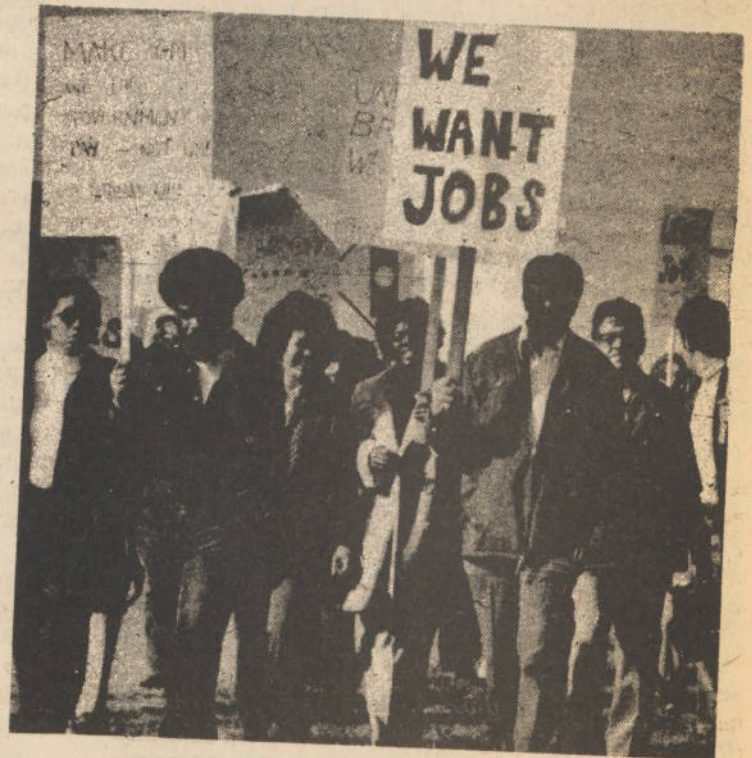
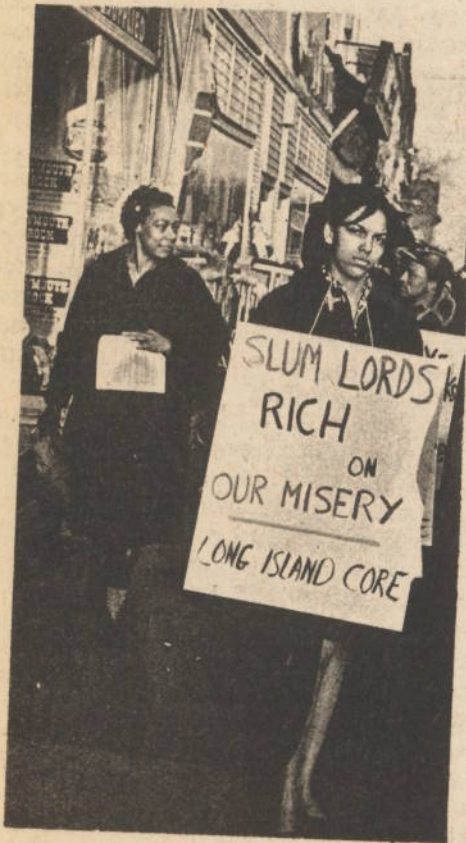
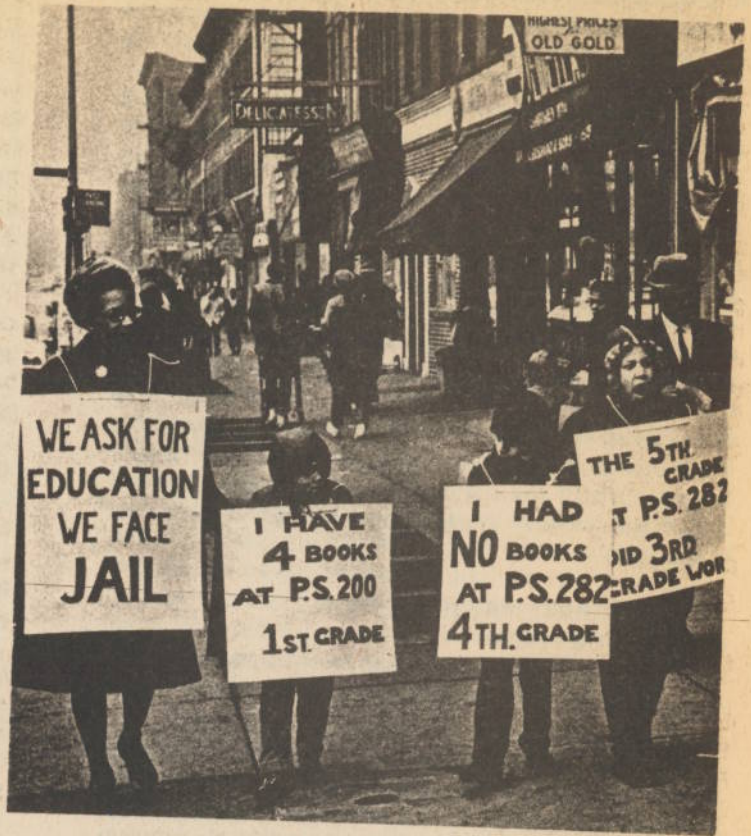


