



The US left and black liberation

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Part 2: From the Comintern to the Socialist Workers Party (USA)

In the last issue John McKee described how American communists fought for a radical break with the US labour movement's traditions of racial segregation early this century. In this, the second part of his article, he examines the debates about black self-determination in the Comintern in the 1920s and 30s and their influence on the development of the post-war left's response to black nationalism.

The overwhelming opinion of Communist Party members in the USA in the mid-1920s was expressed in the words of John Pepper, one of the party's leaders:

There exists a Negro-Zionist movement in America which wishes to go to Africa, but thirteen million Negroes wish to remain in America and demand social equality.

Locked in struggle with the remnants of the declining 'back to Africa' movement, (led by Marcus Garvey) and beginning to win some cadres from it, the CPUSA did not believe the slogan of self-determination was appropriate.

But this position did not last long. As early as 1925 a group of black cadres from the American party were invited to meet with Stalin to discuss the 'Negro Question', as all anti-racists then called it. Otto Hall, one of these cadres, reported Stalin as saying:

The whole approach of the American party to the Negro question is wrong. You are a national minority with some of the characteristics of a nation.

Black people in the USA were measured against Stalin's famous check-list definition of a nation (language, territory, economy and culture). The common language was English. A 'territory', based in the southern states, was staked out by selecting counties with black majorities or large minorities. The common economic life was represented by the continued existence and predominance of share-cropping in this plantation area. And a common psychological make-up and culture emerged from the history of slavery and oppression.

These arguments were put to a sub-committee on the Negro Question to prepare a resolution for the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928.

Three different positions were argued against the proposed national self-determination line. One saw the Negro Question as, fundamentally, a racial one which had to be solved through the fight for full social and political equality. Another argued this was the case in the north but not in the south. A third advocated a Negro Soviet Republic. None of the three black delegates to the Congress spoke in favour of the new line. Two of them, James Ford and Otto Hall, spoke against it.

Nevertheless the adopted position declared:

In those regions of the south in which compact Negro masses are living it is essential to put forward the slogan of the right of self-determination for Negroes.

In a further resolution of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in October 1928 it was argued:

?The various forms of oppression of the Negro masses, who are concentrated mainly in the so-called ?Black Belt?, provide the necessary conditions for a national revolutionary movement among the Negroes . . . the Communist party must come out as the champion of the right of the Negro race for full emancipation. 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 amongst 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 a majority of the population.?2

By 1930 self-determination had become ?the chief slogan? and the Comintern was expecting the ?rapid approach? of a crisis in the Black Belt and the development of demands for complete state independence.

The impact on the American Party

The party cadres responsible for the work among black people were not enthusiastic about the new slogan for a number of reasons.

Most importantly the black people they were working with were not raising demands for self-determination, but for social equality, an end to discrimination and for the right to join trade unions. While the slogan was developed primarily for the blacks in the south (the majority) the Communist Party did little work in the south among the rural black population. The major centres of their work were the black proletariat in New York, Chicago and other northern cities.

While a ?national revolutionary movement? for a ?Black Republic? implied the possibility of seeking alliances with black petit-bourgeois movements and even bourgeois figures, the work of the party was in the opposite direction.

They were in sharp conflict with the Garveyites and had folded the African Black Brotherhood (see TI17), replacing it in 1925 with the launch of the American Negro Labor Congress. This aimed to organise within the black working class and strengthen the party amongst black workers. The Tenants? Leagues they established in Harlem consistently attacked black landlords (who owned a third of Harlem real estate) as well as white ones.

The Comintern?s serious attention to the black question did bring results. The black cadres were treated as equals in Moscow and mixed with fellow leading communists from Africa and Asia. The American Party was not free from racism and numerous complaints were brought to Moscow. These were treated seriously and the Comintern demanded they be rooted out of the party.

