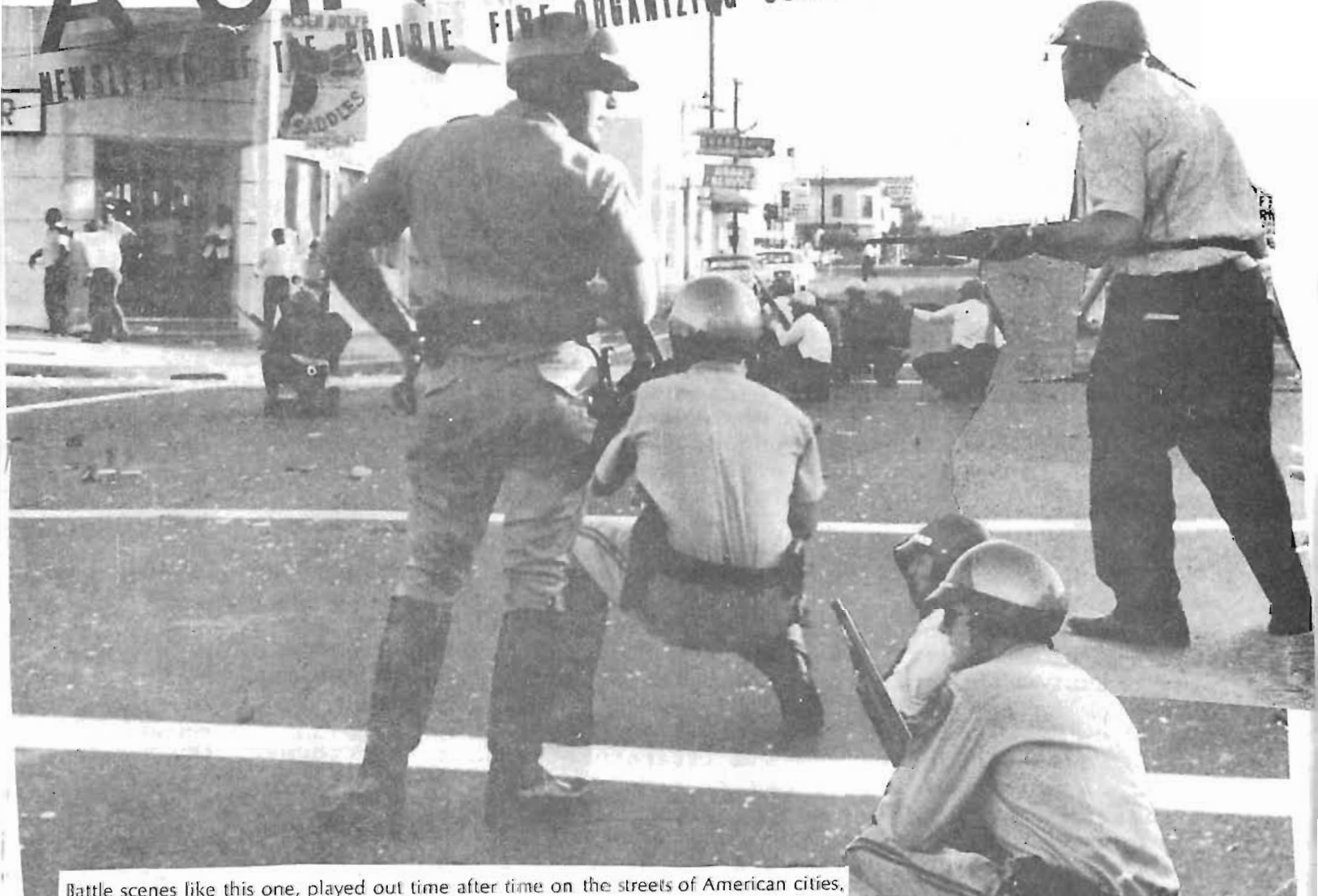


# A SINGLE SPARK

FALL 1976

THE PRAIRIE FIRE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE



Battle scenes like this one, played out time after time on the streets of American cities.

Here police face suspected snipers at a San Francisco intersection

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- THE WHITE OPPRESSOR NATION
- THE NATIONAL QUESTION: SOME RECENT POSITIONS
- RECTIFICATION AND PFOC'S ANALYSIS OF JULY 4TH
- JULY 4th: NATIONAL EVALUATION
- JULY 4TH: NEW YORK CHAPTER
- RECTIFICATION IN BOSTON: THE ANTI-RACISM COMMITTEE
- A REPORT ON THE NATIVE AMERICAN TREATY CONFERENCE

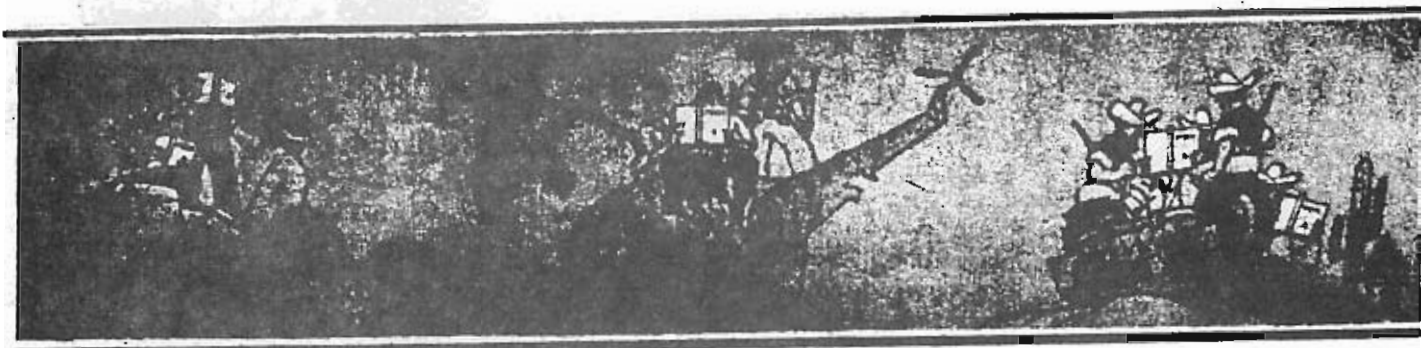
The second issue of our newsletter marks a significant step forward in the process of rectification. Our ability to address the concepts of oppressor and oppressed nations, to change our practice and organizing methods, to analyze coalition work based on revolutionary anti-imperialism has definitely strengthened.

It is right to say that at this time, revolutionary politics and orientation have dominance in our organization. Through self-criticism and struggle with friends and comrades, study that explains the significance of the wrong line, the drafting of a political statement, we can make a positive contribution to the development of a truly Marxist/Leninist line in the oppressor nation working class and left. Leadership that draws strength from revolutionary anti-imperialism and accountability to the class and oppressed peoples have redefined our notions of leadership in general.

This does not mean that rectification is linear, or that it is over. While it is critical to mark advances, imperial society, white and male supremacy are material forces struggling against revolution at every turn. Now that we collectively have more knowledge -- the struggle becomes more intense, not less so. This helps to explain the role of the newsletter as a forum for the development of revolutionary politics.

Struggle, response, disagreement, are all part of making things happen. Initiative and creativity are demanded of us all the time. These things are productive only when content is revolutionary or moving in that direction. The newsletter, just like our political statement, is a contribution to the struggle against the opportunism and chauvinism that has characterized the white left and the beginning of PFOC.

Bourgeois journalism and literature tried to put forward the notions of "value-free ideas," "ideas removed from actions," everything is equal." At the same time it is a powerful tool to deceive, lie, and justify incredible terrorism and warmongering in the name of "the free world." Here we break with all pretenses and share ideas and positions in unity against imperialism -- this is the political context for all our work. It is the same for our newsletter.



Too much of what tried to pass for Marxist-Leninist analysis on the "national question" actually reproduces a bourgeois sociological and anthropological method of exclusively, but painstakingly, analysing the oppressed. The oppressor is never investigated, never subjected to scrutiny, measured, weighed and categorized, inspected and rejected, as are the oppressed. This is no accident, because it serves to hide and shield the oppressor. For example, racism is viewed as a "problem" even among the bourgeoisie; so they commission the likes of Gunnar Myrdal, or Patrick Moynihan to investigate the oppressed, without reference to their problematic relationship to the oppressor. The result of this of course is the protection of the enemy, and the "discovery" of the root of the problem inherently imbedded among the oppressed themselves.

Many of the current analyses of the national question proceed along the same lines. With an exceptional acuteness and verbosity around the Black national question, various "Marxist-Leninists" set out to prove that there is no Black nation, or that if there is one, the Leninist revolutionary essence of the analysis is absent. To reveal the Leninist essence of the analysis of imperialism and the national question, we must re-establish a proper understanding of the conception of the oppressor nation, how it relates to oppressed nations, and how all this applies to the US.

## WHAT IS A NATION?

When discussing any question we must make what we mean clear, and try to base our analysis on scientifically valid concepts. But these concepts, in the Marxist theory of knowledge, do not fall from the sky, but rather are the accurate and scientific formulation through theory, of the direct and indirect experience and practice of changing the world.

When we discuss the national question, one of the invariably first questions is, "What is a nation?" It is not necessary to go into the history of the Russian empire in order to show that the Bolsheviks answered this in different ways at different times. There is of course Stalin's definition, from Marxism and the National Question, which was written in 1913:

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture. 1

But this definition was not always used. It was written in 1913, as Staline himself in 1925 admits, "before imperialist war, when the national question was not yet regarded by Marxists as a question of world significance, when Marxists' fundamental demand for the right to self-determination was regarded not as part of the proletarian revolution, but as part of the bourgeois-democratic revolution." 2

In an extremely important, and excellent article by James Blaut, called "Are Puerto Ricans a 'National Minority'?" Part II, he proves that Stalin's definition of what a nation is corresponds only to the period of rising capitalism and the bourgeois revolutions. He argues convincingly that we must reject that definition in favor of Lenin's revolutionary analysis of imperialism. Says Lenin, "In this age of imperialism, it is particularly important for the proletariat and the Communist International to establish the concrete economic facts and to proceed from concrete realities, not from abstract postulates, in all colonial and national problems." 3

What is different about Lenin's theory of imperialism? Stalin's definition of what a nation is is unilinear, describing what is the purported development of all nations: from feudal dispersion, to national consolidation in the period of rising capitalism, to a period of the breakdown of national distinctions under mature capitalism (which is what they called it before they developed the theory of imperialism) and national assimilation and amalgamation, and finally socialism. But under imperialism, all nations are not the same, and will not smoothly develop in the way indicated by Stalin. Imperialism globalized the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, that between social production and private appropriation, and changed the oppression of nations, ushering in, in Lenin's words, "... the era of the oppression of nations on a new historical basis."

First, what is the cardinal idea underlying our theses?  
It is the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations.<sup>4</sup>

The characteristic feature of imperialism consists in the whole world, as we now see, being divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, the latter possessing colossal wealth and powerful armed forces.<sup>5</sup>

...the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the essence of imperialism, and is deceitfully evaded by the social chauvinists and Kautsky.<sup>6</sup>

This is what is new in Leninism that makes Stalin's definition incomplete and outdated. The rise of imperialism converted the national question from the question of various (almost all white) nations in eastern Europe to the world wide national colonial question, involving the peoples of color, the immense majority of the world. What constitutes a nation in the colonies became less of a question of definitions, or "abstract postulates" for Lenin, but rather the central question became how to unite the national liberation movements of the colonies with the world proletarian revolution for the final and total destruction of imperialism.

#### WHAT ARE OPPRESSED AND OPPRESSOR NATIONS?

Oppressed nations are groups of people, nations that are super-exploited by imperialism. The material basis of this national oppression is rooted in economic and political structural inequalities between oppressor and oppressed nations. Oppressed nations are discriminated against on the basis of their nationality. They get less jobs, are first fired and last hired, constituting a permanent reserve army of labor, which keeps all wages down. In the work force they get the most undesirable jobs -- the lowest paying, most seasonal with least security, most technologically obsolete and without future, most dangerous -- in short, oppressed nations of people work in the lowest stratum of jobs. For equal jobs, they receive lower pay.

These economic inequalities are buttressed and made possible by political oppression. Since the oppressor nation has a monopoly on political power, all the apparatuses of the state are used to oppress nations. The army, police, intelligence agencies, government institutions, etc. -- every social institution is pressed into the service of oppressing nations. Police terror, more arrests, less bail, more and longer convictions, prisons; housing discrimination, non-education and mis-education; poorer health care when it exists at all.

But the point of this article would be missed if we stop there. In addition to the state and the institutions it controls, there is yet another agent of the oppression of nations: the oppressor nation. Even the workers of the oppressor nation "help oppress other nations" as Lenin points out (The Question of Peace). National oppression takes many forms, including pogroms, lynchings, terror, rape, beatings, bombings, etc. It is a generalized and permanent apparatus of social control and domination.

These material inequalities between oppressor and oppressed nations on top of the basis of competition among the workers, is the material basis of the ideology of national chauvinism and racism. This ideology impels the workers of the oppressor nation to oppress nations in an effort to protect relative material privilege.

While the super profits from the super-exploitation of oppressed nations are used to bribe a labor aristocracy (thereby creating the principle bulwark of chauvinism among oppressor nation workers) relative privilege is built into the system itself and all oppressor nation workers stand in this relatively privileged position. Therefore, the ideology of chauvinism and racism permeates all members of the oppressor nation. This is a key to the continued existence of national oppression and class exploitation.

It is also important to note that this is a relative privilege. The fact that there is national oppression and a large reserve army of labor serves as a drag on all wages. It is in the material interests of workers of the oppressor nation to struggle against the short range relative privileges because a united class struggle will bring a new society and a better life for all. Even in the short run it is in the material interests of oppressor nation workers to fight national oppression and privilege: united trade unions bring higher wages. lower unemployment among the oppressed weakens the drag on wages, etc.

The essence of national chauvinism and racism is class collaboration. When oppressor nation workers identify with their own bourgeoisie, as part of the same nation, rather than with the exploited and oppressed, it is class collaboration. As Lenin points out, this is the main content of opportunism in the communist and workers' movements.

The only way to struggle for unity of the exploited and oppressed is for workers of the oppressor nation to struggle:

- against - all forms and manifestations of national oppression
  - the ideology and practice of national chauvinism and racism
  - all the institutions of white supremacy
  - all forms of national privilege for the oppressor nation;
- for - self-determination for oppressed nations, political power over land
  - national equality in all respects
  - special compensatory demands that arise out of national oppression.

## CAN THERE BE OPPRESSED NATIONS WITHOUT AN OPPRESSOR NATION?

We must look at different historical examples.

Colonialism. When colonies were held as trade posts and raw material sources in the early period of colonization, the main colonial policy was not to settle, but only to maintain a foothold on the coast. In this case, the members of the colonizing country that were in the colony were direct exploiters and oppressors, members of the metropolitan oppressor nation.