# The Black People Today



**THE BLACK PEOPLE TODAY:  
AN OPPRESSED NATIONAL MINORITY**

Today the Black people are still burdened with the yoke of national oppression. The dominant and central feature of the oppression of the Black people today is the super-exploitation of the Black worker. Black workers are last hired and first fired and continue to function as a reserve army of the unemployed with an unemployment rate twice that of the national average.

The Black workers are disproportionately represented in the lowest paying, dirtiest and most dangerous jobs. Black people, including those in the petty bourgeoisie, have lower incomes than whites in the same occupations. This differential represents the dollars and cents reaped by the bourgeoisie through their oppression of the Black people. The following two tables document both aspects of national oppression:

Occupation	Average Weekly Wage	% whites employed	% Blacks employed
Managerial positions	\$214.00	10.6%	3.7%
Professional and technical	\$192.00	14.6%	9.5%
Blue collar workers	\$126.00	34.4%	39.9%
Service workers	\$104.00	11.8%	27.2%
Farm labor	\$ 80.00	1.6%	2.4%
Domestics	\$ 40.00	1.2%	6.8%

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Occupation	Average annual income for all males	Average annual income for Black males
Factory manager	\$14,379	\$9,049
Civil engineer	12,675	9,262
Accountant	12,627	8,447
Plumber	8,997	5,546
Auto worker	8,162	7,631
Elementary teacher	8,013	7,521
Assemblers	6,730	5,582
Miners	7,281	5,655
Apparel workers	4,718	4,194

National oppression pervades virtually all aspects of Black life in the U.S. Segregated housing and education, grossly inadequate social services, higher prices and shoddier goods are the features of ghetto life, all of which is maintained by police terror and racist courts.

All of this is well known and hardly needs to be repeated for Marxist-Leninists. Why does it constitute national as opposed to racial oppression if Black people are no longer a nation? For one, because it draws on the historical legacy of the oppressed Black nation. But more centrally because the Black people remain a people, a distinct nationality. The oppression of Black people has always been racial in form, but today no less than before Black people are not simply a racial grouping, but a people with a distinct history who retain a common culture which is continually

strengthened and reinforced by the continuation of their oppression. It is on the basis of this historical experience, on the basis of their identity as a people enslaved, that the Black people are oppressed today.

The formulation that Black people are an oppressed national minority carries a recognition that the Black people remain a nationality and retain some of the features of a nation. In distinction from European national minorities, the Black people have not been assimilated in the sense that they have merged with the Anglo-European population. They continue to be excluded from the full democratic rights won long ago by the European national minorities. They continue to be victims of discrimination and national oppression unlike the Europeans, who by the third generation had become for the most indistinguishable from the rest of the white population.