Because of this the black cadres were often the most enthusiastic supporters of the Comintern, regardless of its political degeneration under the Stalinist leadership. They fervently supported the ?Bolshevisation? of the party in 1925, which swept away the language federations formed by immigrant Communist workers and allowed fully integrated work by the party in Harlem for the first time.

After the Sixth Congress, five black members were elected to the Central Committee of the CPUSA, and a Negro Department was set up. The party put considerable resources into this work , with special issues of its press, national organisers and rotas of national and regional speakers for street meeting campaigns in Harlem.

While the party struggled around ?multi-racial? class issues, such as organising successful rent strikes and building tenants? leagues, unlike the Socialist Party it also put to the fore specific activities for the fight against racial discrimination. It mobilised days of protests against lynchings, campaigned against discrimination in employment and on work relief schemes.

Above all, it made an enormous breakthrough with its championing of the Scottsboro Boys, who were framed in the south on rape charges and threatened with the death penalty. Using International Labour Defense, and later the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the party established this case as a worldwide cause celebre and placed the spotlight on southern racism.

The case, initially ignored by the much more influential but moderate National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), established the party amongst a whole layer of the black masses as a champion against racial oppression. By the late twenties, using these methods, the party had recruited hundreds of black people, by the 1930s several thousand.

This work went a long way to enabling the communists to challenge the official racism of the labour movement. The problem was that it coincided with the Comintern's ultra-left 'third period'.

This meant that in practice the communists set up their own red unions and left the mass of white workers in the AFL unions in the hands of racist reactionary leaders.

Meanwhile, the party's work gave it the cadres that would be capable of rallying the millions of oppressed blacks in the south to a fight against Jim Crow³; except that its slogan of national self-determination was not activated in the south.

Last, but not least, the work created the conditions under which a genuine programme for black liberation could have been developed out of the lessons of black struggles in the USA. But the party had become bureaucratized, debate stifled, and the line of 'self-determination' had been handed down from on high and could only be changed in that same lofty place.

It was left to the Trotskyists to develop the discussion and elaborate a Marxist position on black liberation in the USA.

The Trotskyists and Self-Determination

The Trotskyist opposition leader James Cannon was present at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and supported its line on self-determination. When the Trotskyists were expelled from the CP in 1928 and set up the Communist League of America (CLA) delegates to the first CLA conference deleted the call for self-determination of Negroes on the basis that it needed further discussion.

Discussions took place in 1933 between Trotsky and Arne Swabeck, the secretary of the CLA, who was opposed to using the slogan. Another participant in the discussion was Albert Weisbord, a member of the Communist League of Struggle and supporter of the slogan. Trotsky came down clearly on the side of the self-determination slogan.

Swabeck argued Negroes had no separate language or special customs or religion and had become fully assimilated and 'Americanised':

'It is therefore our opinion that the American negroes are a racial minority whose positions and interests are subordinated to the class relations of the country and depending upon them.'⁴

Trotsky was not convinced. While agreeing that, 'the negroes are a race and not a nation?', he went on:

'Nations grow out of racial material under definite conditions. The Negroes in Africa are not yet a nation but they are in the process of forming a nation. We do not obligate the negroes to become a nation: whether they are is a question of their consciousness, that is what they desire and what they strive for.'⁵

Trotsky was concerned that opposition to self-determination could stem from a fear of offending chauvinist and racist white workers:

'99.9% of the American workers are chauvinists: in relation to the negroes they are hangmen as they are also towards the Chinese etc. It is necessary to make them understand that the American state is not their state and that they do not have to be the guardians of this state. Those American workers who say: 'The Negroes should separate if they so desire, and we will defend them against our American police' - those are revolutionists, I have confidence in them.'⁶

But blacks themselves were not raising the demand, argued Swabeck. Trotsky countered:

?If the Negroes do not at present demand self-determination it is of course for the same reason that the white workers do not yet advance the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Negroes have not yet got it into their heads that they dare carve out a piece of the great and mighty states for themselves.?7

In a later discussion with CLR James in 1939, both James and Trotsky agreed that the real content of the mass movement of Garveyism was a desire for resistance to racism. As James explained, they had:

? . . . not the slightest intention of going back to Africa, but were glad to follow a militant leadership.?8

Trotsky argued that in different circumstances (a Japanese invasion or the triumph of fascism) this desire could quickly turn into a real mass movement for self-determination.