Settler colonies. With settler colonies it becomes clearer that the oppressed nation calls forth the existence of an oppressor nation. The white majority regimes of southern Africa are clearly oppressor nations. Even those in the US who deny the existence of an oppressor nation here, admit that the whites in South Africa are an oppressor nation. All white people there are part of the force that dominates and oppresses the Africans. Clearly all whites there benefit, share in the distribution of surplus value extracted from the Africans.

In Israel, all Zionists oppress the Palestinians. It is an integrated system of social control and domination in which even the Jewish workers have a part. They participate in expropriating the lands and homes of the Palestinians.

Neo-Colonialism. With classical neo-colonialism the direct presence of an oppressor nation in the immediate domination of the oppressed nation is not necessary for the system of domination to work. This can only take place usually if there is a sufficient development of a dependent bourgeoisie, and a fairly sizeable privileged stratum of petty bourgeoisie and state bureaucracy to be able to dominate the masses. But in any case, the oppressor nation, though not directly present, is indirectly present. The arms, police training, intelligence and anti-subversive campaigns are all provided by the oppressor nation. But the fact remains that in this specific case the direct presence of an oppressor nation is not necessary.

Other divisions are utilized, however, in a neo-colonial relationship to create a section that aids in the oppression of the more heavily super-exploited sectors. Religious divisions are often used, as well as ethnic or tribal divisions.

Even in a direct colony, such as Northern Ireland, which is not an English settler colony (on the contrary, the Irish are forced to migrate to England for jobs), in addition to the direct presence of an English occupation army, there is a Protestant majority which stands in the same relatively privileged relationship to the superexploited Catholic minority, as an oppressor nation does to an oppressed nation. In defense of that relative privilege practically the whole Protestant population (even though they are Irish) is mobilized in a political alliance with the oppressor nation to keep the Catholics down. In this instance the Protestants, to a large extent, become national nihilists, renouncing their own nationality for an identification with England.

In Syria, the Christian Maronite minority stands in that relatively privileged relationship to the Moslems, entering a political alliance with French and US imperialism and Zionism to oppress the masses of Moslems.

So, history teaches us that the bourgeoisie tries to mobilize whole sectors of populations (not just 'tiny labor aristocracies'), usually based on nations, but on other divisions as well, to help oppress the super-exploited sectors. The mechanism of this is the system of relative privilege, combined with ideological hatred of the oppressor for the oppressed.

Multi-national states. So far, the only social formations that don't contain oppressor nations we have seen are some forms of colonial countries (although all of these have at least an active, strictly military presence from the oppressor nation), mainly those that are not settler colonies, and neo-colonies proper. But in multi-national states, usually one nation is hegemonic. This may or may not mean that it is an oppressor nation. This depends on the relationship of that state to other states. For example, the Russian empire was a multi-national imperialist state, with the Russians as an oppressor nation. China, on the other hand, argues that all of China was an oppressed semi-colony, and that therefore, though Great Han privilege existed, they did not constitute an oppressor nation in relation to the minority nationalities. This may or may not be true, depending on the concrete reality. If the Great Han nation entered an alliance with the imperialists against the minority nationalities, it would resemble the Protestants in Northern Ireland. But that was less the case since the imperialists mainly came into contact with Hans, who constituted the majority of the population, and were an oppressed nation in relation to imperialism.

In a multi-national state that is not an oppressed colony, that in fact is an imperialist monopoly capitalist state, the hegemonic nationality is structurally in a relationship of oppressor toward the oppressed. In such a multi-national state, is it possible to have an oppressed nation without there being an oppressor nation? Can the dominant nationality not be a nation? If so, what is it? A national minority? Of what? Some other social category? Can it stand in a privileged position and not struggle to defend those privileges? Can it be neutral toward the oppressed nations while the bourgeoisie does all the oppressing, and not "help oppress other nations" as Lenin said?

In the United States, this is a question about white people. Some would have it that there is the white bourgeoisie and oppressed nations, and then the white workers, who are in no national category. Are they part of a white nation? Even those who say that there are no oppressed nations, only national minorities, must answer the question, "If a national minority is assimilating, what is it assimilating into?" Is there a multi-racial, multi-colored single American nation, as in Cuba? If so, then there are no national minorities, because they would already have been assimilated. If not, then they can only be "assimilating" into white people, the white nation. Or is it that white people are all national minorities: Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Jews, Polish-Americans, etc.? The process of cultural and linguistic assimilation of the white European minorities has long since been an accomplished fact, along with massive cross marriage and ethnic fusion. Extremely small minorities of Europeans still exist but are actively and willingly assimilating, since they are constituted mainly by newly arrived immigrants.

To answer all these questions in a Marxist Leninist analysis, we must review the history of white people in the US.

#### SOME HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WHITE NATION

The first permanent settlement of European colonists in what is now the United States, was in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. It was an English colony, the colonists members of the English nation. Landing on Native American land, they constituted part of the English oppressor nation. They immediately instituted indentured servitude and convict labor. Even these servants were part of the English oppressor nation, in relation to the Indians.

After trying to enslave the Indians (which failed for a variety of reasons), in 1619 the first African slaves were brought to Virginia. From 1619 to 1685, Africans never constituted more than 5% of the population. Together with white bond-servants Africans united against the Anglo-American planters. This culminated in Bacon's Rebellion, which threatened the rule of the planters. In order to counter black-white solidarity, slave codes were enacted that put severe penalties on white servants for conspiring with black slaves, for intermarriage, especially for white women. To split black and white bond-servants, the planters extended privileges to white servants. In order to control the increasing black population (that began to rise after 1685) there was a demand for new white immigrants to serve in the militias to help oppress the slaves.

Many of these new bond servants, a majority in the 18th century, were Irish, Scots, or Germans. So even here there was an aspect of national oppression by the English and Anglo-American ruling class. But even given this contradiction, the privileges were granted to whites on "race" lines (one cannot yet speak of a white nation). Slavery came to be defined along the color line. The intent was to make "black" equal "slave". Primitive theories of race were employed to make those with the least little bit of "African blood" slaves.

With a vision of being free some day, and a hope for land, the white indentured servants were willing to identify with the planters against the black slaves. For the English bond-servants, this was national identification; for the Germans, Irish, and Scots it was racial identification and the beginning of the forging of a white national consciousness. The alternative to this would be punishment or revolution.

As Amilcar Cabral, writing of the peoples of Guinea-Bissau (who were very divergent, speaking 23 languages, ranging from class to classless societies), spoke of the forging of the nation in the process of national liberation itself, so an oppressor nation is forged in the process of oppressing other nations.

This was a crucial decision by the planters. They could have chosen to enslave white people. They had no qualms about it. But it would have been impossible to manage it, to maintain social control and domination. They chose to extend a minimum of democratic and economic privileges to "whites" and it worked.

"The white-skin privileges of the poor free whites were simply reflexes of the disabilities imposed on the Negro slave: To move about freely without a pass; to marry without any upper-class consent; to change employment; to vote in elections in accordance with the laws on qualifications; to acquire property; and last, but not least, in this partial list, the right of self-defense." 7

Upon this material base was built the culture of white supremacy. This begins to define the historical uniqueness of national oppression in the US. It was not just national chauvinism as a German toward a Pole, but racism, a full blown theory of racial inferiority of Black people. All the primitive theories were employed to convince all whites to oppress all Blacks. Modern racism was born.

The Biblical curse of Ham, in which God declares all Blacks - as descendants of Ham - to be destined to be servants, was part of the ideological apparatus in the creation and reproduction of the oppressor/oppressed nations.

Theories of the chain of being and crude Darwinism were used to show that Blacks were not humans, or later that they were humans, but of an inferior type. Treatises on the skulls and brains of Black people were cranked out, "proving", now scientifically, that Blacks are inferior. The very category "race" is pregnant with racist overtones, implying that Blacks were a different race of people from the white (human) race. This was a new phenomenon in world history; never before had one people attempted to dehumanize and humiliate another so completely. And the effects on white people were to animalize themselves, to destroy all human sensibility, to become sadistic brutes, enslaving a whole people, convincing themselves that the creatures they were talking to and who were talking back to them were not humans just like them. It takes a lot to get people to think that way. This was the developing culture of the white nation. The prism of white supremacy through which all white people were forced to see the world, together with the acquisition of English as a common language, became the true melting pot in which the white nation was born. It created a "common psychological make-up manifested in a common culture".

This white supremacy had begun earlier against the Indians, and was greatly strengthened after Black slavery became the basis of production in the South.

The revolution of 1776 - 1782 made a clean break with the English nation and started to consolidate a white North American nation. Then there were successive waves of migrations of Europeans: English, Irish, Scots, Germans, Spanish, French, and later more Irish, Italians, Poles, Eastern and Southern Europeans, Jews, Russians, etc. Each of these groups suffered a degree of national oppression when they arrived. The fact that they spoke different languages was one of the main things differentiating them from other whites. This was often the basis of discrimination and oppression. But all white immigrants were privileged in relation to Blacks and Indians. These relative privileges and the struggle to protect them became the material basis for the acceptance of the ideology of white supremacy. This ideology was couched in "racial" terms because these people were obviously not yet culturally and linguistically assimilated. But they helped to oppress Blacks and Indians, and willingly learned the language, intermarried with whites from other nationalities, and began the process of assimilation. They participated in westward expansion, robbing the lands of Indians and Mexicans.

We need to learn more about the specific culture of white people, but in the development of it we can point to some beginning observations. White supremacy was the binding element in that culture, but there is more. The role of the frontier in US history is deeply embedded in the culture of the white nation. The unlimited expansive possibilities; the adventurous explorer and pioneer; the rugged individualism; the cowboy; all these are specifically US and part of the white culture. This unlimited expansionism gives a somewhat optimistic and aggressive strain to the culture. The drive for conquest and domination, the struggle against the supposed savagery of the Indians, the neurotic fear of the rise of Black people. The heavy strain of pragmatism cannot be unrelated to the thoughts of legitimization of the



conquest of the Indians. "Well we deserve the land, we took it, didn't we? And we're here now, anyway, so don't moralize about Indians." This is not unrelated to the more current explanation by whites of rich people: "They deserve their money, they were clever enough to get it." This is a justification that is related to their own role in the plunder of Indians' and Mexicans' lands, and the enslavement of Blacks.

Related to the fabulous increase in the productive powers of US capitalism, and later US imperialism, is the vision of upward mobility, unlimited possibilities, opportunities for grabbing a piece of the pie, that all things are possible, science or technology will solve social problems, etc. Related to this is the conception of "American ingenuity," that we can do anything, we are superior to everyone. "Only in America / Land of opportunity / can a poor boy like me / grow up to be President." This conception is specifically white. It points up the important role that integration into civil and state society on the basis of bourgeois democracy has played in the development of the white culture, of the white nation. Competitiveness, acquisitiveness, consumerism, cruelty, indifference to suffering, hypocritical moralizing, alternating sexual repression/decadence, all play a specific defining role in the culture of the white nation. Sex, violence, conquest and domination are key to white culture.

There are variations among different sectors in which strains of the old cultures remain and survive. Specifically Irish or Italian variations, but these are just that, only variations. We have to look at it in its motion. It is not a completed process with a homogeneous product, but it is in motion in that direction, and there is a sufficiently specific character to a white North American culture which makes it distinctly different from any other.

There is also an egalitarian strain, a subculture of resistance, class struggle, women's struggle, solidarity with the oppressed, rejection of empire, and youth cultural resistance to conformity to the "straight" culture. This is what makes it a contradictory phenomenon, and contains hope for the future. But the dominant aspect has been a culture of oppression. If we don't face that squarely, we will never liberate ourselves.

Historically, the state and its ideological apparatuses have played a key role in forging the white nation. The compulsory education in English that was established by the bourgeoisie served to pound out the differences and provide a common language. Also, the content of that education was designed to create and reproduce a common culture. This was touted as "Americanization" when it was instituted, and that it was. The segregation of schools, in addition to miseducation and non-education of the oppressed has played a specific role in the reproduction of the cultures of two different nations. The schools for the oppressed are designed to combat national culture of resistance, schools for the oppressor to reproduce a specific white culture. To integrate schools makes this separate reproduction more difficult, crosses signals and tends toward national sharing of cultures.

The informational media: TV, radio, the press, are all designed to beam a message and information to the oppressor. The heroic uprisings of oppressed Africans are passed off as "wild riots," for instance. The selection of what is covered sifts carefully to reproduce the ideological relations of oppressor/oppressed nations.

The cultural media: books, literature, poetry, movies, TV, all reproduce white culture. The examples are endless.

The family serves a role in the socialization of all people -- it serves to recreate culture, national consciousness which is crucial in the reproduction of the white nation.

Churches, both in their segregated form and in their content serve to produce white culture and the ideological relationships of oppressor/oppressed nations.

Bourgeois and petty bourgeois political parties, white political parties, reformist and chauvinist trade unions, are also social institutions that contribute to the culture of white chauvinism.

I think there is an argument that a white culture exists. But a white nation? Recall Stalin's definition. The white nation was a nation forged in the era of rising capitalism. It is different from other nations in Europe, in that its constituents were originally so diverse, but that does not totally alter the argument. Stalin's definition, while it no longer applies to oppressed nations in the era of imperialism, does apply to the white nation that arose in competitive capitalism.

"Historically evolved stable community of persons," certainly is the white nation. "Common culture" has been argued above. Common language -- English which characterizes the hegemony of the Anglo-WASP sector in the nation. The language was forced on the immigrants, but they also accepted it in many instances even willingly. Common economic life? Monopoly capitalism, the most advanced and intricately interrelated economy in the world. Every person is bound by a million threads to millions of others through the market. The most highly socialized forces of production are located within US monopoly capital. Common territory? The white nation occupies a contiguous territory which it plundered from the Indians, Mexicans, and within which other oppressed nations reside. If all the land that may go to oppressed nations were subtracted, the white nation would still have some form of common territory.

In its history, the white nation has played the role of oppressor, from the robbing of land from Indians and Mexicans, to the enslavement of Blacks and the betrayal of Reconstruction and the continued oppression of the Black nation, to the colonization of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, etc., the national oppression and superexploitation of Asian and other "national minorities" or foreign workers in the US, and the invasion, subversion and oppression of colonies and neo-colonies around the world. In every period of economic crisis the white nation has been mobilized against oppressed nation in the US. And today, it does all of that still. The KKK, ROAR, the John Birch Society, White Citizens' Councils, the Nazi Party, white gangs have organized to terrorize the oppressed in the US. Racism is on the rise. Unless we start from an analysis that points clearly to the existence and consequences of a white oppressor nation, we will not be able to destroy imperialism and make a revolution in this country. We will inevitably succumb to opportunism toward white chauvinism, privilege and racism.