**A NATION OF A NEW TYPE?**

It seems clear to us that this formulation of the Black people as a national minority scientifically corresponds to the real character of the Black people today. Yet there are those, who while fully acknowledging the dissolution of the Black nation in the Black Belt, maintain that this development has not spelled the end of the Black nation but rather its transformation. Today, they argue, there is a Black nation of a new type, a dispersed proletarian nation. This argument for the existence of a "nation of a new type," the position of the Revolutionary Union, rests on two propositions: 1) that historically the Black people were welded together as a nation in the Black Belt and 2) that this historical and material basis for nationhood has not been eliminated but transformed.

As we have already sought to demonstrate, the historical existence of a nation is in and of itself no guarantee that a people remain a nation. To argue otherwise reduces Marxism to bourgeois metaphysics. The historical existence of the oppressed Black nation is of unquestionable importance in understanding the continuing cohesion of the Black people, but it cannot be substituted for the real, material underpinnings of nationhood in the present.

RU argues these material features continue to exist but in a new form. They point to the existence of ghettos, the marginal ghetto economy and the continued existence of class divisions among the Black people. These characteristics, taken together with the continued strength of Black culture, constitute the material basis of nationhood under the new conditions of dispersal and proletarianization.

If we object that these features, which undeniably exist, are not sufficient as the basis for a nation according to the analysis developed by Lenin and Stalin, RU chides us for not grasping the existence of a "third period" in the development of the National Question in the U.S. today.

And what is this third period?

*Stripped of all the trimmings it is simply the dispersal and proletarianization of the Black people with the consequent negation of the bourgeois democratic and peasant character of the National Question.*

**CLASS COMPOSITION OF THE  
BLACK PEOPLE—1972**

<b>Bourgeoisie</b>	<b>Percent of Black Labor Force</b>
Public administration (heads of agencies and depts.)	1.8%
Salaried managers (manufacturing, retail, etc.)	1.3
Self employed managers (manufacturers, contractors, retailers)	.6
	<b>3.7%</b>
<b>Petty Bourgeoisie</b>	
Professionals (lawyers, doctors, college professors, etc.)	3.3%
Sales managers, insurance brokers, realtors, etc.)	.5
Foremen	1.0
Police, firement and security guards**	1.4
Farmers	.6
	<b>6.8%</b>
<b>Proletariat</b>	
1. Commercial and Technical labor:	
Teachers, social workers and technicians	6.2%
Retail sales and clerical workers, bank clerks, etc.	16.1
	<b>22.3%</b>
2. Service sector:	
Hotel, restaurant, hospital worker, hairdressers, etc.	1.9%
Private household workers	6.8
	<b>25.9%</b>
3. Industrial and Agriculture labor:	
Craftsmen (carpenters, mechanics, etc.)	7.7%
Operatives (machine operators, assemblers, truck drivers, etc.)	21.3
Laborers (construction, material handlers, etc.)	9.9
Farm laborers	2.4
	<b>41.3%</b>
<b>Total working class: 89.5%</b>	

Source: These figures are based on an analysis of material from the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics.

\*Note: Census data makes no distinction as to whether or not self employed managers employ labor or not. Nor is there any breakdown on the size of firms managed by salaried managers. Thus these figures are very imperfect since many of the managers undoubtedly own or operate small businesses and would more properly be counted as part of the petty bourgeoisie.

\*\*Note: While these "protective service workers" are technically wage laborers, their social role, para-military character and the close political ties to the bourgeoisie that develop as a consequence explain their inclusion in this social class. There is also some ambiguity in the case of teachers and social workers because of their social roles but we think the proletarian aspect of their class identity is dominant.

**Fig. 16**

In short we have a circular argument. There is a nation of a new type because there is a new period in the development of the National Question and we have a new period in the national question because we have the features of a nation of a new type. Both these constructs, the new nation and the new period are artificial and arbitrary devices the RU employs in order to keep the concept of a Black nation afloat.

