trend continued, as we know it did, Blacks would no longer be a majority in more and more counties. Would this mean they would no longer be a nation?

There were also a number of weaknesses in the evidence substantiating the economic cohesion of the Black Belt. How integrated were the Black and white economies? (Blacks never made up completely self-sufficient communities.) How big a role did the Black bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie play? What did it mean to the economic life of the Black Belt that it was the youngest, strongest men and women, that is the most productive workers, who were migrating to the North in many cases? That many sharecroppers were leaving the land for the cities, both in and out of the Black Belt? How relevant would the call to redistribute the land remain? In conclusion, it was highly probable that a Black nation did exist in the Black Belt South but these questions needed to be addressed and answered in some detail for it to be firmly proved.

Whether or not it actually constituted a nation or only a national minority (because of lacking common territory or economic life), a concept not much discussed then, the Comintern was absolutely correct to approach the question as a national one. In doing so the Comintern (and Workers Party) took a step forward from their previous line by recognizing that Blacks had a different

history and social and economic position in this country than whites, even other white workers and sharecroppers. And while there were important concrete differences between the position of Blacks in the United States and colonized Blacks in Africa (or other peoples in other colonies), in the broad sweep it was correct and enlightening to see them in the same general context; an enslaved source of superprofits for capitalism, kept backward, landless, and poverty-stricken for the benefit of the ruling class of an advanced capitalist nation.

Despite some unanswered questions in his economic analysis, Haywood made a contribution to our understanding of the national question in the United States. He recognized the national characteristics of the Blacks in the Black Belt and the pressing need for land reform, democratic rights, and self-determination, although it was twenty years before he systematically compiled the information to substantiate his views. The book Negro Liberation which contains this valuable information is, however, confusing and evasive on the question relating the struggle for self-determination to the struggle for socialism, either in the United States as a whole or in the Black Belt. On the fight for agrarian and democratic reforms, he says, "It is a task which must be assumed now by the modern forces of progressive democracy as an integral part of the struggle for progress and democracy in the country as a whole." (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 116) He does not specify who the "modern forces of progressive democracy" are. Further on he says:

Altogether the conclusion is inescapable that the liberation of the Negro people and the transformation of the agrarian relations in the South cannot be achieved through the further economic evolution of capitalism in that region. They can be achieved, on the one hand, only through the development and organization of the economic and political struggle of the landless masses, Negro and white, aimed against the entire 'Southern system', and supported by the working class and other progressive forces of the country as a whole. On the other hand, they can be achieved only when the government is free from the influence of the monopolies, in short, is a truly people's government, firmly rooted in the public ownership of the economy, and whose first concern is the welfare of the masses and the progress of the country, and not the profits of trusts and corporations. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 123)

To counter "left" objections that socialism would automatically solve the question of land and freedom for Blacks, Haywood, in his fuzziest scenario, says:

Actually, while neither the measures presented here nor the conditions of their achievement necessarily mean socialism, neither do they mean a departure from the path to socialism. On the one hand, therefore, to maintain that a people's government is an indispensable prerequisite for the realization of the foregoing measures is not equivalent to arguing that they can be achieved only under socialism. For, while it is possible that the establishment of a truly people's government in the United States might not be achieved until such a government would necessarily be a socialist government, it is also possible for a people's government to come into office which is not yet directly socialist. On the other hand, it is idle to talk of socialism in the United States without the development of the broadest struggle for the solution of precisely such democratic questions

as are represented by the liberation of the Negro people and fundamental land reform in the South. (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 125)

In this passage he incorrectly suggests the possibility of an intermediate non-socialist "people's government" in the United States as a whole through which these reforms could take place (though it rightly counters the view that these reforms should not be struggled for because socialism will take care of them). Not only is he wrong to support the establishment of a "people's government" in a major imperialist country, but he implies that a monopoly-capitalist government can be overturned peacefully, when he talks about a "people's government" coming into office, a government which would be "free from the influence of monopolies".⁶

Arguments by proponents of the "racism" line erred in a number of ways. To be sure, they were correct in pointing out that there was not a strong indigenous national movement in the Black Belt. Though Haywood might assert, "what is in reality an aspiration for identity as a nation has sought expression through false symbols of 'race' foisted on him by white rulers" (Haywood, Negro Liberation, p. 139), this kind of statement is difficult to prove or disprove and in itself is not a convincing argument. But presumably the question of nationhood is an objective question, not to be determined by what Blacks have necessarily wanted up to this point, or more accurately, what some Communists (and bourgeois historians) think they have wanted. Nations can exist without a highly developed national movement or national consciousness. This was Stalin's view, as Haywood correctly observed.