For revolutionaries in the US to deny the existence of oppressed and oppressor nations is to liquidate the Leninist analysis of imperialism, and commit a national chauvinist error. For those who try to say that there is an oppressed nation, but liquidate the existence of the oppressor nation, they conclude by liquidating the Leninist analysis of imperialism and the national question. To deny its existence destroys the theoretical basis for understanding racism. It has to end up capitulating to white privilege and racism. Only if we understand, and relentlessly point to, expose and struggle against, and ultimately destroy the material basis of racism will we be able to make correct strategic decisions and provide people with the tools to make a revolution. Otherwise, racism will continue to divide and weaken the revolutionary struggle, and serve to perpetuate the existence and domination of imperialism.

This is the historical error of the white left in this country. The Comintern resolutions, the CP in its best days, did not understand this. Opportunism on this question must be smashed in order to lead the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. This is why it is not rhetoric when we emblazon on our banners the revolutionary slogan:

"THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IMPERIALISM IS A SHAM AND A HUMBAG  
UNLESS IT IS INSEPARABLY BOUND UP WITH THE STRUGGLE  
AGAINST OPPORTUNISM.!"

## THE NATIONAL QUESTION : Some Recent Positions

Within the "new communist movement" many different views on the national question have been put forward recently. This question has rightly been seen as a crucial subject for debate among Marxist/Leninists in the context of party-building. Some groups, including the October League, uphold the existence of a Black nation and the right to self-determination; others, including the Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee (PWOC), deny that Black people in the US constitute a nation.

Both of these powerful voices in the Marxist/Leninist left share crucial weaknesses on this question, however. Both use Stalin's definition of a nation and the pre-World War I critique of bourgeois nationalism in a way that ignores the reality of contemporary imperialism as well as distorting the meaning of the Leninist analysis. Both distort the history of the US. Both resort to idealist explanations of that history. And the root of these errors is the same: the failure to recognize the reality of the oppressor nation, its impact on white workers, and the duties it imposes on white people in the US who want to hasten the revolutionary destruction of US imperialism.

### A CARICATURE OF LENINISM The P.W.O.C. Position

The PWOC pamphlet "Black Liberation Today: Against Dogmatism on the National question" is the most fully developed recent argument for the complete liquidation of the national question. The theoretical basis developed for their argument is well worth studying as an example of what a tissue of chauvinist nonsense can be woven in the name of Marxism/Leninism.

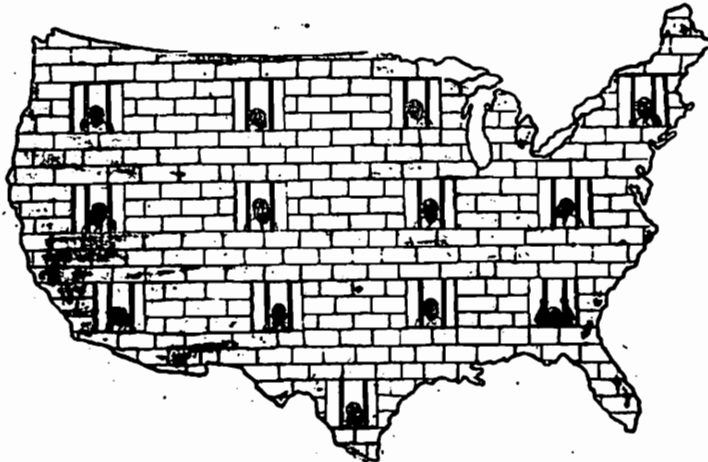
The pamphlet's preface sets the tone with a few seemingly minor flaws. "We believe that the main theoretical impediment to forward progress within our movement is dogmatism ... The starting point for correct theory, for sound strategy and tactics, must be a correct assessment of the character of Black people." Leaving aside this assessment of the main theoretical impediment we face, the "objective reality" in question has already been mis-defined. "The character of Black people" is one element of the reality in which the national question must be explained. The character of US imperialism, the character of white people in the US, and the character of the world revolutionary movement in this era are others. As we shall see, this "oversight" on PWOC's part in fact illustrates an assumption -- that the "national question" is a question that pertains only to oppressed nations and peoples -- not to the oppressors.

The argument begins with Stalin's definition of a nation and the comment, "Stalin went on to situate the development of nations historically. The emergence of nations was a feature of the epoch of rising capitalism and a product of the rising bourgeoisie's drive for a national market." A long description of the historical development of nations in Europe follows. But nowhere do they note the central fact which renders the discussion irrelevant: that this definition applies to nations in the "epoch of rising capitalism" in Europe -- not to national liberation movements formed in the epoch of imperialism. Neither India nor Guinea-Bissau, for example, could meet Stalin's definition of a nation, neither having a common language.

All of the would-be Marxist/Leninist analysts claim to recognize that Stalin's criteria cannot be used in a rigid, ahistorical manner. Yet each of them finally relies on it as a basic guide to discussing the existence or non-existence of a Black nation. Why is this? Because they do not recognize that there is a fundamental difference between national liberation movements produced by the "rising national bourgeoisie's drive for a national market" and national liberation movements produced by the resistance of colonized and oppressed peoples to imperialism. Stalin's criteria were valid as a summary of the conditions under which national markets could be developed in pre-imperialist Europe. They have nothing to do with the conditions under which a people can be welded together in the fight against imperialism.

The discussion of "The Proletariat and the National Movement" demonstrates again that PWOOC has not grasped the central features of imperialism. The significance of the national movements for the proletariat is described this way: "national oppression serves to obfuscate the class struggle. Its elimination 'clears the decks' for the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It sharpens and illuminates the contradictions between them." No recognition of the critical role of national liberation in cutting off the life-blood of imperialism -- captive markets and super-profits from the oppressed nations. No differentiation between the proletariat of the oppressed and oppressor nations.

Instead of drawing attention to these crucial realities, PWOOC turns its fire on the dangers of "supporting the national movement uncritically." The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations, we are told, "misrepresents the enemy, portraying the workers of the oppressor nation -- along with the oppressor nation bourgeoisie -- as the source of national oppression. It seeks to develop a chauvinistic ideology of national superiority to justify its nationally exclusive aims. Left unchallenged, the effect of its activity is



to split the proletariat of the oppressed nation from its natural allies, the proletariat of the oppressor nation and the worldwide proletarian movement." 14

Of course, the national bourgeoisie will downplay the class character of imperialism while communists in the oppressed nations will point out that imperialism is ultimately in opposition to the interests of all workers. But can anyone really believe that it is the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations that "splits" the proletariat of the oppressed and oppressor nations? And what does it mean to call the proletariat of the oppressor nation "natural allies?" True, in their class interests they are allies. But in reality, the proletariat of the oppressor nation have repeatedly, from the Spanish-American War of 1898 to World War I to the whole grim history of Black and Native American peoples in this country, served as "allies" of their "own" bourgeoisie. There are instances of proletarian internationalism in the oppressor nations, but to speak of "natural allies" is simply utopian hyperbole. Worse than that, it is an attempt to shift responsibility for the absence of proletarian internationalism from the workers of the oppressor nation to those of the oppressed nations, an attempt that is false, both theoretically and historically. This shifting of responsibility is a bulwark of national chauvinism among communists of the oppressor nations.

The PWOC does have an explanation for some of the failures of proletarian internationalism among these "natural allies." "The oppressor nation bourgeoisie works to enlist the proletariat in its of the oppressed nations. It spreads national chauvinism among the workers, teaching them the inferiority of other peoples and the 'natural' rightness of national domination. It seeks to convince the workers ... etc." This is all true enough. But why do the workers buy it? Why do they allow themselves to be "enlisted," "taught" and "convinced?" As Marxists, we look to material interests -- the fact that imperialism produces a vastly higher standard of living for workers in the oppressor nation -- as a basis of a consistent pattern of national chauvinism. Because they deny that white workers receive any material benefit from their position in the oppressor nation, PWOC (as well as the OL) is reduced to historical idealism -- the workers were fooled, blinded, by bad ideas spread by the bourgeoisie.

It is worthwhile to compare this approach with the way Lenin analyzed the terrible victory of national chauvinism and opportunism in the working class and the Second International in Europe during World War I. Out of the experience of the instance in which the workers betrayed their own class interests in a bloody, horrible war, Lenin formulated -- not a theory of bourgeois propaganda or a lament about how the workers were "fooled" -- but an analysis of imperialism and how it corrupts the working class of the oppressor nations economically, politically and socially and not only ideologically.

National oppression is not in the class interest of white workers. It keeps the imperialist bourgeoisie in power; it tends to cheapen the price of labor-power; it creates wars in which workers suffer and die. But national oppression does produce real material privileges for workers of the oppressor nation. Economic privileges: control over better-paying jobs, a higher standard of living made possible by an economy fueled by the stolen resources and super-exploited labor of oppressed nations. Political and social privileges: greater influence in the bourgeois-democratic

political machinery, better social services, social power over Black and other Third World people. The sheer wealth of the US is a major basis for anti-communism among white workers: we're better off than anybody else, so this must be the best system. US imperialism had made white workers the wealthiest and most politically backward workers in the world. This is the material basis for racism and national chauvinism.

Does this mean that white workers cannot be organized against racism on the basis of their own class interests, but only on "white guilt" or "moral concern" for the "less fortunate?" No! What it means is that white workers have to be organized around an understanding that their class interests depend upon the consistent fight against national oppression in all its forms. In some instances, this means that the class interest will demand the sacrifice of immediate individual interests -- in supporting the right of Black and other Third World workers to jobs and seniority over white workers, for example. This is not extraordinary: struggle always involves individual sacrifices. Millions of workers have fought and died in revolutionary struggles. And as for "moral concern," we should avoid a one-sided approach. Bourgeois morality and prejudice we oppose. Proletarian morality, a morality based on the desire to assure freedom and a decent dignified life for all people is a powerful weapon in our struggle. To fail to see that, to believe that workers can only fight for a fatter paycheck, is the classical economist error and a denial of the humanity of workingpeople and of their ability to wage a full and intelligent struggle for their liberation.

The next questions our anti-dogmatists attack are those of the distinction between supporting self-determination and advocating secession and the "division of labor" between the proletariat of the oppressed and oppressor nations on the national question.

Marxists make no a priori determination on the question of secession. What serves the general interest of the proletariat at one time or place may not in another. A concrete analysis of those interests is the key to determining whether or not the proletariat should raise the demand for secession. Again the case of Poland illustrates the point.<sup>7</sup>

Here the PWOC draws on Lenin's essay "The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up." Their discussion is worth examining as an example of how to read Lenin for the purpose of drawing conclusions diametrically opposed to what Lenin was arguing.

...in the period of the early twentieth century, when the question of Poland was a source of debate among Social Democrats, the demand for an independent Poland had changed character. The rise of imperialist Germany which sandwiched Poland between the Kaiser on the one hand and the Tsar on the other, meant that Polish national aims were subject to the manipulations of the Great Powers. Polish freedom under these circumstances could only be achieved through revolution in conjunction with a general European or at least a Russian or German revolution.

Thus the central and overriding task of Polish Social Democrats was the strengthening of ties between the Polish workers' movement and those of Russia and Germany. To raise the demand for Polish independence under these circumstances represented "a plunge into narrow minded nationalism" (Lenin). An "independent" Polish state without the

destruction of imperial Germany and Tsarist Russia could only be, in the words of the Polish Social Democrats, an "inane utopia of small impotent groups...a tiny fragment of a Polish state that would be a military colony of one or another group of Great Powers, a plaything of their military or economic interests, an area exploited by foreign capital and a battlefield for future wars." Thus the Bolsheviks, while continuing to uphold the right of Poland to secede, opposed raising the actual demand of Polish independence.

Two points: First, Lenin specifically criticizes the quote from the Polish Social Democrats.

But these same arguments, which are true from the standpoint of Poland's specific condition in the present epoch, are manifestly untrue in the general form in which they are presented. So long as there are wars, Poland will always remain a battlefield in wars between Germany and Russia; but this is no argument against greater political liberty (and, therefore, against political independence) in the periods between wars. The same applies to the arguments about exploitation by foreign capital and Poland's role as a plaything of foreign interests. The Polish Social Democrats cannot, at the moment, raise the slogan of Poland's independence... But it is not indifferent to the Russian and German workers whether Poland is independent, or they take part in annexing her (and that would mean educating the Russian and German workers in the basest turpitude and their consent to play the role of executioners of other peoples.).

Second, having grossly distorted what Lenin was saying about Polish independence, the PWOC goes on to draw its conclusions.

The Marxist attitude toward the national movement and toward the question of self-determination is not absolute and unconditional.

What is the meaning of Lenin's discussion if not that for workers of the oppressor nation the Marxist attitude toward the question of self-determination is absolute and unconditional, that any failure to support self-determination for the nations oppressed by one's 'own' nation, even where independence might be impracticable or unwise, is bowing to national chauvinism and alliance with imperialism? Lenin continually demands this "absolute and unconditional" support for self-determination for nations oppressed by one's own nation as the only way to break the alliance with imperialism and forge real proletarian unity.

On the basis of this opportunistic caricature of Leninism, PWOC proceeds to discuss "Opportunism and the National Question." This is defined as follows:

Opportunism on the national question expresses itself as the alien bourgeois outlooks of either national chauvinism or bourgeois nationalism... The most serious struggle was against the outright chauvinists and social patriots like Kautsky who sided with their respective imperialists with the outbreak of war in 1914. This scum, whether they were outright annexationists or hypocritically voiced

their support for the right of nations to self-determination in general while remaining silent on the right of nations oppressed within their own borders to secede, was roundly condemned by the whole of revolutionary Social Democracy. 11

There's just one problem with this history. The great majority of what had been revolutionary Social Democracy sided with Kautsky and the social chauvinists of their own countries. The Second International and the major European parties ceased to be revolutionary as a direct result of their opportunist, national chauvinist stands on World War I. This sort of gross falsification of history in order to minimize the seriousness and the extent of national chauvinism among the workers of the oppressor nations is characteristic of all those who seek to deny or disguise the reality of the oppressor nation. Equally characteristic is the fact that the bulk of the discussion of opportunism focuses on errors made by revolutionaries of the oppressed nations and nationalities (Poland Jews, etc.).

Finally, after a brief reference to the "Second Period in the National Question" -- that is, the period of imperialism -- the PWOC finishes laying the theoretical foundations of their argument by discussing "Capitalism and the Assimilation of Nations."