Trotsky clearly believed that the whole question of self-determination for black people in the USA had great revolutionary potential. It might start as a movement for democratic demands and for equal rights, and might initially be led by the petit bourgeoisie. But it had the potential to move in the direction of permanent revolution, with the black masses becoming the most advanced section of all the oppressed and exploited in the USA in the struggle for revolution. This was why it was crucial to carry on a ceaseless struggle amongst white workers in support of such demands.

In the 1939 discussion with James, Trotsky made clear that he disagreed with the way the Communist Party positively advocated a separate state:

?I do not propose for the party to advocate . . . but only to proclaim our obligation to support the struggle for self-determination if the negroes themselves want it.?9

In retrospect, the slogans adopted in the 1930s by Trotsky and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP-US, a successor to the CLA) were correct. Because of the situation of blacks in the south - economic enslavement combined with a denial of democratic rights and a campaign of racist terror - a mass movement for self-determination was a real possibility. Such a battle against racism and Jim Crow could have had a powerful revolutionary dynamic.

History would, in a sense, decide whether the slogan of self-determination would have to be advocated by revolutionaries and not just defended as a right. The question for revolutionary Marxists after the Second World War was whether this perspective retained its validity.

It is fitting that the major Trotskyist debates on the relationship between the struggle for black liberation and the struggle for socialism should have taken place in the United States?a land founded on genocide of the native Americans, slavery and Jim Crow apartheid.

It is unfortunate, however, that many of these debates occurred during the degeneration of Trotskyism after 1951. For what they bequeath us is a series of incomplete positions, developed by the post-war leaders of the SWP into an abandonment of Marxism on the black question.

According to a resolution to the second conference of the SWP in 1939, the struggle itself would decide whether:

? . . . the Negroes in America are a national minority to which the slogan of self-determination applies . . . The raising or support of the slogan by the masses of Negroes will be the best and only proof required.?10

If the slogan was embraced by the black masses the SWP would support it, but until then it would seek other ways of developing the black struggle and linking it to the general class struggle for socialism.

In particular, the party agreed to champion the building of an independent black movement. A second resolution, ?The SWP and Negro Work?, argued:

?The SWP proposes that its Negro members, aided and supported by the party, take the initiative and collaborate with

other militant Negroes in the formation of a negro mass organisation devoted to the struggle for Negro rights. This organisation will NOT be either openly or secretly a periphery organisation of the Fourth International. It will be an organisation in which the masses of Negroes will be invited to participate on a working class programme corresponding to the day-to-day struggles of the masses of Negro workers and farmers.?

These basic positions, written by C.L.R. James, were a compromise with Trotsky's more positive attitude to self-determination but an affirmation of Trotsky's argument for a working class black organisation.

Fighting racism in World War Two

The adoption of these resolutions marked a positive turn in the work of the SWP. The party intervened vigorously in the March on Washington movement led by A. Philip Randolph, the black leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

During the war the SWP militants carried on this work fighting racism inside the army. When the government moved to suppress the SWP's paper and imprison its leaders, one observer noted that it was not just because of its anti-war line:

'The government's efforts to suppress the Militant during the war were frankly motivated, in part, by the SWP's irreconcilable struggle against all forms of white supremacy.'¹¹

This work did not result in the birth of a mass black movement, as James and Trotsky had hoped, but it did result in the transformation of the SWP from a predominantly white organisation into one in which almost 50% of the membership was black. This was a tremendous achievement.