To clear up the muddle RU makes, it is necessary to take a step backward to fundamentals. The consistent theme of both Lenin's and Stalin's writings on the National Question is, to use Stalin's phrase, that the "fate of nations is linked with the fate of capitalism." Stalin, in *The National Question and Leninism*, a polemic written in 1930, discusses at some length the "two types of nations" known to history—the bourgeois nation and the socialist nation. The bourgeois nation arises with capitalism and derives its character from it. With the passing of capitalism, these nations become nations of a new type, socialist nations, which possess markedly different characteristics owing to their social constitution.

Stalin omits any discussion of a nation of a new type existing under capitalism because such a conception was patently absurd. He understood the fate of nations to be linked to the fate of capitalism. Capitalism creates nations and later assaults and absorbs them. Weaker dependent nations do not become nations of a new type, in RU's sense, but are instead assimilated and absorbed. This was the observable trend in the Russia of Stalin's day prior to the Bolshevik revolution. It is a phenomenon he described occurring among the Jews of Russia and Eastern Europe.

Of course we would agree with RU that Stalin did not necessarily speak the last word on the National Question. But in regard to the types of nations known to history we see no reason to fault his discussion nor do we see that the passage of time has rendered these remarks obsolete. What RU identifies as a third period, a new period in the development of the national question, is in fact the same process of dispersal, proletarianization and assimilation of internal nations that both Lenin and Stalin described occurring in Russia with the rise of imperialism. The maturation of this process marked not nations of a new type but the disappearance of nations.

The concrete social development of the Black people in this century is bound up with this "world historical tendency of capitalism to assimilate nations." We have already noted the features of this tendency—the dispersal of peoples, their amalgamation with other peoples on the basis of capitalist economic development, the expropriation of the peasantry and the creation of a mass of wage laborers. In short, all the features that are associated with the transformation of the Black people in this century.

Yet the RU takes precisely the features that have led to the assimilation of the Black nation as the earmarks of a nation of a new type. Forces that obliterate nations are magically transformed by the RU into forces that generate nations.

Lenin, in noting this feature of the national

question, that is, the tendency of capitalism to assimilate nations, some sixty years ago spoke of "a tendency which manifests itself more and more powerfully with every passing decade, and is one of the greatest driving forces transforming capitalism into socialism." It is the task of revolutionary theory to bring to the fore what is the rising feature of historical development and draw out its implications. The RU, with its sophistry about new periods and nations, serves to obfuscate the development of this "driving force." The RU, like the OL and the other dogmatists, is also guilty of "organizing nations," only in a more convoluted and sophisticated way. The nation of a new type, like the various Black Belt nation formulations, serves to turn RU's back on the progressive, historical development represented by the assimilation of the Black nation.

Yet RU, unlike the dogmatists of the OL and CL variety, demonstrates in Red Papers 5 and 6 a fairly consistent grasp of the concrete features of the Black people today and the general strategic orientation that follows on the basis of such an understanding. Their "creative" formulations, the nation of a new type and the third period in the National Question, stand in contradiction to much of the rest of their analysis. The RU seems to want to keep both Marxism and metaphysics in store. With both these stocks in trade the RU presumably hopes to satisfy all comers.

#### THE NATIONALIST BOGEY OF ASSIMILATION

**Whoever does not recognize and champion the equality of nations and languages, and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality, is not a Marxist; he is not even a democrat. That is beyond doubt. But it is also beyond doubt that the pseudo-Marxist who heaps abuse upon a Marxist of another nation for being a "dissimilator" is simply a nationalist philistine.' (stressed in original) <sup>25</sup>**

Lenin

The various proponents of the Black nation formulation, especially the pristine defenders of the Black nation in the Black Belt, imply, if they do not state outright, that the denial of the existence of a Black nation is a white chauvinist heresy. They take the existence of a Black nation, not as something whose existence must be scientifically demonstrated, but as an *a priori* truth. Concrete evidence is of little interest to them because the existence of the Black nation is a political, one might almost say an emotional, imperative. It simply *must* exist.

This tendency is rooted in bourgeois nationalism and the petty bourgeois moralism that is the baggage of many white Marxist-Leninists. For the bourgeois nationalists who dress in Marxist garb, the postulation of the Black nation serves to justify separatist thinking and national aloofness. It serves as a left cover for anti-working class views.