Imperialism on the one hand develops the firmest foundations for the resolution of the national question by generating the conditions for international proletarian solidarity, proletarian revolution and a socialist economic order. On the other hand, it is constitutionally incapable of resolving the national question. 12

Rising capitalism developed the conditions for international proletarian solidarity. Imperialism undermines those conditions in the oppressor nations and creates the conditions for opportunism and national chauvinism by making it possible to bribe large sectors of the oppressor nation's working class. At the same time it creates the conditions for national liberation movements and wars in the oppressed nations. These movements have played and are playing the leading role in the world wide struggle against imperialism. If there is to be international proletarian solidarity, and if there are to be proletarian revolutions in the oppressor nations, this can only be on the basis of the national liberation movements, drawing strength from their victories and moving from militant solidarity with these leading revolutionary struggles to joining in the full revolutionary assault on the weakening imperialist monster by its "own" proletariat with all the oppressed peoples.

The rest of the PWOC pamphlet, which spells out the PWOC position on the "dissolution" of the Black nation and their strategy for Black liberation follows logically from their theoretical justification of opportunism, national chauvinism, and the denial of the leading role of national liberation movements under imperialism in the name of Marxism/Leninism and proletarian unity. One main feature is the whitewashing of the history of white workers in the US. The labor movement during the Civil War is described for instance, as having been "for the most part solidly on the side of the union and pro-abolition," 13 a patent lie. Some parts of the labor movement were on the side of the union; others joined in the reactionary Copperhead movement against the war. None were consistently pro-abolition and all were united in their opposition to equal competition from free Black labor.

The specific argument for the dissolution of the Black nation rests squarely on the dogmatic application of Stalin's criteria to a statistical analysis of the movement of much of the Black population out of the Black belt and their "assimilation" into the dominant US nation.

To the argument that the Black nation can and should gain self-determination and reverse this forced "assimilation" they respond with another quote from Stalin. "...Since when have Social Democrats begun to occupy themselves with 'organizing' nations, 'constituting' nations, 'creating' nations?"<sup>14</sup> Stalin wrote that in 1913. In 1976 we can answer it: since the development of national liberation movements in the colonies, revolutionaries have concerned themselves with organizing, constituting, and creating nations. Guinea-Bissau, a nation of peoples with twenty-two languages and a multitude of historical, cultural, tribal differences, was in fact created by Portuguese imperialism and organized by the PAIGC in the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. The revolutionary forces consciously built a national consciousness, promoting literacy in Portuguese as a common language and unity in the struggle for self-determination and people's power. The same is true of many other Third World nations. To deny the right of these newly-created nations to self-determination is to renounce the leading revolutionary force on a world scale. To deny the right of the Black nation to self-determination is to renounce the leading revolutionary force within the US.

## LIQUIDATING THE OPPRESSOR NATION The October League Position

The position of the October League on the Black nation is put forward in their pamphlet, "The struggle for Black Liberation and Socialist Revolution: Resolution of the Third National Congress of the October League (Marxist/Leninist)." Superficially, it is poles apart from the PWOOC liquidationist position. The existence of a Black nation in the Black Belt South and the upholding of its right to self-determination are presented as basic points in their position. A concrete program of demands embodying a real familiarity with the Black struggle is presented.

Yet the OL too, ultimately liquidates the central political-content of the national question. This is done in two major ways: first, and most importantly, by denying that white workers have any responsibility for, or stake in, national oppression, thus taking out the core of any struggle against national chauvinism; and second, by separating self-determination (which they support) from secession (which they oppose) in a way that robs self-determination of its political essence.

It is important to note that the OL does not recognize a Black nation consisting of all Black people in the US and having the right to self-determination. They recognize a "Black Belt" nation with the right to self-determination and a Black "national minority" in the North which does not have the right to self-determination but only to full equality within the "dominant mainly white US nation."

To define Black workers in the North as a national minority whose struggle is only for "democratic rights" is to assume that they are in fact in the process of being assimilated into the white nation in the North. If that is not true, if it is not possible for them to be assimilated under the prevailing conditions in which the whole Black nation is oppressed, then their struggle must be for their national liberation. The question of the territory over which self-determination will be exercised is secondary. What is key is that self-determination is a pre-requisite for an end to the national oppression of all Black people.

James Blaut's discussion of the theory of national minorities is useful here:

National minorities were only created when, and where, capitalism was expanding. In those times and places, job opportunities were growing, proletarian living conditions were objectively improving, and, as an inevitable consequence, workers were invited to immigrate -- Lenin used the word "attracted" -- to the centers of growth from the backward areas, though not from colonies. In these centers of developing capitalism, like the US, the in-migrating workers were slowly (and painfully) assimilated into the host nationality and the host proletariat. During the period of transition, they formed national minorities, communities which, for a time, were ethnically distinct but were nevertheless becoming in all important respects, acculturated. But even in those days there existed another kind of workers' migration, signaled by the African slave trade and the forced migration of Irishmen to England, East Indians to the Caribbean, Chinese to Southeast Asia -- all colonies and semi-colonies. These migrations were another, nastier, face of evolving capitalism; and none of the communities which they have created have anywhere (under capitalism) been fully assimilated: they are minorities of another type, a type that does not satisfy Stalin's definition of a 'national minority.' ...the colonial forced-migrants do not leave behind the special forms of political and national oppression which prevail in the colonies themselves. Nor do they find, when they arrive, a set of circumstances which is markedly more favorable than those prevailing in the homeland. All they find, in essence, is a replica of the same colonial conditions. In the colony, the imperialists impose the fiercest forms of cultural aggression, the purpose of which is not to assimilate the colonial people to the colonizer's nationality, but to pacify them by wresting from their culture all possible sources of resistance -- including, if possible, their language. Exactly the same aggression descends on them in the metropolis, and thus they do not lose their nationality.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly this argument applies with even greater force to the "internal colonies" within the borders of the US -- Blacks, Native Americans, Mexicanos. To separate Black workers in the North from those in the South, when they suffer the same national oppression North and South, when they suffer the oppression North and South, is to reduce the national liberation struggle to a scholastic concept and ignore the concrete reality of the unity of the oppression and resistance of Black people in this country.

The pamphlet contains a lot of useful historical information. There is only one serious flaw -- in the description of the role of white workers in the Civil War, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction periods. The OL defines one of the reasons for the defeat of Reconstruction as "The political immaturity of the working class," which "did not comprehend the significance of the need for a democratic solution" and "failed to see the importance of Reconstruction."<sup>16</sup> What this wipes out is the material basis for the racist position of the white workers in the North: in this period primarily the fierce competition for jobs.

This "oversight" becomes significant when the pamphlet turns to the problem of working class unity and overcoming the forces that impede it. These forces are, in their view, basically two -- bad ideas spread among white workers by the bourgeoisie and the labor aristocracy (a "bribed and tiny section of the working class") and "bourgeois" or "narrow nationalism" in the Black movement.

Thus the Black movement is accused of having "deeply underestimated the potential strength in unity with the overall workers' movement in achieving the aims of the national struggle," "underestimated the need for unity with white workers." We are instructed that "the proletariat must oppose the view that "the task of communists is also to combat any petit-bourgeois theories that aim the blow (in the fight against national oppression) at the white workers."<sup>17</sup>

It is true that the class interests of white workers are identical with those of Black workers and call for a firm alliance with the Black liberation movement. But by failing to recognize the material privileges of white workers and the basis they provide for white chauvinism and reactionary ideologies of all kinds, the OL inevitably ends up by blaming the Black movement for the lack of class unity (as if the Black movement had not sought white allies!) and advancing solutions which in reality demand submission to white chauvinism.

This is clear in the discussion of organization. "We hold to the principle that the communist party must be a multinational party and representative of the entire working class within the borders of the US." (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup> We believe that a single communist party representing the major part of the US working class -- excluding the labor aristocracy -- would be the most effective possible revolutionary organization we could achieve -- but only if it is united on the basis of the absolute support for the liberation of the Black nation and other oppressed nations within the US, the demands of the most oppressed, and the leadership of the Black proletariat, the most powerful revolutionary sector of the US working class. Such a party cannot be built without a decisive struggle against national chauvinism among white revolutionaries, the building of a revolutionary, internationalist base among white workers, and the consolidation of Black revolutionary forces. Only on such a basis would the party be able to overcome the material and ideological impact of white supremacy.

The OL, however, believes that the development of the "subjective conditions" has laid the basis for communist unity, on a party level, to be forged over the next period." They admit that "national forms of communist organization have played an important role in bringing Marxism/Leninism to a large number of minority workers and contributing to the practical and ideological development of the communist movement." But "conditions do not remain the same. There are still some forces who (in one form

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or another) continue to hold the line of "separate Marxist/Leninist parties" or national forms of organization, instead of a multi-national party or national organization. This line, when raised to a principle, objectively represents a step backward today."<sup>19</sup>

What this means is that any Black or other national communist organization which refuses to join in a predominantly white "multi-national" party under the OL's leadership is to be condemned as "backward" if not "narrow nationalist."

(The PWOC, which takes the same position on party building, has already written Black nationalists out of the movement.) "The party must clearly be a multi-national party. Bundist conceptions or nationally exclusive 'communist' organizations have no place in our movement and it is a sign of the growth of our movement that no Marxist/Leninists today hold any brief for such notions" (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> Would it be fair to call this a "white blindspot?" PWOC is in fact rapidly writing itself out of the revolutionary movement.)

The OL's practical liquidation of the national question is most fully expressed in its program, in which they liquidate the meaning of self-determination. The primary form of this programmatic liquidation is in their opposition to the secession of the Black nation.

The relationship of the US working class to the Afro-American nation oppressed within the borders of the US differs from its relationship to the colonies maintained externally. Although the principles on which the proletarian internationalism must be built are essentially the same, we uphold the right of self-determination in the former and the struggle for independence in the latter. The difference comes to the fore in terms of the concrete conditions shaping the strategic alliance between the Afro-American nation and the working class in the US. It is this strategic relationship which leads us to oppose secession at this time as the solution to the Afro-American question...

The fact that the majority of Black people are working side by side with their brothers and sisters, whites and other oppressed minorities, lays the basis for a united assault on the imperialists. Our strategic outlook then calls for a socialist revolution, based on proletarian internationalism, which will accomplish in one sweep the basic conditions for the emancipation of the working class and the liberation of Black people.

We oppose those who advocate secession or separatism as being the only way self-determination can be exercised. As Lenin said, 'The right of nations to self-determination implies exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to political separation from the oppressor nation. Specifically this demand for political democracy implies complete freedom to agitate for secession and for a referendum on secession by the seceding nation. This demand therefore, is not the equivalent of a demand for separation, fragmentation, and the formation of small states.'

Lenin also pointed out that the demand for the right of self-determination 'implies only a consistent expression of struggle against all national oppression.' In each case

he explained, the question of secession versus federation could have to be dealt with in the basis of which choice would unite the working class and further the cause of socialism, which is in the final analysis the only system that can fully emancipate the oppressed nations.<sup>21</sup>

We have quoted at length in order to allow a full examination of the argument. There are a number of points to be made:

1) In the passage from Lenin quoted here his point is that self-determination will not necessarily result in secession, as part of an argument for the necessity of demanding self-determination--the exclusive right of the oppressed nation to determine its own future--even where secession might be unwise. Nowhere does he advise communists, and certainly not communists of an oppressor nation, to oppose secession. The particular question of secession is one which is considered only in the concrete situation in which self-determination has been or may be won.

2) Nowhere in this argument is there any recognition that the question of secession is one that can be decided by the Black nation alone. The "question of secession versus federation" will be "dealt with" not by the "whole" working class, not by a multi-national communist party, but by the whole Black nation. That is the meaning of self-determination.

3) Why does the "strategic alliance between the Afro-American nation and the working class in the U.S." require that the Black nation abjure the possibility of secession before it has come near to gaining its self-determination? Isn't this a variety of the belief that you can't unite the working class unless you put aside the national aspirations of the oppressed peoples? Does the OL really understand that a revolutionary working class will be united only on the basis of absolute support for the right of self-determination for oppressed nations?

4) Finally, let's examine the last phrase: "socialism, which is in the final analysis the only system that can fully emancipate the oppressed nations." This corresponds to another statement that "the struggle for self-determination for Afro-Americans cannot be won without the revolutionary winning of state power by the working class."<sup>22</sup>

Clearly, real liberation for oppressed nations in this era must be led by the working class and move rapidly in the direction of socialism. Bourgeois national revolutions become increasingly untenable under imperialism. But OL's point here is to make the national liberation struggle a kind of junior partner to the struggle of the multi-national working class, unable to do anything until after the multi-national working class makes its socialist revolution, after which self-determination will be granted to the oppressed nations as a kind of by-product. What the OL has missed here, and what is bound to be missed in an analysis based on pre-imperialist Eastern Europe and not the world-wide revolutionary struggles of the era of imperialism in decline, our era, is that the struggles of the oppressed nations to emancipate themselves are the leading struggles that make possible socialist revolution in the oppressor nations as well.

The situation in the U.S. is extraordinarily complex, with a working class composed of workers of the Black, Mexican, Puerto Rican and Native American nations as well as the white oppressor nation and various oppressed nationalities. The oppressed nations will surely provide the bulk of the revolutionary leadership for this class. But we cannot determine in advance all the twists and

turns in the course of the national and class struggles. To insist that "the struggle for self-determination for Afro-Americans cannot be won without the revolutionary winning of state power by the working class" is to close one's eyes to the possible paths of struggle. This not to deny either the intimate relationship between national liberation and the destruction of imperialist rule everywhere in the U.S. or the necessity of developing a revolutionary strategy, working toward a specific vision of revolutionary change. But only a crystal ball gazer can be assured that all of our revolutionary tasks will be fulfilled "in one sweep."

On the basis of their conception of the character of the revolution, the OL reduces the Black liberation from the revolutionary struggle for political power (self-determination) to the struggle for democratic rights within the imperialist system. This becomes evident in their program for Black liberation. In the fourteen major demands self-determination is not mentioned. Only one speaks to the question of political power at all, the demand for "reorganization of the political districting in the South," a demand raised probably because it was part of Communist Party U.S.A.'s position in the 1930's. Given that the OL resolution also declares itself "firmly against reformist schemes and nationalist ambitions which would rely<sup>23</sup> on 'elections'," this demand clearly means precisely nothing.

Under the demand for "equal rights" this vague mention of the problem is made:

Special problems require special solutions. The forced migration of large numbers of Afro-American people from the southern Black Belt region to the North and the resultant creation of compact concentrations of Black people in northern cities is such a problem. This phenomenon is a product of national oppression, and within these communities (ghettos) the people suffer poor housing and health care, high unemployment and police repression. Every aspect of their life is affected by national oppression. This is a just and progressive demand, which the October League supports, and which the unity of the working class demands.<sup>24</sup>

Political power is not just a "special solution" to "special demands!" Yet in the OL's concrete demands around housing, health care, repression, and particularly education, the question of political power or limited political control through community control is not once raised. Self-determination is a question of political power. Revolution is also a question of political power. By eliminating political power in their program, the OL liquidates both self-determination and the revolutionary character of the Black liberation struggle. What's left is economism and bourgeois democracy, nothing more.