But it meant that the cautious and incomplete analysis of the black question in the USA, and a decision on whether or not it could be viewed and treated as a national question, was not really built upon.

Agnosticism on this question seemed to have borne fruit. So, in the 1948 resolution - also drafted by James - agnosticism remained the guiding principle. The resolution, 'The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the US?', analysed the position of blacks within US society and explained the dynamics of their struggle for equality:

'The Negro people in all aspects of their social and cultural life are a part of the American people. At the same time it must be recognised that the Negro struggle is not identical with the proletarian movement towards socialism. It exists as a distinct movement of an oppressed minority within the country, possessing its own historical origins, special characteristics, forms of development and methods of action.'¹²

James went on to deride those who feared the development of a black movement, lest it upset the routinist assumptions of the labour movement, and argued:

'We say, number one, that the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and a validity of its own.'¹³

The Stalinists, by contrast, feared any independent movements as a threat to their ability to bureaucratically manipulate struggles.¹⁴ The white liberals saw the independent black struggle as a threat to themselves and likely to undermine their efforts at reforms enacted from above within capitalism.

The Trotskyists, however, recognised the explosive potential of the struggle for black equality, even if led by people other than themselves. They had no reason to fear any movement that developed in opposition to the ruling class and its racist system. The 1948 position maintained the revolutionary orientation.

Like its 1939 predecessor, however, the position dodged the important question - were black people in the USA a nation?

By 1948 this might well have seemed less important. The process of migration that occurred before World War Two

was speeded up. The concentration of black people in the rural south - the so called 'black belt' where 75% of the black population of the USA lived prior to 1940 - was being undermined by the process of migration that commenced during and after the war.

The roots of oppression

By 1964 the proportion of blacks in the south was down to 54% of the black population of the US.¹⁵ The great ghettos of the cities in the north and west were creating a diversified black population, increasingly urban and proletarian.

Despite white racism in the cities, contact between black and white workers was growing. To some extent this excuses the agnosticism of the 1948 resolution. But only to some extent. For the ideas in that resolution of an independent black struggle, unified despite the increasing diversity of the black communities, based on the existence of the black population as a distinct oppressed minority, begged the question - nationally oppressed or racially oppressed?

The question is not academic. If the oppression of black people in the USA had reached the level of national oppression, if a black national consciousness had been created out of the misery of slavery, segregation and urban poverty, then a revolutionary national struggle had the power to explode the USA - geographically as well as socially.

While fighting for working class independence, leadership and methods of struggle as the only way of ensuring a progressive victory in the national struggle, revolutionaries would be obliged to make tactical alliances with those who called for a separate black state, including bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaders.

Despite the best efforts of revolutionary socialists, such a movement might not have assumed the form, originally envisaged by Trotsky, of a workers' and poor farmers' movement, but rather, of a cross-class movement - all classes in the black community striving for national liberation. Even a movement for a bourgeois democratic goal would deserve the support of revolutionary socialists against attempts by a white racist state to deny it.

To assert, however, that the black question was fundamentally about racial oppression, and that racial oppression can only be eliminated with the destruction of its material base, imperialist capitalism, poses a different set of tasks for Marxists.

The fight for an integrated anti-racist working class movement becomes crucial, as only a workers' revolution can rid society of racial oppression. If the dynamic is primarily racial, if black nationalists represent not a developing national consciousness but an illusory utopia, then the whole relationship between revolutionaries and the demands and struggles of black nationalist organisations has to change.

This was a gaping hole in the 1948 resolution. At the time it did not cause any ill effects. But by 1954 the birth of a mass civil rights movement among black people meant the issue had to be resolved.

Civil Rights

Led by the reformist NAACP the movement commenced a struggle against segregation in education, winning a Supreme Court ruling against such segregation in four states and in Washington DC. White reaction to the ruling, led by the Ku Klux Klan, prompted vigorous black struggle.