Practically, said opponents of the resolution, the call for self-determination would divide the working class, a serious matter since a foremost task of the CPUSA was to develop class consciousness and build class solidarity. What the argument avoided noting was that the working class was already deeply divided. In the South it was physically separated, in the North and South Blacks commonly met with discrimination and hostility on the job and in the unions from white workers. There were "race riots" in the 1920's, that is armed clashes between white and Black workers. Because much working class unity in the United States had been based on white chauvinist politics, a militant, principled stand by the Party against Jim Crow, discrimination, etc., whether recognizing the right to self-determination or not, was bound to be "divisive" in the short run. (Historically, "progressive" groups have often excused their own failure to uphold Black rights with the plea of avoiding "divisiveness". From the point of view of Blacks, this kind of "unity" was meaningless, which partly accounted for the CPUSA's lack of presence among Blacks in the 1920's.)

Sik's argument about the development of nations is faulty and poorly reasoned. He does not refer to the changed conditions of the imperialist epoch, and by his reasoning many liberation struggles today would be invalid, because there is not a developing industrial bourgeoisie leading them for the purpose of securing their home markets.

Most of the above views (that self-determination as a slogan would be divisive, that Blacks did not want it, and that it was really a form of segregation) were reactions to political conditions, rather than the underlying economic and class questions. Racism (the view that one race is superior to another, and that race is the basic difference between Blacks and whites) did

and does exist, but as an explanation for the condition of Black people, it did not get at the economic and political roots of their subjugation, and therefore did not recognize the necessity for redistribution of the land for the masses of Black farmers in the South. Instead it asserted that the United States had one working class where some of the workers happened to be white and some Black, and this was merely a convenient tool which the ruling class used to keep the class divided. The solution therefore was to not allow the ruling class to divide the working class, to call on whites to oppose racism and recognize that it was in the interests of Blacks and whites to unite against the capitalists. Unfortunately this was not always true in the short run. Trade unions, for example, found it expedient to exclude Blacks, and even the Party had failed to militantly uphold the rights of Blacks throughout the 1920's. In a rich imperialist country, there were rewards for those sections of the working class which did not seriously oppose Jim Crow, terrorism, and discrimination. This solution, therefore, had not only failed to unite the working class, it had left Blacks without the revolutionary leadership of the Party.

VI. Notes

1. The Black Belt was mentioned as the specific location of the Black nation for the first time in the 1930 resolution, which was a follow-up resolution strengthening and clarifying the 1928 one.
2. The Workers Party of America was formed in 1921 as the open organization of the Communists when government attacks forced part of the Communist movement underground. In April 1923 the underground Communist Party fully consolidated with the Workers Party and in 1925 the Party changed its name to Workers (Communist) Party. In 1930 it became the Communist Party of the United States. For convenience I refer to it as the Workers Party throughout the 1920's.
3. The Socialist Labor Party, though supporting equality for Blacks in the course of their trade union work, under the leadership of Daniel De Leon insisted that the Black question was only a class question to be solved by the victory of socialism. It ignored special aspects of the Black question in its writings, and in practice it did not combat terrorism, lynching, or discrimination. The Socialist Party also failed to establish special demands for Blacks in its program, although a special resolution was adopted in 1901 expressing sympathy for their plight. The Socialist Party made it clear it saw no distinction between the condition of Black workers and white workers; it also ignored the situation of Southern Black tenant farmers. In 1920 it finally did call for equal rights for Blacks.
4. Endre Sik also wrote "To the Question of the Negro Problem in the U.S." in Revolutionary East, No.7, 1929.
5. Otto Bauer was a leader and theoretician of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party.

6. Haywood's view undoubtedly reflected the line of the CPUSA at that time. In the post-war era the CPUSA de-emphasized class struggle and instead favored building a "united front anti-fascist peace coalition." (Foster, History of the CPUSA, p.469) This policy was a carry-over from the Popular Front period and was one example of the non-revolutionary perspective which had developed in the CPUSA.

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