Both of the organizations whose positions we have discussed are representative of larger trends in the Marxist-Leninist left. The line put forward by Irwin Silber in his series of articles in the Guardian on the national question is essentially identical to that of PWOC; the OL is now in the process of organizing yet another party around itself and its politics. Various other groups and individuals have put forward their own positions on this question.

All of the positions being taken in the "new communist movement" react in some way to the history of the national question in the Communist Party. The CPUSA, pushed on by Lenin and the Communist International, was the first revolutionary party in the history of the U.S. to recognize Black people as a nation and raise the demand for self-determination. In the 1930's it carried on a high level of struggle against the oppression of Black people, exemplified by its leadership in the international campaign around the Scottsboro case, in which nine young Blacks who had been falsely accused of raping two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama in 1931 and convicted by an all-white jury were finally freed after years of struggle. And it developed a program of internal education and struggle against national chauvinism. This represented a decisive break with the past practice of the Socialist Party and other U.S. 'Marxists' who had refused to take any responsibility for the situation of Black people and thus condoned incredible racist abuses--including segregated chapters.

As the CPUSA moved away from its revolutionary positions in other spheres, it gradually moved away from a revolutionary position on the Black question. During World War II, with the downplaying of independent Communist work outside of the Administration's war program, the Party liquidated the struggle against Black oppression, criticizing A. Philip Randolph and the March on Washington Movement as divisive. After the dissolution of the Party in 1944, its re-formation a year later and the repudiation of Earl Browder and his revisionist line, the Party criticized its errors in the Black struggle, but this was not thorough or decisive.

In the 1950's one of the first major victories of the revived revisionist trend in the Party was the liquidation of the "left" Black organizations in which the Party had worked in favor of work with the NAACP and other "moderate" forces. This was followed in 1956 by a major assault on the Party's historic support of self-determination. It was asserted that Black people in the Black Belt had not developed into a nation, had chosen integration, and were in fact achieving equality within the capitalist system. National struggle, class struggle, and revolution were all written out of the Party's program.<sup>25</sup>

This is the background on which the debate within the "new communist movement" takes place. Both of the groups we have examined and many others claim to be "anti-revisionist" and criticize the line and practice of the CPUSA. But they have not yet grasped that the struggle against revisionism and opportunism can only be waged successfully if the roots of opportunism are thoroughly understood. Incorrect ideas don't fall from the sky any more than correct ones. If we grasp and apply a materialist analysis we can

look at the history of the white nation in the U.S. and the position of U.S. imperialism in the world, and understand the sources of opportunism and the strategies needed to fight it. If, as OL and PWOC--and Irwin Silber, and the CPUSA, and the "Revolutionary Communist Party,"--do, we fail to recognize the existence of the oppressor nation and its role under imperialism, we are disarmed against opportunism, revisionism, and national chauvinism. No matter how many "parties" are formed on that basis, we cannot build a genuinely revolutionary communist party. A major part of the struggle for a new communist party must be the struggle to consolidate an understanding which gives us the tools to wage the continuing struggle against national chauvinism and opportunism and for a revolutionary course.

1. Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee, "Black Liberation Today: Against Dogmatism on the National Question," (PWOC), p.5.
2. PWOC, p.7.
3. See James Blaut, "Are Puerto Ricans a 'National Minority?'" Journal of Contemporary Puerto Rican Thought, Vol. II, no. 2-3, pp.117-128.
4. PWOC, p.9.
5. PWOC, p.9.
6. PWOC, p.10.
7. See "The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up," (1916), especially section 7; "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism," (1916), especially section 5; "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," (1916); "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," (1916), especially section 8.
8. PWOC, pp.10-11.
9. "The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up," section 8.
10. PWOC, p.11.
11. PWOC, p.11.
12. PWOC, p.15.
13. PWOC, p.20.
14. PWOC, p.40.
15. James Blaut, "are Puerto Ricans a 'National Minority?,' Part II," section xii.
16. "The Struggle for Black Liberation and Socialist Revolution: Resolution of the Third National Congress of the October League (Marxist-Leninist)," (OL), p.22.
17. OL, pp.48, 49, 52, 66.
18. OL, pp.67.
19. OL, pp.67.
20. PWOC, p.55.

- 21. OL, pp.36-37.
- 22. OL, p.41.
- 23. OL, pp.72, 43.
- 24. OL, 71.
- 25. This is a very superficial analysis of the development of the CPUSA's line. See Harry Haywood, "For a Revolutionary Position of the Negro Question."

## RECTIFICATION AND P.F.O.C.'S ANALYSIS OF JULY 4 TH

There exists in this organization two evaluations of the July 4 Coalition. The significance of this is that the two put out distinctly different political lines and for that reason we need to examine our entire orientation around July 4th, as well as citing the main difference in line.

Why is it so important that we correctly analyze the character and forces at work in July 4th? The primary reason is that significant revolutionary and progressive forces agreed to respond to the ruling class deception but more than this, it agreed to do it on the basis of anti-imperialism. Not just against the government, not just against "big business" but against the monster itself. We of PFOC have learned the hard way that the gap between saying and doing can be quite huge, and that the economic, political and cultural forces at work in Imperial society are all-pervasive. But we know more than this: we know that the main historic source for the bolstering of white and male supremacy comes from the existence of the white oppressor nation and its left and "communist" forces have done their best to keep it all going.

The key question we have to ask ourselves is: What was the main contribution of the July 4th Coalition? Did it serve revolution? Did it serve the people, or did it serve opportunism and chauvinism? Regardless of how one chooses to define the content or goal of a thing in the final analysis of history and the class and oppressed people to whom we are primarily responsible will judge. This is why political line is most defining -- it reflects class stand.



What does the National evaluation have to say? First, it begins with a correct recognition of the leading role played by the Puerto Rican and Native American national liberation struggles. And this was a good thing, but it was not the basis on which the Coalition came together. The national evaluation backs into the question of political line instead of taking it on self-consciously.

In the absence of a generally recognized leading organization in this stage of our revolutionary process, and given the prevailing isolation of the national, class and women's struggles from one another our movement has found it difficult to link these struggles together, to coordinate their activities, and to build support for them among the masses of people in the US. (first page, Nat. Eval.)

Does this sound familiar? It should, because it is fundamentally the analysis of our national travellers who laid the basis and gave primary leadership to the birth of this organization. The class, national, and women's struggles are not isolated now or in the past. This way of looking at things not only puts process in command (...and in this stage of our revolutionary process...) but it is also a refutation of how Lenin looked at class in the age of imperialism. The class, national and women's struggles in the US are inter-connected and reinforce each other of necessity. The struggles for women's liberation and national liberation, and against white and male supremacy against imperialism is the main content of class struggle and orientation . Citing errors and failures and attributing them to "the absence of a generally recognized revolutionary organization" is to refute rectification and the main lessons we have learned. Organization is not the problem. It is, in this case, the reflection of the problem. The article goes on to say that, "In this context the ability of the July 4th Coalition to bring together participants and leaders from a broad range of struggles was a real schievement." So, we proved we can do it even without a party. This abuses the struggle for the party. The implication is that we need a party so it can do all of these things and bring these struggles together, without laying out the line which makes that possible. And in this period, the main thing about party building is the struggle over line. The article would have done better to say why we don't have a party -- that it is mainly because of white and male chauvinism, opportunism and revisionism and all the rest. And that the main social base which feeds and nourishes most of this is not just the ruling class, but more significantly the oppressor nation. It is the same reason for the failures and errors of the July 4th Coalition also. Then to go on and say that in the absence of such a leading revolutionary organization "and given the isolation of the national, class and women's struggles" therefore our movement has found it difficult to link the struggles together and build support for them among the masses of the people is a cruel lie. Who gives impetus to the national and women's struggles? Where do they first find their most powerful voice? Among the people. It is the people who suffer national and women's oppression who have most consistently fought to "support" their own struggles on a revolutionary basis. "Our movement," on the other hand, has not done so well. The material reality and social consciousness of the white working class (primarily white male workers) finds its own strange bedfellow in the white left and communist movements. And it is no accident tha the people who have the most to gain by defeating imperialism are the same people who have fought best to "support" their own struggle. So let's put the responsibility where it belongs, because if communists are supposed to bring revolutionary consciousness to the peoples' struggles, then it is fair to say that some of the people, in fact most of the people get lots of friction from the white leftists and communists.

The accomplishments of July 4th are further cited as "Organizations in the coalition got the chance to assess each other's strengths and weaknesses. Members of these organizations got valuable experience organizing for the events; skills were sharpened in the areas of outreach, security and propaganda, etc. The political struggles that occurred over the Coalition's program and political demands and the shared work experience laid the basis for raising political unity amongst organizations in the future." (emphasis added).

Again, here is process in command. Of course it is good to gain skills. The real thing is not skills gained in propaganda, but what was the character of the propaganda, what did it say? Did it raise consciousness about US imperialism as a whole system? The political line of July 4th came through sharpest in written leaflets and the call. That line was defined originally at the March founding national conference held in NYC. The struggles at this conference, and the political direction taken, show that the major source of opportunism and chauvinism came from the white groups. The question of how and why opportunism came from Third World groups is important, but this paper focuses on the major source which sets a context for answering the other question.

All five working papers submitted for discussion to the March conference were intended to lay the political basis for all 25 demands. All had a common character. Throughout US imperialism was defined as a foreign policy of the imperialists, something that is exported to the Third World. What were the consequences of this?

The paper called "The International Situation" was designed to lay the basis for the slogans :A Bicentennial Without Colonies," "Independence for Puerto Rico," "Sovereignty for Native Americans," "Self-Determination for Mexican people." It did this by explaining the colonization of the Third World so that slogans for internal colonies were not explained. One might ask, What happened to the Black Nation in all of this? Our national evaluation doesn't take this on. In a working paper on racism the basis was laid for the slogan, "Self-Determination for all Black people." The populist notion of self-determination meant that the Black and Mexicano national struggles were liquidated. This appeared in the day itself. Whatever mention or consciousness was expressed of those national struggles was too little and too late. Likewise, there was a paper on the situation of the workers. This paper laid the basis of the demand "Jobs for All." While there were forces in July 4th who hold a Leninist definition of imperialism, the chauvinism and opportunism of many white groups was accommodated and allowed to become absent from the political line.

This laid the basis for the constituency approach to organizing and propaganda. There was a women's leaflet (which PFOC participated in writing) a workers' leaflet, etc. None of them served to provide an overall understanding of the US imperialist system, or of the nature of the state, or the concept of a common enemy and the struggles and victories of Africa, Asia, Latin America. No amount of process, and doing leaflets, or working together was going to turn this over. The error was not one of process, but of recognizing the social forces which most define US imperialism in this way: in the US that means the white oppressor nation and the white left and all the pacifists and social chauvinists like Dave McReynolds, the MPOC and Arthur Kinoy. This is also true of the July 4th Board and its Interim Committee which held all its meetings in NY. It was primarily white, primarily male, and primarily wrong. Third World comrades had little or no support for revolutionary direction and content. PFOC did not struggle well on the Board, especially because we did not take responsibility for struggling with white forces.

But how does our national evaluation explain this whole thing? It does not and that is bad because rectification has given us the skills to do that. What our national evaluation does do is the following:

"However PFOC has also called attention to what we feel have been the weaknesses of the demonstrations, weaknesses with a long history in the US left, weaknesses around which our organization led recently in the Hard Times Conference; a failure to maintain a clear overview of the development and character of US imperialism that would allow us to propagandize and agitate for the strategic relationship between struggles and a failure that led most importantly to the downplaying of the strategic importance and leading role presently and historically and in the future of the two largest national groupings and movements within the current US borders; The Black Liberation Movement and the Mexicano people's struggle. We insist on calling attention to these weaknesses not to undercut the unity of our forces or to detract from achievements. We wish to strengthen politically and organizationally the capacity to maintain and deepen fighting unity in the future." (emphasis added).

The first thing is why are we so careful to MAKE SURE that we are not misunderstood -- why are we apologetic about offering criticism? The reason we are is because the whole thing must not have set right with folks -- otherwise we could have laid out criticism directly and not be overly concerned about being misrepresented. Something is going on here and what it is is that the people who wrote this evaluation are re-writing PFOC history. The PFOC did not criticize itself for weaknesses, or downplaying, or failure to maintain a clear overview or anything like that. We criticized ourselves -- finally -- for white and male supremacy, and bowing to spontaneity. It is very heavy that all of a sudden, only 6 months after the HTC, that quality becomes quantity. We must criticize ourselves for this, and understand where it came from. We cannot re-write history and pick and choose the type or severity of our errors. It is safe to say that the same thing that caused our errors also is responsible for the re-writing of history. To draw things out some more: if the PFOC did gain strength from really grappling with HTC errors, and if we finally -- with the help and criticism of the oppressed peoples and of women and comrades inside of PFOC who fought hard for revolutionary direction and principles -- did come clean on the nature and sources of our errors, then how come the same thing suddenly turns into weaknesses, and downplaying, and failure of overview, when -- 1) we do it again; and 2) a whole lot of people do it also?

We are not special people. We cannot call the same thing (opportunism and chauvinism) by its name when some people do it, and then call it something else when it appears again. Who do we think we are? Some examples of what really happened up to and into the day of July 4th can provide information for us:

1. The MPOC and Arthus Kinor, the great compromiser and social democrat, led in a) deciding (with the appropriate alliances) that if the BPP and the APSP and other nationalist forces had two fundamentally different slogans -- for their own struggle, mind you -- which were self-determination for all Black, poor and oppressed people and political independence for all colonized Black people respectively, that it really didn't matter that everyone had to work together to

30  
overcome minor differences, that through the process of working together we would all gain trust, etc. So why don't we have both slogans and everyone will be happy. and b) At the March founding conference for July 4th, it was the same force who suggested that we shouldn't all get sweated over deciding who should be on the Board of the Coalition (where theoretically politics would be struggled over). Originally 50 members were suggested -- they urged everyone whould climb aboard.

These are examples of how the main counter-revolutionary forces at work here were white and male supremacy, and that white supremacists took it upon themselves to make a fundamental decision for the Black movement.

Many people attended the demonstrations. By far, Philadelphia was the most important. The content of many banners was anti-imperialist. There were many speakers and some real revolutionary content was present. But it was isolated. Within this, the nature of the state was often confused. Demands like "Jobs, not Guns" (which was supposed to mean opposition to arms stockpiling) and the demands for opposition to imperialist war were not complemented by support for class and national war. Misdefining imperialism and the movement's inability to be strong enough to counteract that is a very serious thing.