This is clearest in the case of the CL which actually holds the remarkable position that the Black nation *must* secede and only on that basis can it consider unity with the proletariat of the former oppressor nation. Furthermore, the CL holds to the formulation that the mass of white workers are "bribed" by

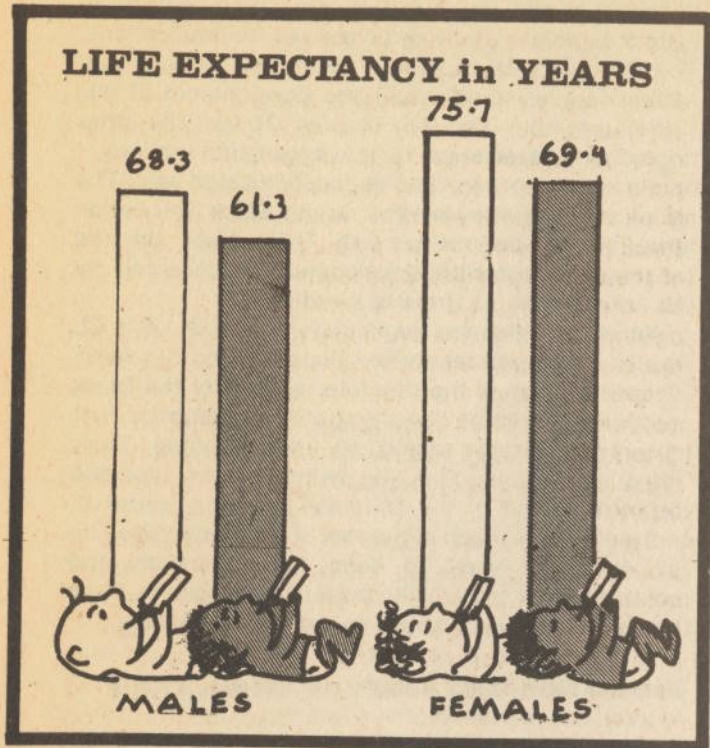


Fig. 17

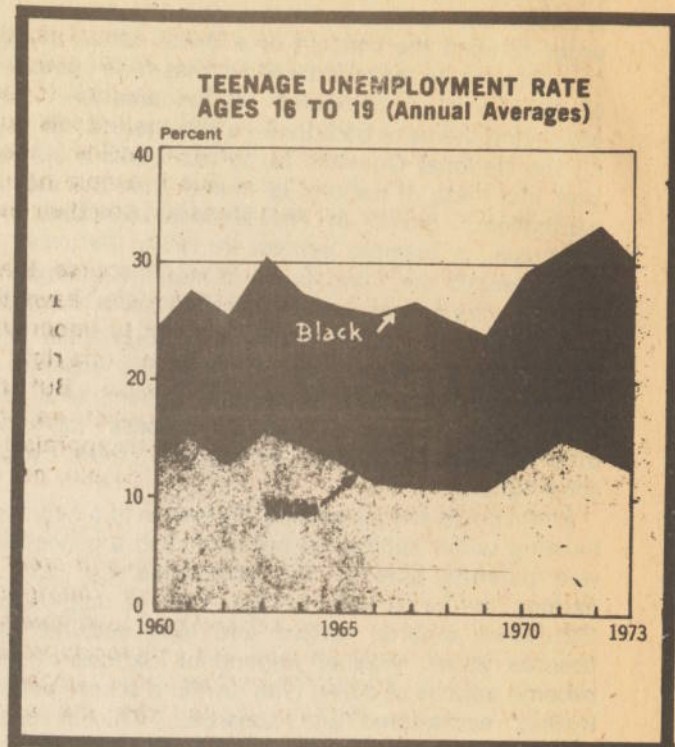


Fig. 18

imperialism. These ideas can hardly serve to further class unity—which is the overriding concern of Marxist-Leninists. In fact, these ideas are nothing more than the hostility and suspicion of the Black bourgeoisie toward the working class and proletarian internationalism, dressed up in Marxist-Leninist phraseology.