Under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. the black population of Montgomery, Alabama, launched a 381 day boycott of transport in protest at segregation.

In the sixteen years that followed the black movement went through several transformations. It fragmented into numerous movements. And its leaders ranged from the reformist King, through the revolutionary nationalist Malcolm X, to the Maoist influenced Black Panthers.

Was the black struggle a national one or an anti-racist one? On the answer to this question hinged important tactics that Trotskyists should take, not just to the black struggles that were occurring, but to the various leaderships that were

competing to direct those struggles.

Fraser vs Breitman

In a 1955 internal bulletin of the SWP Richard Fraser wrote a document entitled, 'For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Struggle?'. This document challenged the SWP's traditional agnosticism on whether or not the black population were a national minority, and argued against the traditional SWP acceptance that, if the black masses demanded it, then the SWP would support the slogan for self-determination. He wrote:

'The Negro question is not a national question because it lacks the fundamental groundwork for the development of nationalism; an independent system of commodity exchange, or to be more precise, a mode of life which would make possible the emergence of such a system . . . The Negro question is a racial question: a matter of discrimination because of skin colour, and that's all.'¹⁶

For Fraser, this meant that self-determination was never an issue for black people in the USA and never should be allowed to become one. Nationalism pandered to white prejudice since it tended to confirm the argument - albeit in a positive way - in favour of segregation. He argued that class was the fundamental driving force of the black question, because of its origins in slavery.

Fraser insisted this was far more important in determining the character of black oppression in the USA than the national origins of black people in Africa:

'The goals which history has dictated to them are to achieve complete equality through the elimination of racial segregation, discrimination, and prejudice. That is, the overthrow of the race system. It is from these historically conditioned conclusions that the Negro struggle, whatever its forms, has taken the path of the struggle for direct assimilation. All that we can add to this is that these goals cannot be accomplished except through the socialist revolution.'¹⁷

The weakness of Fraser's position lay in his elimination of consciousness as a factor in the national struggle. He excluded, in principle, the possibility of racism in the US forging a national consciousness that could give birth to a national movement. Fraser was on firm ground when it came to contemporary trends. His mistake was to read back into the whole of black history this position.

To have excluded from the outset the possible development of a national consciousness as one line of development reveals a mechanical, undialectical and, potentially, sectarian attitude to the national question. It eliminates the subjective factor from the national question. Yet it was precisely the subjective factor that Trotsky regarded as the one thing that could lend the black question a national character in the US.

Despite this weakness Fraser was right to insist that it was time for the SWP to come clean. Had the struggle decided the fate of the black question, as the 1939 resolution suggested? And if so, what had it decided?

Trotsky's prognosis about the possible development of the US black population towards nationhood had been disproved by events. US capitalism had not only integrated black people into the workforce, and dispersed them across the nation in so doing, it had imparted into their consciousness the goals of equality.

Every significant black struggle was a fight for equality, a fight against discrimination, a fight against their status as second class citizens of the USA. Trotsky's prognosis about the national question in the 1930s no longer applied in the 1950s. Struggle, and objective developments in US capitalism, had decided the fate of the black question, and Fraser was right - it was a question of racial oppression, not national oppression.

In contrast to this analysis, faced with the growth of the civil rights movement, and its later nationalist offshoots, the SWP decided that the struggle had created a black nation - or more precisely that it had created black nationalism - and that was just fine.

Centrism tailing nationalism

For by this time the SWP had ceased to be any sort of revolutionary party. Along with the rest of the Fourth International¹⁸ it had undergone a profound degeneration.

In place of the revolutionary party as the leadership of the class struggle, it hunted the colonial and semi-colonial world for 'unconscious Trotskyists', like Castro in Cuba and Ben Bella in Algeria. An assortment of revolutionary nationalists and left Stalinists became the objects of worship. The reflection of this on US soil was the black movement.