PFOC has to re-evaluate our stance on July 4th. While there are some shortcomings in the NY Chapter evaluation, like weaknesses around women, gay oppression and the nature of the state, its main contribu--tion is the argument for the social base of opportunism and chauvinism. It is different analysis than the National evaluation and it is a correct evaluation. There is widespread agreement that a revolutionary core is needed to reach unity on fundamental questions if July 4th is going to make a greater anti-imperialist impact. Politics need to be fleshed out.

PFOC can make a contribution if we are willing and able to confront white and male supremacy, and create a revolutionary alliance with Third World forces. In the absence of anti-imperialist and revolutionary consciousness in the oppressor nation, Third World forces have made accomodations to opportunism in order to make alliances. We must attack the root of the problem. This is our historic task, as we have said many times. July 4th was not able to break with the chauvinism and opportunism of the US movement, but the revolutionary forces, that is the Third World forces, are able to advance to the extent that PFOC and friends wage serious political struggle with other white forces. By re-writing PFOC history, the national evaluation denies the lessons we have learned through the HTC. It is the same history that helps us understand what the key obstacles in July 4th were.

The New York Interim Committee

## JULY 4 : NATIONAL EVALUATION

31

This evaluation concentrates on the main overall political strengths and weaknesses of the July 4 Coalition, nationally and regionally, as we see them. We put this forward in the spirit of comradeship and with the aim of helping to raise the political unity of the Coalition to a higher level.

On July 4th, the July 4th Coalition (J4C) was able to mobilize the spirited participation of 70,000 activists and participants, from a wide range of diverse struggles in joint activity to denounce the US colonization of Puerto Rico and to demand independence for the Puerto Rican nation, to denounce the oppression of Native Americans and to support their demand for sovereignty, and to call attention to the many struggles taking shape within the US, and to build links among them.

These are no small achievements. The rising attentiveness within the US left for solidarity and support of the Puerto Rican people's struggle for independence has been one of the most striking developments of the last two years. This is due primarily to the acceleration of the struggle of the Puerto Rican people themselves and to the tireless effort of their representatives and leadership, particularly the PSP. In projecting widely the demand for Puerto Rican independence, the J4C educated many people about the colonization of Puerto Rico and pushed ahead the building of a broad-based solidarity movement with that demand.

The recognition within the US left of the nature and centrality of the struggles of Native Americans for national sovereignty and against US imperialism has risen dramatically in the last few years. The life and death fight of Native Americans under the ideological and political leadership of AIM against genocidal attacks of US imperialism are responsible for this increased consciousness. This is a qualitative leap over the romanticism-rooted support that the US left gave to Native American liberation in the 60's. The struggle of Native Americans is the oldest national struggle in the hemisphere and demands the widest possible support. In this respect, it was a significant advance for the movement that AIM chose to join the J4C and lead the organizations in the coalition to recognize the centrality of the Native American demand for sovereignty.

In the absence of a generally recognized leading organization in this stage of our revolutionary process, and given the prevailing isolation of the national, class and women's struggles from one another, our movement has found it difficult to link these struggles together, to coordinate their activities, and to build support for them among the masses of people in the US. In this context, the ability of the J4C to bring together participants and leaders from a broad range was a real achievement. Organizations in the coalition got the chance to work together and to assess each other's strengths and weaknesses. Members of these organizations got valuable experience organizing for the events; skills were sharpened in the areas of outreach, security, and propaganda. The political struggle that occurred over the coalition's program and political demands and the shared work experience, laid the basis for raising the political unity among various organizations for future work.

Last, but not least, the J4C's events were a strong and timely response to the white supremacist, male supremacist Bicentennial circus staged by the US government. They were also a resounding victory against the government's attempts to suppress our demonstrations.

PFOC has been pleased to contribute to this effort, pleased to have worked with and struggled with other organizations, comrades who were part of the coalition. However, PFOC has also called attention what we felt have been the weaknesses of the demonstrations, weaknesses with a long history within the US left, weaknesses around which our organization recently led in the Hard Times Conference: a failure to maintain a clear overview of the development and character of US imperialism that would allow us to propagandize and agitate for the strategic relationship between struggles, and a failure that led to the downplaying of the strategic importance and leading role historically, presently, and in the future of the two largest national groupings and movements within the current US borders -- The Black liberation movement and the Mexican peoples' movement. We insist on calling attention to these weaknesses not to undercut the unity of our forces, or to detract from achievements. We wish to strengthen, politically and organizationally, the capacity to maintain and deepen the fighting unity for the future.

We think that the main weakness of the J4C both nationally and regionally was that it failed to put forward a correct and truthful definition of imperialism. Such a definition would have served to unite organizations in the coalition around a genuinely anti-imperialist understanding of July 4th. It would have provided a firm political basis for resolving many of the political questions that faced the coalition as it built for July 4th -- questions about program and demands, speakers, sites for the events, etc. It would have also provided a foundation for future coalition work among the organizations. The Coalition was strong in its call for independence for independence for Puerto Rico, and sovereignty for Native Americans. But the coalition weakened the anti-imperialist thrust of its program by taking a "something for everyone" approach that "sectorized" the struggles against US imperialism and treated these sectors as equal (excepting those of Puerto Ricans and Native Americans) in their historical and strategic importance. The result was a populist approach to July 4th.

Our organization, the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, believes that the coalition's leadership (of which we were a part) made a significant error in not struggling from the very beginning for a correct definition, a minimal definition of US imperialism. We want to be clear about what we mean, and don't mean, by a correct, minimal definition. We do not mean a full, correct, historical materialist analysis of US imperialism that includes fully developed positions on the nature of women's oppression or the national question. This is the kind of analysis that can only be initiated by individual organizations engaged in on-going mass practice and carried to a qualitatively higher level by a revolutionary communist party. We think it would have been incorrect for the J4C to try to develop such an analysis. Instead we believe the coalition should have struggled for a minimal definition that included the following:

- 1) a definition of imperialism as a stage of capitalism, not a set of policies of the monopoly capitalists;
- 2) a minimal historical and strategic conception of US history that included the role of slavery, genocide and annexation of land, and the oppression of women in building the US.

These deserve to be looked at in more detail. 1) The definition would say that imperialism is a stage ( the highest stage, the monopoly stage) of capitalism, not a set of ideas of the capitalist class. Imperialism is a system that must continually increase its exploitation and oppression of nations, classes, and peoples both inside and outside the imperialist nation if it is to survive. This ever - increasing exploitation of land and labor around the

world is a necessity of the monopoly capitalist-imperialist system, not a set of policies that they can rescind at any time. The coalition failed to make this distinction. The coalition's propaganda declared that Puerto Rico is a colony and must fight to end its colonization, that Black people are oppressed and must fight to end their oppression, that women are oppressed and must fight to end their oppression, etc. But the coalition did not say that Puerto Ricans, Black people, and women are fighting against the same system, the same enemy, US imperialism. It did not say that these struggles are many fronts of one struggle. By omitting this key fact, the coalition incorrectly projected the view that each oppressed "sector" could conceivably end its own exploitation and oppression while leaving the system intact. The coalition should have said that only when the US imperialist system is overthrown will there be an end to exploitation and oppression perpetrated by this brutal system. Many of the speakers on the day of the event referred to imperialism and the anti-imperialist movement, but it was too little and too late. These speakers were not able to reverse the populist approach that had characterized the coalition's politics for six months.

33

2) The definition of history would sketch out in broad strokes a picture of the US from the 1600's to the present. It would clearly expose the falsification and glorifications of US history which the ruling class is mouthing in the Bicentennial year. A history of the development of capitalism in the New World made possible by genocide, slavery, and the forced annexation of land. A history of the development of capitalism and the growth of the capitalist class into the wealthiest most powerful ruling class the world has ever seen. This class acts in many ways to maintain its worldwide control. Through wars of aggression against other imperialist rivals, through the suppression of National Liberation struggles, through colonization and neo-colonization, and by ripping off people's land and labor. Inside the US this ruling class has stolen the land and labor of Blacks, Mexicans, and Native Americans, and continues to do so today. Third World workers continue to be super-exploited and nationally oppressed in the US, and Third World communities continue to be the victims of armed attacks by the state. Even as it has exploited white workers in the US, the ruling class has been able to buy off certain sectors of white workers with the profits gained from this super-exploitation of Third World workers inside and outside the US. This has led, in most instances, to white workers abandoning the struggles and demands of Third World people in the US in order to maintain their relative privileges, their economic, political and social advantages. This relative material privilege of white workers is the root cause of the national chauvinism and racism among white working class people and continues to divide the US working class and keep it under the thumb of the ruling class.

PFOC thinks that this kind of minimal definition should have been struggled for in the J4C from the very beginning. With no agreed upon conception of US history to remind us that the US was built on the stolen land of Indians, and Mexicans, and the slave labor of Black people, on the super-exploitation of oppressed nations, national minorities, and women, the coalition was unable to draw from that history the lessons it should have drawn. The coalition had no basis, for instance, for assessing the historical and strategic importance of different inside and outside the US. It had no basis for saying which particular struggles have led the fight against US imperialism and which are leading that fight today. Therefore, it had no basis for saying which demands have to be spoken to before others. Apart from the Native American and Puerto Rican struggles, all other demands and struggles were treated equally in the program. This was a major error that had grave consequences. In a program that purported

to speak to the whole range of national, class and women's oppression in the US on July 4th, the coalition failed to give the Black and Mexican national liberation movements in the US a central place together with the focus on Puerto Rican and Native American struggles.

First, the coalition never really addressed in a strong way and a correct way, the national oppression of Black people and the key role of the Black liberation struggle in the US. It never put forward a clear demand for self-determination. The two demands in the coalition's program cancelled each other out. The life and death struggle of the Black people was never addressed specifically until it was too late. The coalition failed to support African Liberation Day in Philadelphia, demanded an end to racist attacks in Boston, but did not put that out clearly on the day of the national build-up actions on June 6, in the Bay Area never dealt with the prison movement, all of which affect Black people directly. Therefore, there was nothing politically that the coalition could offer the Black community organizations to bring them into the coalition or to mobilize them to the events themselves. There was very little that could counter the response of the Black community groups that they were too busy organizing in their own communities to relate to the July 4 Coalition. A correct and consistent position from the coalition on the centrality of the Black liberation movement would have been the first step in bridging this gap between the coalition and the on-going organizing being done in the Black community.

Because of this failure to see the centrality of the Black struggle, there was much opportunist practice by the coalition in relation to it. The most striking example is the treatment of the Black Anti-Bicentennial Action Committee in Philadelphia. The coalition refused to support their actions as it would detract from the build-up of July 4th, but went to them for support when the march route was in question, and their support was needed in order to gain permission for the demonstration. The failure to place the Black struggle in its central place led to increased national chauvinism on the part of white organizations. When Black people initially stayed away from the coalition, the response was that the Black movement had no leadership, or there was no unity in the movement on the question of nationhood. There is a historical trend on the part of the white left in particular to ignore the Black struggle, and to liquidate it, unless confronted by Black people and their organizations. This was fed by a political line that failed to address the Black movement. In the last weeks, the coalition became a focus for the initiative of leading Black organizations seeking unity with a broader movement. This initiative led to the inclusion of many Black speakers in the events. But lack of a consistent position on the strategic centrality of Black liberation blunted the impact of this development. The impact of 6 months of work around a political line that down-played this struggle and failed to uphold support for self-determination cannot be reversed on the day of an event.

Likewise, and for much the same reason, the history (past and present) of Mexican oppression by the US was not strongly and correctly addressed, nor was the national liberation struggle of Mexicans against this oppression. The fruits of this error were seen in the Northern California Regional July 4 Coalition, when CASA, a Mexican organization which is leading the struggles in the US for Mexican national liberation and the rights of undocumented workers, proposed to the coordinating committee that they be given adequate time to speak to their struggle on July 4th. The coordinating committee refused, and CASA decided not to speak at the San Francisco rally -- this happened on land that was stolen from the Mexican people in a part of the country where the Mexican struggle is a central struggle against US imperialism and in connection with an event being held in San Francisco's Latino district. PFOC wants to criticize the coordinating

committee for abandoning the revolutionary line that CASA was putting forward in favor of fashioning a speakers program that carefully reflected the exact "equality" of all struggles beyond those of Puerto Ricans and Native Americans. For the predominantly white organizations represented on the CC, including the PFOC, this was a very serious error of national chauvinism, and we should be endeavoring to understand its roots and to correct it immediately.

The struggle of women for our liberation has been a globe-shaking event, and development in the last decade. This latest phase of struggle has arisen in conjunction with national liberation movements. The US women's movement has grown up within that context. It has fought against the ruling class that has fostered male chauvinism and sexism by continuing to give material benefits to men over women, and to exploit women's unwaged labor in the home. Third World women, oppressed by nationality, class and sex, have carried the heaviest burden under this male supremacist system. Women's struggles in the US and around the world against this exploitation, against male chauvinism, and for full equality is a leading force against US imperialism. The failure to view this struggle as a leading force is a grave error and has serious consequences for the whole anti-imperialist movement. The height of this error by the July 4 Coalition was in ignoring the true anti-imperialist leadership of the women's movement. By elevating NOW as the leadership in Philadelphia, making that organization the only representative of the women's movement, it negated 5 years of work. The event in Philadelphia for women and our movement was not an advance in terms of deepening unity or building an alliance between the women's movement and the national liberation struggles. There is much struggle in the women's movement at this time as to what direction to take. A revolutionary core is being developed, the movement is under increasing repression from the state. It is the unity of all of our movements that can build this alliance and fight repression. The J4C failed to build this, by not giving the women's struggle for liberation the true emphasis it deserved.

The fight for the rights of gay people to live free of harassment and with dignity was not seen by the coalition in its relationship to the oppression of women, but rather viewed as another sector. Without the understanding of the material basis of gay oppression there can be no combatting of anti-gay ideas and attitudes -- this is enhanced when all struggles are equalized. So while it was a step forward that gay people and organizations were sought out and did participate, they were viewed more for their numbers than for how their oppression and their struggle against it actually threaten imperialism.

Lastly, with no shared, minimal conception of US history to guide it, the coalition could not put forward a correct explanation of the increased attacks on working people in the US. The coalition should have struggled for the recognition that US imperialism is on the decline in this period, due to the struggles and victories of oppressed and socialist nations and peoples to free themselves from imperialism's yoke. It should have laid out the connection between US imperialism's losses overseas and its intensified exploitation and oppression back "home" in its own belly. As usual, this exploitation falls heaviest on the oppressed nationalities. It falls heavier on women than on men. The coalition developed demands around different effects of the economic crisis, the crisis of imperialism in decline -- demands around social services, job lay-offs, increased attacks on Third World communities, forced sterilization of women, etc. -- but it did not define the root cause of the crisis itself. Instead of leading around a correct explanation of these attacks on the working class, the coalition tended to mystify these attacks, to portray them as just happening. This added nothing to the working class' understanding of the real contradictions

within the US in this bicentennial year.