In the case of many white Marxist-Leninists, the attitude toward the question of the Black nation is influenced by an uncritical, tailist posture toward Black nationalism, a product of petty bourgeois guilt and paternalism. Tossing science aside, these "communists" talk in terms of Black people having "earned the right to self determination and their own state."

This misses the point entirely. Of course Black people, along with all oppressed people, have the right to national freedom and an end to imperialist oppression. They hardly have to "earn" this right as far as Marxist-Leninists are concerned. But the political concept of the struggle against national oppression must be based on a scientific appraisal of the actual character of the oppressed people, not on moral abstractions.

*Marxist-Leninists do not create nations in order to give them the right to self determination. The right to self determination is a correct and necessary demand not for all oppressed peoples, but only for oppressed nations. For national minorities this slogan is incorrect. It has nothing to do with the actual character of a national minority, nor does it correspond to their real interests.*

Stalin, in dealing with the Bundists who wished to create nations out of national minorities, made crystal clear the Bolshevik attitude on solving the national oppression of minorities:

**It is proposed to bind the dispersed minorities into a single national union. But what minorities want is not an artificial union but real rights in the localities they inhabit. What can such a union give them without complete democracy? On the other hand, what need is there for a national union when there is complete democracy?**

What is it that particularly agitates a national minority?

**A minority is discontented not because there is no national union but because it does not enjoy the right to use its native language. Permit it to use its native language and the discontent will pass of itself.**

**A minority is discontent not because there is no artificial union but because it does not possess its own schools. Give it its own schools and all ground for discontent will disappear.**

**A minority is discontented not because there is no national union but because it does not enjoy liberty of conscience, liberty of movement, etc. Give it these liberties and it will cease to be discontented.**<sup>26</sup>

Is it not similarly so with the Black people in the U.S. today? Is it not clear that the Black people want

not an artificial union but an end to discrimination and the achievement of full democracy. Even our dogmatists admit this is the case in the north where they concede the Black people are a national minority. But it is also the case in the Black Belt where Black people are also a national minority and where their conditions of life increasingly approximate those of Black people elsewhere in the U.S.

Our dogmatists will now undoubtedly say, "Yes, Black people want full equality and not secession but we must uphold the *right* to secede." Upholding the right to secede, they will explain, is the key to building class unity and building mutual trust. We think this is quite wrong. It would be true *only* if the Black people were in fact a nation, for then the gauge of the sincerity of Black people's allies would indeed be the willingness to uphold the right to self determination. But as a national minority, the mass of the Black people do not regard the defence of their "right" to secede from the U.S. as any litmus test of support for Black liberation. The right to self determination is at best abstract to them and is more often perceived as a demand injurious to their real interests.

The RU, in *Red Papers 5*, provides us with an example of how the upholding of the right of self determination serves to forge class unity. In their hypothetical case, a Black worker is approached by a member of the RNA who speaks to him of their demand for a Black Republic in the South. A white worker intervenes and says that Black people do not have a right to a Republic in the South. The RU concludes that the Black worker, while rejecting the RNA, will not unite with this white worker because he has denied the right of self determination to the Black people.

Certainly the Black worker in this particular case will not be drawn closer to the white worker because of the chauvinism displayed by this white worker, whose only interest was in defending the right of the white people to the land. But we doubt that the white worker's stand on the demand of the RNA for a Black Republic in the South has much at all to do with the actual development of class unity. The Black worker will judge the white worker on the basis of his actual practice in the fight for equality. If this white worker had said: "What we have to do is unite against the bosses and fight discrimination," and if his practice revealed a real commitment to that goal, the interests of class unity would have been advanced and the RNA would have been further isolated.

The RU argues that the right to self determination is not "at the heart of" the struggle for Black liberation, but it does represent a "current" in the struggle. We would agree. But what does this current represent? Is it not clear that this current represents the narrow nationalism and separatism of the Black bourgeoisie? It is an anachronistic expression of the disenfranchised Black bourgeoisie's drive for a market. The nation of Islam, the RNA and other groupings reflect this trend. Clearly Marxist-Leninists must fight this current.