When militant nationalists like Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panthers arrived on the scene, the SWP discovered its very own versions of unconscious Trotskyism. Its theoretical gap was plugged with grotesque opportunism towards any and every black leader.

In 1963 the SWP updated its position with a new resolution on the black question, 'Freedom Now'. The vestiges of the 1939 and 1948 resolutions that had championed revolutionary integrationism were expunged. Integrationism and separatism were given equal billing:

'Negro nationalism is progressive because it contributes to the creation of such an independent Negro movement. It will remain progressive so long as it fulfils that function, whether the struggle be fought along integrationist or separatist lines.'¹⁹

In part, the SWP's espousal of nationalism and separatism flowed from their correct understanding that part of the impulse towards separatism represented a rejection of white US values.

But this was only part of the impulse, a part that would have to be sensitively and patiently dealt with by a revolutionary party fighting for a class perspective. Another part of the impulse, in fact a very big part of it, was the leadership of the black movement.

A section of that leadership was the intensely separatist, and in many respects reactionary, Black Muslim movement of Elijah Muhammad. Their separatism had little to do with the desires of the black masses and everything to do with their utopian project of creating a separate black Muslim state.

Overlooking the reactionary aspects of such a theocratic project, the SWP defended this brand of separatism, only to tail obediently behind Malcolm X's more sophisticated (and revolutionary nationalist inspired) separatism when he split from the Muslims.

The same pattern of tailing any radical black movement saw the SWP becoming cheer leaders for the Panthers, the Black Power movement and just about anybody else they could find.

Underlying this abject capitulation to separatism lay the party's interpretation of its own historic position on nationalism. When the black struggle elevated nationalist leaders to the fore the SWP concluded that the struggle was a national struggle after all. Therefore - according to the SWP's 'development' of Trotsky's views on national struggles - the question of independent working class leadership could be held in abeyance unless and until the national struggle had run its course.

Even if the struggle were a national struggle the SWP's position on the nationalist leaders would have been wrong. Trotskyists seek concretely to connect any struggle for self-determination with working class overthrow of capitalism. Support for self-determination and, when necessary, advocacy of independence, allows socialists maximum leverage to split workers from their bourgeois leaders.

But Trotskyists seek to bring the working class to the head of any national struggle so that it can be connected and carry over into the fight to overthrow capitalism. If the independence struggle were to fall short of this then it would be the black working class who would remain exploited and oppressed as a class and national freedom will not deliver the

social gains they expected at the outset.

The SWP abandoned this approach but also had to avoid embracing Stalinism with its entire logic of completely subordinating the class struggle to the national one. Hence, their centrist alternative, which was to confuse the national and socialist aspects of the struggle of black Americans.

George Breitman was called upon to theorise this:

Those black nationalists who slight the socialist element inherent in their movement commit an error comparable to those who today slight black nationalism. Here the colonial revolution they feel kinship with has something to teach them. Cuba and Algeria have recently shown how a nationalist, democratic, revolutionary mass movement can, through conclusions derived from direct experience in struggle with imperialism and its agents, grow over into a consciously socialist movement, party and government. We believe that this dynamic of permanent revolution will be operative in the evolution of American black nationalism too.²⁰

Black nationalism is inherently socialist, according to Breitman. This could not be further from the truth.

The black nationalism of Elijah Muhammad did not have so much as a whiff of socialism about it, notwithstanding Malcolm X's origins in this movement. Breitman also fails to differentiate between types of black nationalism - that of the Muslims and that of the later Malcolm X.

For him the nationalism of an oppressed people is, in and of itself, progressive. According to Breitman, Cuba and Algeria were proof positive that national and democratic struggles automatically lead to socialist movements and regimes arising.

In fact, as is doubly clear from the vantage point of the 1990s, Cuba demonstrated only the ability of Stalinism to create a bureaucratic workers' state without any independent political rule or control by the mass of the working class.