In summing up, we the PFOC think that the coalition's leadership made an error in opting for the short-run goal of involving as many people as possible in the July 4th events. We think the coalition should have built for July 4th in the context of building an anti-imperialist mass movement that extended beyond July 4th. In fact, history does not show that watered down and incorrect positions organize more people than strong and correct ones. In any case, our goal is not numbers alone, but a sound movement. We should have struggled over a definition of imperialism and a history from the very beginning, as well as over which struggles and demands were more historically and strategically central than others in the fight against US imperialism. This kind of struggle toward unity would have linked the organizations in the coalition together on a more firm political basis than now exists and would have constituted a major step forward toward accomplishing our tasks.

#### PFOC'S ROLE IN THE JULY 4TH COALITION

Our evaluation of the July 4th Coalition must be accompanied with a self-criticism and evaluation of our role within it.

First, we must take responsibility for all of the initial errors committed in the July 4th Coalition, as the basis for the populist approach to the organizing for the 4th was laid at the Hard Times Conference in January. We helped to lead this political line in the anti-imperialist movement, and set the forces in motion. In retrospect, our organization understands the seriousness of our failure to define imperialism and therefore anti-imperialism and through the first 4 months of the build-up for July 4th were engaged in the overturning of this incorrect line. This process left our practice nationally uneven. We failed to externalize our understanding of the Hard Times Conference until it was too late. This was viewed in different cases as divisive by the coalition. This was never our plan or intent. We feel that the most serious self-criticism is that we failed to build alliances with other white organizations in building an alliance that supported the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, thereby continuing to make similar errors of national chauvinism that we initiated at the Hard Times Conference.

As a sponsoring organization of the coalition, we were expected to do work in the coalition, because of the two-line struggle taking place in our organization we were incapable of committing ourselves -- we should have stated this clearly, and not kept it a secret, particularly since it was obvious that something was happening in our organization.

In all of the regions we did not push forcefully enough for the coalition to contact Black organizations with strong internationalist politics. Nor did we struggle for the importance of women's leadership within the coalition or on the board.

The following article is based on a presentation given by the N.Y. PFOC at a meeting of close political comrades. The analysis was developed by the Steering Committee based on the political struggle within the collectives; it was discussed at a membership meeting. The initial part of the presentation, not reproduced here, set the context for our evaluation: our responsibility as white communists, our understanding of the primacy of line, and what are some of the major aspects of our line. We stressed the understanding of imperialism as one system, the centrality of the issue of oppressor/oppressed nations, the revolutionary nature of the woman's liberation struggle, and the relationship of the gay struggle to the struggle against male supremacy and imperialism. This article starts with the second part of the presentation, an analysis of the nature of the political struggle within the chapter.

In the course of the struggle within our chapter, we identified two issues that made it difficult for us to develop a clear political analysis of the July 4th coalition and our work within it. The first was a sense that to define opportunism as the main character of the coalition implied that the PFOC could not continue to participate. The second was that to define opportunism as the main character meant that the PSP was mainly responsible for it, and that that was national chauvinist.

Both of these were wrong methods of analysis. They served to obscure the issue of the political line of the coalition rather than making it primary. If we could not overcome these obstacles, it would mean that we would approach our evaluation with strings attached: if we wanted to continue, it would mean that our evaluation would have to be that the coalition was predominantly anti-imperialist and that we would have to make a case to support our conclusion. This would disarm us from being able to develop a correct strategy for how to help struggle for a correct anti-imperialist perspective within the coalition. We had to realize that because a coalition is mainly opportunist does not mean automatic withdrawal. We had to look at the whole movement, its strengths and weaknesses, the dominant lines, and draw conclusion based on the needs of the class and national struggles and what will move the revolution forward. We could not put our organizational interests above the interests of the revolutionary process and struggle.



We could not assume that a Third World or Black organization could not be responsible for opportunist errors. Our approach to the coalition, and to the role of the PSP or any other organization, had to put politics in command. Loyalty and respect for the work of organizations within the various national liberation struggles were real factors, but did not substitute for open and honest political struggle. And while we have to be acutely aware of our own short and predominantly opportunist history as an organization, that did not mean that we had no right to criticize in a principled manner.

### Evaluation

The bottom line - the minimal basis of unity for any anti-imperialist coalition - is whether or not it views imperialism as one system, and whether or not it's able to link together all the struggles against the common enemy. The analysis of imperialism that dominated the coalition propaganda, including the speech that was to be given on July 4th itself, either implicitly or explicitly made a separation between capitalism within the U.S. and imperialism as a foreign policy. This was explicit in the original call to the demonstration, "The American Revolution Continues" and in a working paper on imperialism prepared for the first large national board meeting. In that paper, imperialism is described specifically as a foreign policy in three of the first four paragraphs.

This separation was the political basis for the opportunism on the role of national liberation struggles in general, and of the Black struggle in particular. Almost none of the mass propaganda of the coalition projected national liberation struggles strongly, and much of it - such as the mass leaflets in New York and Chicago - dropped these demands completely. Self-determination was robbed of its correct and revolutionary meaning by adopting two conflicting slogans.; this struggle was "mediated" by a predominantly white group. The Black liberation struggle was viewed as a possible constituency, not as a central struggle which had to be understood politically. The most moderate, and at times the most obviously opportunist elements in the Black community were seized on and projected as spokespeople for Black people. This was the case with Mohammed Kenyatta who was distrusted by many Black forces and by our people in Philadelphia; warnings were not heeded, and he ended up testifying at a hearing to block the demonstration. This was continued by giving the SCLC much more projection as well as equal speaking time with forces such as the African People's Socialist Party, the African People's Party, and the Republic of New Africa. The coalition's opportunism engendered splits and dissension within the Black community of Philadelphia. And the issue of national chauvinism among white people was never taken on by the coalition.

Opportunism prevailed on the issue of the women's liberation struggle and the gay struggle. Poor politics on women both came from and resulted in a male-dominated board. The women's struggle was neither viewed as nor projected as a major revolutionary force; there was no effort to integrate the politics of women's liberation with either the class question or the national question. Getting a speaker from NOW became a major goal in terms of organizing women; in fact, Karen DeCrow was the only speaker at the demonstration that spoke about the politics of women's liberation before the rains came. With the exception of a leaflet that PFOC women helped work on, there was absolutely no propaganda that dealt with male supremacy. The rally itself had no consciousness of the women's struggle, and the only mention of gay people was degrading and in the context of a fund raising pitch. We should note that there were large and militant women's and gay contingents at the rally.

The issue of the state, and the relationship of the coalition and its various component organizations to the state, was not strongly addressed. While there was a demand against imperialist war (Jobs Not Guns), there was little consciousness around repression or of the right of people to struggle against the state. This was most pronounced when the draft of the speech to be given at the demonstration by a leader of the Native American struggle had no reference to the intensity of the repression against that very struggle.

It's clear that there is not agreement on many of these issues among revolutionary forces in the U.S., yet alone among all progressive forces. Yet, if this coalition is to play a role in building revolutionary consciousness in this country, it is imperative that some unity be reached about how these issues are to be addressed. It is for this reason, that we see a necessity of building a revolutionary core of organizations to lead the broader coalition. Those organizations which share a full analysis of imperialism must struggle for a higher level of unity among themselves, so that strong and consistent revolutionary leadership can be given to the broader coalition. This is the only way that the coalition will not function on the level of unity projected by the church, liberal, and pacifist forces.

These errors in political line were reflected in the organizing methods of the coalition. A constituency approach was adopted which equated and separated each of the various struggles; as a result no real understanding of a common enemy, of U.S. imperialism was built. Up front manifestations of opportunism toward Blacks, women, and gay people flowed directly from a reformist definition of imperialism. The net effect in several cases was to pit struggles against each other -- the way that national liberation struggles could fight for their leading role was to criticize the gay movement. The coalition, including us, have great responsibility for this. One specific example of this kind of constituency work was the "Worker's Leaflet": although written one week after white construction workers attacked Black and Latin workers in Boston, it had one sentence about divisions within the working class and nothing about women. It didn't raise the demands for self-determination. It is strikingly similar to our line in the Hard Times Conference.

Another similarity to our work in the Hard Times Conference was the adoption of a shopping list of 25 demands. Most of these demands were never explained nor utilized in the work of the coalition. And without a correct analysis of imperialism, it was impossible to coherently link them together.

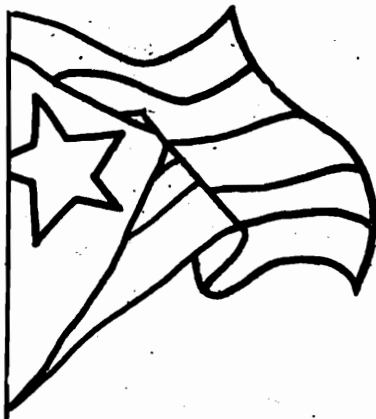
One last thing about organizing methods. Whenever there was talk on the board about broadening out, it was almost synonymous with reaching more white people. Clearly, there is absolutely nothing wrong with reaching more white people; however, with no agreement on the issue of national chauvinism, this argument usually was followed within an argument for watering down the politics of the coalition so that they would be more acceptable to white people. The issue is not whether or not the coalition should reach people, but rather on what political terms.

#### Where does the major responsibility lie?

It was crucial for those of us in the PFOC, and for all of us as white communists, to understand our responsibility for the political line of the coalition. The social base for opportunism in the coalition, as is true in the broader society, was white people and white organizations.

On the whole, Black and Third World anti-imperialist and Marxist-Leninist forces struggled for the political basis of the coalition to be self-determination for oppressed nations.

On the whole, white forces, whether Marxist-Leninist, social democrats, peace and antiwar forces, formed the main political base for opportunism to become dominant. National chauvinism ran rampant in the discussion at the National Board meeting on the use of the U.S. flag. It was white groups that mostly argued for capitalism in the U.S. and imperialism abroad. It was white groups that pushed that demands for national liberation were not working class demands, and that only a jobs demand had class content. Consolidated opportunists like Dave McReynolds from the War Resistor's League argued that there was too much focus on Puerto Rico and that it would turn white people off.



Black and Third World groups related to the coalition in a qualitatively different way than most of the white organization. By and large, they did their own organizing within their own communities, utilizing their own propaganda and raising their own demands. And given the realities of the imperialist system, these demands were almost always revolutionary.

White groups, on the other hand, often saw the coalition as building their base. In fact, the coalition propaganda was written primarily for whites and by whites. And because of the state of the white left, and the objective reality of the consciousness of white workers, politics were watered down in every piece of propaganda and in the coalition speech in an attempt to broaden who would attend the event.

#### Some Preliminary Lessons for International Solidarity Work

At this point, we would like to briefly state some of the political issues that were raised for us by our work on July 4th, specifically in relation to building international solidarity. These are issues, not necessarily answers at this point.

1. Black and other Third World groups have the right to build the broadest base of support for their national liberation struggles; this would include members of varying classes and sectors within the oppressor nation.
2. Our goal as white communists, and the goal of any anti-imperialist united front, is to build political solidarity on a conscious anti-imperialist basis. "Objective" anti-imperialism is not our primary task.

3. The reality of national oppression creates a material basis for an economist view of whites by organizations and individuals from oppressed nations: " How do we get these people to move and get off our backs?" In the absence of revolutionary organizing within the oppressor nation, the answer to this question is going to tend to be economist. White communists cannot ask national liberation struggles to adjust their timetable to our political backwardness.

4. There cannot be mechanical transference of lessons from oppressed nations to the oppressor nation. The Vietnamese urged many white North Americans to carry the American flag during the 60s; this argument was used by Dave Dellinger at the Board meeting to substantiate his argument about why it was correct to use the U.S. flag. We felt Dellinger was opportunist, but not the Vietnamese. It was not their responsibility to figure out how to organize in the oppressor nation.

### The PFOC

The PFOC accepts responsibility for the opportunism of the coalition. Our work on the Hard Times Conference, under a different leadership and an opportunist line, directly and indirectly helped to lay the basis for the political line of the July 4th Coalition. And our failure to issue a public statement and to struggle around it with individual groups as well as within the coalition, served to perpetuate our errors. We did not take full responsibility for struggling with other white groups or for doing consistent anti-imperialist organizing among white people. In practice, this was a perpetuation of a national chauvinist, male supremacist, and economist line.

We wrote a leaflet and distributed it in Philadelphia on July 4th which also didn't struggle for a full anti-imperialist view among white people. Our leaflet did not deal with the Native American or Puerto Rican or Mexican struggles; it did not draw the links and develop an understanding of imperialism as one system. It was wrong to only respond to the struggles within the Board on Blacks and women and not to fulfill our overall tasks of winning whites to a correct understanding of imperialism.

### Continuations

What does this evaluation mean for our work in the coalition?

We believe that we must stay in the coalition and struggle around the issues we have just outlined. We have a particular responsibility to struggle with the other white groups and individuals around national chauvinism. We must take this responsibility more seriously than we have in the past. We believe that the issues we are raising must be addressed by the coalition if it is to play a revolutionary role as a mass form in the United States. Clearly, that means that we must also struggle for the building of a revolutionary core of groups to help give leadership to the coalition.

An integral part of that strategy is that we must develop and put out our own propaganda with a correct revolutionary line for white people. We must fulfill our responsibility as communists in the oppressor nation; we have got to confront national chauvinism and consistently raise the demand of support for self-determination.

The current issue facing the coalition is posed as whether to massify now or whether to consolidate a deeper political unity now. We don't believe that the issue is being posed properly. The correct issue is around what politics do we build this coalition; when we agree on that, we should try to win as many people as possible over to that line. But we also believe that that political struggle around line will not be won unless revolutionary groups within the coalition build a higher level of political unity. Based on our analysis of line being primary, we also are against asking or allowing the Communist Party, USA to be part of the coalition. While there are honest progressive forces which can be won to a revolutionary line with correct leadership, the Communist Party, both in theory and in practice, has proven itself class collaborationist and national chauvinist. It has no role to play in a coalition attempting to forge a revolutionary mass line for the national, class, and mass struggles of this country.

## RECTIFICATION IN BOSTON: THE ANTI RACISM COMMITTEE

The work of the Boston PFOC Anti-Racism Committee is a major place where rectification and externalization of our understanding of the Hard Times Conference errors takes place -- a primary aspect of externalization being on-going struggle for a revolutionary anti-imperialist line in the left. In this report we will show 1) how applying political line as primary, informs our present practice; 2) how overturning the opportunist, specifically national chauvinist line has begun to significantly redirect our work ; and 3) what progress we have made toward developing a revolutionary anti-imperialist class analysis, our position on the Black National Question, and what effects this is having on our analysis of the situation in Boston.