If there was a Black nation it would be important to uphold the right of self determination precisely in

order to isolate these bourgeois nationalists. Here there is no contradiction between opposition to separatism while defending the right to secede.

But in the absence of a Black nation, the upholding of a right to self determination can only serve to confer legitimacy on the nationally exclusive aims of the bourgeois nationalists and strengthen their hold on the masses. The admission of the existence of a Black nation with a right to self determination buttresses the bourgeois and metaphysical thinking of these "nation builders."

*In an earlier period, Marxist-Leninists could counterpose the scientific conception of the Black nation to the abstract, ahistorical notions of the bourgeois nationalists like the Garveyites, the 49th stater and so forth. But today, when a scientific analysis compels us to conclude that there no longer is a Black nation, "Marxist-Leninists" who uphold this position are themselves forced into metaphysics—into bourgeois schemes of reconstituting nations or discovering nations of a new type.*

Thus the slogan of the right to self determination does not further class unity, but only serves to build unity with the nationalist-minded sections of the Black petty bourgeoisie. We do not oppose unity with this class—on the contrary, we believe that Marxist-Leninists should and must build unity with the Black petty bourgeoisie in the context of forging the United Front against Imperialism. But this must be unity built on a principled basis, that is, on the basis of the fight for full democracy for the Black people. Unity that is built on the sands of even backhanded support for the nationally exclusive and in fact utopian aspirations of the "nation builders" is opportunism pure and simple.

The Bolsheviks carried out the most consistent fight against bourgeois nationalism while upholding the right of nations to self determination. But at the same time, they fought the notion that peoples who were national minorities rather than nations had any right to secede that Marxists were bound to defend. Would the struggle of the Bolsheviks against the Bund and its scheme of cultural national autonomy been strengthened if they had upheld the "right" of the Jews of the Tsarist empire to secede and form a separate state? We do not think so—and neither did Lenin or Stalin. The whole weight of their writings against the Bund not only opposed the scheme of a separate national union, but argued that the material basis of a nation and thus a separate state did not exist. To speak of the right of a Jewish nation to secede or form a national union could only have played into the hands of the "Jewish reactionary phillistines."

The abandonment of Marxism-Leninism in favor of petty bourgeois moralism and nationalism is the essence of the dogmatist approach to the Afro-American national question. The "theoretical work" of the October League, perhaps the most influential of these groups currently, is a good case in point.

The method of the OL has nothing in common with historical materialism. Not only has the OL failed to do any real investigation of the concrete features of the Black Belt today, they consistently belittle such investigation as "bourgeois sociology" and mere "head counting." The OL apparently believes that parroting the Comintern resolutions and reprinting the works of Harry Haywood, the most recent of which was written almost twenty years ago, suffices to establish the correctness of their line.

Given as the OL is so vague and rhetorical pronouncements, it is never clear exactly how the OL does regard the economic and social developments that have occurred in the Black Belt. Their main aim seems to be to minimize the extent of these changes so as to make their denial of these implications more credible. In their resolution on the Afro-American National Question, the OL posits their opposition to what they call the "theory of productive forces" which allegedly holds that industrialization leads to the peaceful resolution of the national question. Actually, no one holds such a vulgar position as this which OL attributes to forces as diverse as the CPUSA and the RU. What we at least do hold is that industrialization *does alter*—(but certainly *not resolve*)—the character of the national question. The OL, while they are not so bold as to say so outright, in effect, deny that industrialization and the collapse of the plantation system have introduced *any* central changes in the character of the national question.

It is axiomatic to scientific socialism that we examine the changes that are constantly occurring in the system of production and take this as our starting point for the development of revolutionary theory. Lenin's seminal study of capitalist development in Russia provided the whole backdrop for analysing the correct strategy and tactics for the revolutionary movement. This work is worth examination for its thoroughness in studying the concrete features of economic development and its grasp of their implications.