And the history of Algerian capitalism since independence proves not the spontaneously 'socialist' character of national movements in oppressed nations, but nothing more than the ability of such movements and regimes temporarily to put on a left face.

Neither proved that socialism could triumph without a revolutionary party. Indeed, the subsequent development of both countries proves the exact opposite.

The dynamic of permanent revolution requires a party and programme if it is to lead to a socialist resolution of the crisis.

It is not automatic. If it was there would be no need for a revolutionary party to fight for it against bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists who direct the struggle away from socialist goals.

By the end of the 1960s the SWP, having embraced separatism as well as black nationalism as inherently socialist, believed that a separate black party was both necessary and desirable.

A black revolutionary party?

In 1967 the SWP adopted a new resolution calling for an independent black political party. What should be the class basis of this party?

This was answered not in the unambiguous form of a working class programme, but in what Breitman termed the 'proletarian-socialist in tendency' character of black nationalism²¹. This was how the SWP put it:

Similarly the Socialist Workers Party favours the formation of an independent party uniting Afro-Americans in political struggle for their just rights and freedom.

It believes that black people have the democratic right to decide their own destiny and that, without such a political instrument, they cannot effectively advance their immediate well being or attain their ultimate goals.²²

This is an admission that the supposed revolutionary party of the US working class, the SWP, could not offer revolutionary leadership to the black masses under any circumstances.

It is to concede that a non-class based party (or more accurately a party led by representatives of the bourgeoisie and staffed by the petit bourgeoisie - there can never be non-class based parties) is the only way that black people can secure their liberation in the USA.

It is to accept the nationalists' contention that a socialist revolution, led by an integrated revolutionary party and carried out by an integrated working class, cannot eradicate racism and black oppression. And it is totally wrong on all counts.

Conclusion

For revolutionaries in the USA today learning the lessons from both the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers' Party's experiences in fighting racism and developing a revolutionary answer to racial oppression is vital.

For by avoiding the mistakes they fell into, and by assimilating and developing the best contributions both parties made in their revolutionary periods, a fighting programme for black liberation can be developed anew.

And that is an urgent task for revolutionaries in the USA, where the fight for black liberation remains of strategic importance to the struggle for socialism.

Notes

Footnotes

1 The same commission developed the slogan for 'an independent native South African Republic' which was opposed by the leader of the South African Communist Party, Bunting.

2 The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents Vol II Jane Degras London 1971

3 A nickname for US state laws passed following the defeat of the 'reconstruction' after the Civil War. These laws introduced segregation and severely restricted civil rights for black people.

4 On Black Nationalism and Self Determination, p 22, Leon Trotsky, New York, 1978

5 ibid p 24

6 ibid p29

7 ibid p29

8 Trotsky, op. cit. p40

9 ibid p46

10 'The Right of Self-Determination and the Negro in the United States of North America?', in The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party, p355, New York, 1982

11 ibid p 359 - emphasis and capitals in original

12 Negroes on the March, Daniel Guerin, London 1956, p131

13 Published in Fourth International, New York, May-June 1950

14 ibid

15 In the mid 1930s the ultraleftism of the 'third period' gave way to the Stalinist 'popular front' strategy, which meant alliances with 'progressive' capitalists. Thus they tied themselves to white liberal and moderate black oppositions to racism.

16 T Draper, The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism, London, 1969, p144. By 1980 this proportion was down to 33%.

17 Reprinted in, What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism versus Black Nationalism, Spartacist League, New York, 1978

18 ibid p3

19 ibid p7

20 The SWP was in the International Committee in the 1950s, but then fused with the International Secretariat in 1963 to become part of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International - USFI.

21 SWP Discussion Bulletin, vol 24, no 30, July 1963

22 Reprinted in Marxism and The Negro Struggle, New York, 1965, p 42

23 Fifty Years of World Revolution, New York 1971, p208

24 The Case for an Independent Black Party, New York, 1968, p23

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