There are two arenas where this political struggle currently takes place. The first is the PROF ARC. All PFOC members are now involved in the ARC. The second arena is the Hyde Park defense work, which in addition to us, also involves some 25-50 other white leftists, many of whom have related to PFOC in various ways for some time. The defense work has been the major practice of the Boston PFOC since the ending of the School Committee picket line last August (besides the local HTC work). It involves providing defense of Black families (and one in particular) primarily in Hyde Park, previously an all-white neighborhood of Boston, but also in Dorchester against racist attacks. It also involves building a relationship with the one Black family in particular, the family with whom we have worked consistently, and building political organization with the other white defense workers. Of the whites involved, we in PFOC have largely provided the organizational leadership in the group; the Black families initiated the work and have continually provided political direction. But since rectification has begun here in Boston, at least two significant changes have been occurring: 1) our relations with the Black family have deepened; and 2) we are able to provide more consistent political leadership among the defense workers. We feel it is the rectification of an opportunist, national chauvinist line that is providing us with the political basis and clarity to struggle for correct politics and change our social practice for the better.

Since the June NC/IC meeting, the Boston PFOC ARC has begun to evaluate out past and present practice in the light of the opportunism of our political line over the past year, up until the HTC. From thorough discussion of opportunism and the HTC, including study of the national question, we have generated a series of questions to guide our analysis of the situation in Boston from a revolutionary anti-imperialist perspective. The basis for these questions is

our understanding that the opportunist line that said the present crisis of imperialism was in fact merely an economic crisis of capitalism, leveling the material differences between people of the oppressed and oppressor nations in the US led us to liquidate the material basis of national and women's oppression. 43 While in words we said "the Black struggle is a national liberation struggle," in practice we operated from a line which said, in essence, "Black and white, unite and fight." Increasingly, during the HTC period, we moved toward seeing racism as a division within the working class; we became increasingly unclear, specifically in our own work here in Boston, as to how to raise self-determination. We began to view defense work as a moral question, and more and more crisis-oriented, and in some ways saw that the Black families involved had as much to gain and learn from us as we had from them, in that we could help bridge the gap between them and white workers. Now, as we are in the process of developing a revolutionary anti-imperialist line, we are defining Black peoples' struggles in Boston as a fight for democratic rights (the right to live wherever, to go to school wherever, for safety, quality education, jobs, etc.) in the context of the Black liberation struggle. We now see that organizing among the oppressor nation working class has to be based on support for the right of self-determination for Black people. This political process has shown us that political line is not just a matter of words, but rather an analysis that can be seen in the real world through our social practice.

Outside the PFOC, in the Hyde Park defense network, we did not, in the past, struggle with people to understand wither the material basis for opportunism and national chauvinism within our ranks, or the true nature of the defense we were engaged in as defense of the Black liberation struggle, not just the defense of one particular family against the attacks on their right to live in peace. Some results of this: we had allowed comments to the effect that the Black woman whose home we were defending was "overreacting" or becoming "hysterical" when she was angry at the attacks on her home to go unchallenged (not connections between male supremacy and national chauvinism in this situation). We had no answer for members of the defense group who felt that it was a "bummer" to just defend the families' homes, that we had to see immediate results, and assure people that the attacks would end soon, in order to keep the group from "bumming out." Although we understand that we have to broaden our strategy to include outreach and to build a broader force of white people against national oppression, to constantly recruit new people -- particularly white workers -- into the defense group, we also now feel that this "bummed out" response reflects a lack of understanding of and respect for the protracted struggle of the Black nation for liberation. It also reflects a lack of understanding that what we are doing is defending the ability of the Black struggle as a whole to survive and fight, by helping to defend individual Black families from attacks which are in essence part of an all-out attack on the Black liberation struggle. We also see our work as a defense of the right of armed self-defense among Black people. Until recently, we did not fully counter defense workers' chauvinist attitudes about the choices the Black families have made, expressing them as, for example, "why would they (the Black families) want to live in these white neighborhoods anyway.. they're sort of asking for it, aren't they? or "what was wrong with living in Roxbury?" Now we are arguing for the specific importance of Blacks fighting to move throughout the city, which will mean challenging segregated white neighborhoods also, which is part of the struggle for survival of the Black community by declaring its right to mobility and expansion. We said before these attitudes were racist, but now we argue for the historical and material basis for these choices.

One way the struggle for a revolutionary line within the Hyde Park defense group expresses itself is in a particular struggle over the relationship between doing the actual defense of the homes (which has been fairly successful lately in deterring the attacks), and organizing white workers. These two tasks most often get put forward by defense workers as separate and even

incompatible or mutually exclusive tasks. At the core of this polarization of the two we see a line that says that the class consciousness of the white working class is a question separate from consciousness of the necessity of defending the struggle of the Black nation. We feel that this position reflects an incorrect understanding of the nature of US imperialism, and sees organizing white workers as separate from struggling for a correct understanding of the nature of US imperialism with its oppression of internal and external nations. This position makes the fight against national chauvinism one of a list of "issues" to be brought up in the course of organizing. We in PFOC see that any organizing among whites that does not demand support for the national liberation struggle of Black people -- support for the right of self-determination -- will be opportunist and ultimately self-defeating. 44

Class consciousness is consciousness that the nature of the enemy is unreformable -- "Either place yourself at the mercy of capital, eke out a wretched existence as of old and sink lower and lower, or adopt a new weapon -- this is the alternative imperialism puts before the vast masses of the proletariat." (J. Stalin, Foundations of Leninism). It is also the understanding of who are friends, allies, and leaders in the struggle to "adopt a new weapon," and of the strategic weak points of the empire which, when attacked, will enable the new weapon to come into being through the destruction of the old. Class consciousness must be based on a correct understanding of the nature of imperialism as well as of the forces capable of opposing and overthrowing imperialism (and of the relationship among these forces, leadership, alliance, etc.). In the US, this means that class consciousness among workers of the oppressor nation is an understanding of the full nature of imperialism -- political and economic -- and that means an understanding of the national question. There can be no class consciousness among white workers in the US that does not include at the center the demand for self-determination for oppressed nations.

Thus, more and more, we are understanding that each question we face in the Hyde Park defense work -- from the question of militancy to the question of Black leadership -- comes down to our analysis of imperialism and the national question. At this point, we are still learning how to struggle for our politics in this work without being dogmatic, liberal, or un-selfcritical of our own past practice and political line. The better we understand the questions ourselves, the more effectively we will be able to do this. We have circulated a questionnaire relating to study groups for the defense workers, and many people have expressed interest in being in a study group on the Black liberation struggle, Black history, etc. We see this as an extremely important task to take up, as it is a way we will be able to struggle for our politics in the defense group (we have also had a series of meetings of the defense workers, and plan to have a day of workshops and presentations on these questions in early September). We see this political education and struggle among the defense workers as critical to the survival and growth of the defense work itself -- all these political questions, such as support for the right of self-determination, when left unresolved, or resolved incorrectly, will hold back and weaken defense work, and all our anti-racist work. We do not see this as a smooth or simple process, for there are many different people involved in the work, with various levels of political development and political positions on these questions. In addition, PFOC's developing of an anti-imperialist class analysis will be a key breakthrough in this work -- an analysis which puts the demand for self-determination for oppressed nations at the heart of class consciousness for oppressor nation workers. We need a truly anti-imperialist class analysis capable of exposing and drawing out the fundamental contradiction that does exist between oppressor nation workers and the imperialist bourgeoisie, but which is buried and masked under a false consciousness -- national chauvinism -- built over centuries and founded on material privileges.



## A REPORT ON THE NATIVE AMERICAN TREATY CONFERENCE

The second International Indian Treaty Conference was held on June 16-17, 1976, on the land of the Yanktonai Dakota people, in the south-east corner of the state of South Dakota. The Treaty Conference meets every two years. The first conference was held in June of 1974, on the Standing Rock Reservation, Hunkpapa Dakota country.

The conference followed the Sun Dance, a highly sacred traditional ceremony of the Lakota people. Non-Indian people were not invited to attend this ceremony.

The International Indian Council is a body of representatives from different Indian Nations in North and South America. It was established to deal specifically with the question of Native Nations and their relationship to the international community.

The plenary sessions of the conference were held in a large tent, and were opened and closed with prayers from the spiritual leaders of many Indian Nations. The workshops were mostly held outside. The quiet and beauty of the Missouri River and the absence of traffic and other distractions made this possible. There was a large encampment made on the bank of the Missouri. Many people brought tents and teepees, some slept in cars and makeshift shelters. Food was prepared for everyone at the registration center and rations were also given to many people cooking in their own camps.

Five hundred Indian people from many different Nations attended the conference. About 50 non-Indian people came by invitation. Most of these people were from the Native American Solidarity Committee (NASC). Representatives from other national liberation struggles--Jose Alberto Alvarez (PSP), Tapson Mawere (ZANU), Cheryl Buchanan, Lionel Fogarty (Black Resource Center, leaders of the struggle of the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia)-- addressed plenary sessions with speeches describing their struggles and expressing their solidarity with the Native American peoples. The conference allowed filming and taping of all sessions.

The conference was lead by national and local coordinators of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and members of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC). Many more Indian people had expected to attend but the effects of this present economic period and the constant repression and harrassment of Native people prevented more folks from coming. The shooting of Russell Means and John Thomas, only two weeks before the conference in a small town just 10 miles away from the site, was used by the media and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to intimidate people. The FBI and BIA pigs surrounded the area during the conference and watched its progress closely.

The major thrust of the conference was Internationalism. Within the Indian movement there is very little controversy over whether Indian people are a nation or a national minority. Only the national chauvenism and lack of understanding of history of some white organizations allows that to even be a question among progressive and revolutionary people. The question of land base is primary to Indian people today. The land is the material and spiritual basis from which all things grow, develop, and perish. There are over 100 Indian Nations in the U.S. today. The people working on the IITC, and the question of Native nations in the United Nations, and the land base Indian people will control, are faced with the strategic questions of how Native people will move on entering the U.N., developing national consciousness of Indian people, and securing treaty rights. Will Native people enter the U.N. as a confederation of Nations (like the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy), as one consolidated nation, or as the many separate and distinct nations that they are?

Through the work of Jimmie Durham, a Cherokee man from Oklahoma, and others, the Native question has been brought to the attention of many nations of the world. The political and economic support of many of these nations (some socialist countries such as Cuba, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, The Democratic Republic of Yeman) are being pursued within the relationships that have been established.

The International workshop, led by Jimmie Durham, decided to send AIM representatives to conferences of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of Non-aligned Nations, and the League of Arab States. Because of the oil on Indian lands, the prospect of joining the Organization of petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will be investigated. The development of relations with these organizations and their member nations is key to building international political support for the colonial case of Indian people in the U.N. and economic aid Native people will need for their continuing fight against U.S. Imperialism.

Many of the speakers who addressed the plenaries and workshops spoke of the need to establish stronger international relationships and of their total solidarity with the national liberation struggle of the Puerto Rican people.

The national resources that Indian nations own but, for the most part, do not control, was the topic of one of the workshops. Throughout the conference, the material basis for the genocide, continued harassment and government repression of Indian people was spoken to and understood. The land was not stolen from Native peoples because the white imperialists did not like red people or their way of life. The coal under the Cheyenne lands, the gold in the Black Hills, the waters of the Navaho, the fish of the Nisqually; all of these and more resources were once controlled by Indian people; and were and still are (more and more in this period of time) vital to the U.S. Imperialists. This expansionist policy of land theft and genocide of Nations is the primary reason why there are only 1 million Native Americans in this country today, where once at least 25 million Indian people lived.

In the workshop dealing with the present colonial condition of Native Americans in the U.S., Madonna Gilbert, a leader in the development of the Survival schools (schools where Indian children learn their own culture, language and true history, as well as reading and writing skills) reminded us all that the world is mostly non-white people and that Third World people are moving to regain their power as nations. She spoke of the need for Indian people to know their treaties, and the laws of the whites, so that they can be dealt with from a position of knowledge and power.

Leonard Crow Dog, spiritual leader of AIM, addressed the plenary twice, both times stressing the sovereignty of Indian nations, the centrality of the treaty rights, and the power of Indian Spiritualism.

47

Perhaps the most powerful and moving speech was given by John Trudell, National Chairman of AIM. He spoke of the need for solidarity among Indian peoples here in the U.S.-- "When they shoot one of us we all must bleed, when one of us is rewarded we must all share that reward, because we are all one people. WE may come from different tribal nations, but we are all one people. Our blood is the water of America and our flesh is the land itself". He spoke of the primacy of support for Indian political prisoners, the need for armed resistance, and the power of silence in the face of the FBI.

The fundamental demands of Native people in the U.S. center around the treaties. There were 371 treaties made by the U.S. Government with sovereign Indian Nations. Some treaties were made when Indian people were in positions of power; because the U.S. could not totally militarily defeat some nations, they made agreements. Every treaty was broken by the imperialists. The treaties are the key to the struggle for land. They are valid under international law. This struggle for land rights and the power of Indian spiritualism (see Jimmie Durham's paper - Am. Indian Culture, Spiritualism, and Traditionalism in a Revolutionary Struggle) are the threads that weave Indian Nations together in their unified resistance to U.S. Imperialism.

We must build a strong solidarity movement based on political demands. Non-Indian people have a tendency to romanticize and idolize Indian culture. These people become blind to the material basis of the oppression of Native People.

What is the relationship of the theft of Indian land to the accumulation of capital in the U.S. ? What was the true relationship of the first white settlers to Native peoples? Of black slaves to Native peoples? When were Indian people colonized.

How does the National liberation struggle of Indian people relate to the class struggle of the oppressor nation? What is our role as white Marxist-Leninists in fighting for the self-determination of Native peoples? How do we best talk to people about the Indian struggle, given that the borders of this country will change, and land will be retaken by Native People?

These are beginning questions that we must look for the answers to, both in our study and our practice. Everyone who attended the conference learned many things. The way Indian children were totally integrated into the process of the conference is an experience that is very alien to our (white) culture. Cooking in the kitchen, helping at the campsites, and in all the sessions of the conference, children were not just tolerated but asked and encouraged to participate fully in the ideas and decisions that were made. Every night traditional music and dancing was shared by us all. Young children that could just barely walk, old people, women and men of all ages joined in dances that gave strength and unity to the entire conference.

The American Indian Movement is in a serious crisis. The murder and incarceration of many of its leaders and warriors has been a primary strategy of the U.S. Imperialists. Indian people are constantly under the gun, and the building of a strong organization is crucial. We must build a solidarity movement based on the political demands of Indian people, and their leading organizations. We need to study more, and to work with Indian and non-Indian people, and never fail to uphold the right of Indian Nations to self-determination.