But for the OL and its kindred spirits, this is no doubt bourgeois sociology and revisionism. The starting point for the OL is the apparently timeless and immutable truth as enunciated by the Comintern and Harry Haywood. In a speech given in Philadelphia, Michael Klonsky, National Chairman of the OL, made the revealing comment that we must approach the study of the concrete features of the Black people today "with a bias . . . a bias toward upholding their right to self determination." Since even Klonsky would acknowledge there can be no talk of self determination without the existence of a nation, he is saying that we must approach the study of the objective social character of Black people today with the bias that they are a nation.

This is a raw capitulation to nationalism. Of course, Marxist-Leninists do not approach any question neutrally. But our only bias in our unconditional identification with the working class. In the realm of the national question, this means we study in order to further the cause of Black liberation and working class unity.

Klonsky's bias that there needs to be a Black nation is necessarily a bias against assimilation. In order to preserve the conception of the Black nation it is necessary to pit oneself against the notion that the nation has been, is being or even can be assimilated. This is the essence of this bias. We can say of Mr. Klonsky what Lenin said of the Bundist Liebman:

**The question arises: what does our Bundist mean when he cries out to heaven against "assimilation"? He could not have meant the oppression of nations, or the privileges enjoyed by a particular nation, because the word "assimilation" here does not fit at all, because all Marxists, individually, and as an official, united whole, have quite definitely and unambiguously condemned the slightest violence against and oppression and inequality of nations. . . .**

**No, evasion is impossible here. In condemning "assimilation" Mr. Liebman had in mind, not violence, not inequality, and not privileges. Is there anything real left in the concept of assimilation, after all violence and all inequality have been eliminated?**

**Yet there undoubtedly is. What is left is capitalism's world historical tendency . . . to assimilate nations—a tendency which manifests itself more and more powerfully with every passing decade and is one of the greatest driving forces transforming capitalism into socialism. (stress in original) 27**

Klonsky and all the other advocates of nationalist phillistinism have pitted themselves against this "driving force" and like their Russian kinfolk, the Bundists, they will undoubtedly be driven over by the victorious proletariat.

The OL's mystification of the Black nation and their transformation of the right of self determination from a political demand into a moral absolute grows out of a fundamental error in their approach to the national question.

A correct handling of the national question, as we have emphasized earlier, must take into account the "two historical tendencies in the national question," that is, (1) the existence of national oppression and the struggle against it and (2) the amalgamation of peoples that is the consequence of capitalist economic development. Both tendencies, which Lenin notes are "universal laws of capitalism" must be addressed in

the Marxist program. On the one hand, we insist on the equality of nations and peoples and the "impermissibility" of national privilege of any kind, and on the other we insist on the "principle of internationalism and uncompromising struggle against contamination of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism, even of the most refined kind." 28 The OL, by denying this universal law of capitalism, the world historical tendency of capitalism to assimilate nations, can only lead to a mishandling of the national question theoretically and a liquidation of the struggle against bourgeois nationalism practically.

In the U.S. today the conception of a Black nation with a right to self determination is nationalist phillistinism. It is a blow against the progressive features of the trend toward assimilation and serves to strengthen the grip of bourgeois nationalism. For these reasons this line serves to divert the Black Liberation Movement from its central tasks—the fight for full democracy, the forging of unity of the working class, the uniting of the Black people with the proletariat and the achievement of the Socialist Revolution.

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The transformation of the Black people from a rural, peasant nation to an urban, overwhelmingly proletarian, national minority in no way diminishes the centrality of Black liberation. On the contrary, it enhances it. Today the question of Black liberation is more profoundly a part of the general question of proletarian revolution than ever before. The change in the class composition of the Black people has elevated the significance of the struggle against national oppression to the central element in the struggle for class unity. The dispersal and proletarianization of the Black people has deepened the objective stake of the Black people in the Socialist revolution. This represents yet another working out of Lenin's thesis that the tendency of capitalism to assimilate nations "is one of the greatest driving forces transforming capitalism into socialism." And this underlines the importance of defeating the dogmatists' attempts to drag the emerging Marxist-Leninist movement back into the past.