

*remarks of*

# *William Z. Foster*

NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, COMMUNIST PARTY, U.S.A.

I DID not expect to speak in this discussion but inasmuch as an announcement was made that I was to speak I will say a few words extemporaneously.

One thing that must strike all of us here is the high level of this discussion on the question of self-determination. I have participated in many discussions in our Party, but I do not recall any that was on a higher theoretical plane than this. Such a discussion, it is hardly necessary for me to add, could not have taken place under the Browder regime. Then we would have had a ukase from above and God help him who challenged it. Now, however, we have had a free, open and comradely discussion. It has been such that it will cause us all to leave this meeting with a better understanding and a greater unity in the Party on this question than we have ever had.

Some of the comrades who have spoken against the resolution would probably not make the same speech now if they were to speak again. The discussion goes to show that Comrade Davis' report and the resolution before us have stood up.

What have we been saying in this discussion? We have been re-examining the whole theoretical basis of our approach to the Negro question, not simply the application of the self-determination slogan. During the course of this discussion, we have clearly established three or four fundamental propositions regarding the mooted question of self-determination in the Black Belt of the South.

First, that the Negro people in the Black Belt are a nation, that they possess the essential qualities of nationhood, as elaborated in the works of that great expert on the national question, Stalin. This lays a firm basis for the self-determination slogan. So I will not deal further with this basic matter of whether or not the Negroes in the Black Belt are a nation.

Secondly, we have made an important contribution in answering a question that has puzzled our comrades for the past twenty years, namely, why, if the Negro people are a nation, don't they put forth

the slogan of self-determination. Fundamentally, the reason is that they are essentially a young nation, a developing nation. A nation has to be at a certain stage of political growth before it advances the demand for self-determination. As a number of comrades have pointed out, all over the world there are to be found peoples who do not advance the slogan of self-determination. We have had one illustration from India. I might add further that there are some 18 distinct peoples in India, with very few of them advancing the slogan of self-determination. Nevertheless, the Communist Party of India does advance this slogan in their name.

Nations are a matter of growth, of course. Our own nation took some 150 years at least before it had developed a real national consciousness, until it advanced the slogan of self-determination, backing it up to the point of separation from Great Britain. Of course, the Negro people in the United States are developing under far more complicated and difficult circumstances than did the 13 American colonies.

It has been pointed out in this general connection (and I think this throws much light on the question) that some of the nations of India are advancing their self-determination slogan under the guise of religion. It is also true that in certain circumstances national slogans are put out by other peoples in primitive or in distorted forms, for example, as racial slogans. One of the characteristics of the American Negro people has been that they, too, have put out what are basically national slogans very largely in a racial sense. Hence we have to look more closely than we have in the past at these racial slogans and at the conceptions the Negro people have with regard to race and racial oppression. Behind these prevalent concepts of race are actually developing national concepts. I think the discussion has proved that it is no decisive sign that a people does not constitute a nation if it does not advance clear-cut slogans for self-determination.

Thirdly, our discussion has shed considerable light on another very elementary matter, bearing directly upon the central question of whether or not the Negro people in the Black Belt are a nation, and on the slogan of self-determination. Some comrades in the discussion have said that the Negro people are not only not now a nation but also that they are not moving in the direction of becoming a nation. To help clear up this matter we have pretty clearly shown in our discussion what the orientation, or general course of development of the Negro people, really is. This orientation is developing along two general lines:

First, the Negro people most distinctly feel themselves to be

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Americans in the fullest sense of the word and they are fighting resolutely for full participation in all phases of American life on the basis of complete economic, political and social equality. The second main trend in the orientation of the Negro people is to unify their own ranks on a national basis and to develop more and more systematically a definite national consciousness. One of the most important developments in this respect has to do with the change that has already been noted by some comrades, namely, that the Negro people no longer speak of themselves so much as a race, but rather as a people. When the Negro people begin to designate themselves as a people rather than as a race, they are already taking a long stride in the direction of national consciousness.

There are many other signs, of course, of the developing national consciousness of the American Negro people. They are building up many movements that are definitely of a national liberation character. They are also closely identifying themselves with the national liberation struggles of colonial peoples all over the world. They feel a kinship with these movements. Very significant in this general respect was the demand made by the National Negro Congress to the United Nations to take up the grievances of the Negro people in this country. This demand, I understand, was very favorably received by the Negro masses and intellectuals. Such an act was essentially that of a nation appealing over the head of the American government to the peoples of the world for justice, much as almost any other colonial or oppressed nation might do.

Let me sum up on this general point: that is, the orientation of the Negro people is first, toward full participation and full equality in American life, and second, toward the development of their national consciousness. Comrade Ed Strong made a good contribution when he stressed the basic harmony between these two streams of courses of development. One of the major difficulties we have had to contend with has been a tendency of our opponents to pose one of these currents to the other, thus making it appear that the demand for self-determination slogans is in contradiction to the proposition that Negroes fight for the fullest rights as Americans. Comrade Strong knocked this nonsense on the head when he pointed out so forcefully that it is impossible for the Negro people to achieve their full economic, political, and social equality as Americans unless they organize as a nation, unless they forward the slogan of self-determination for the Black Belt of the South.

The foregoing three major points in our discussion, relating to the reaffirmation of the basis of Negro nationhood, the clarification

of the question of the Negro people not putting forward the self-determination slogan, and the analysis of the orientation of the Negro people, lay a solid basis for our theoretical development and use of the slogan of self-determination. From which we may conclude that the soundness of our Negro resolution has been proved and its adoption by our National Committee justified.

Even with these things said, we have, however, by no means exhausted the matter. There are numerous aspects of this general problem to which we have to pay more attention in the immediate future than we have done in this discussion. First, there is the question of the whole concept and role of race, which I have already alluded to. In past years the tendency in the Party was to brush this entire matter of race aside, on the assumption that it was some sort of distortion that had no significance except as an obstacle to the Negro people's acquiring a national consciousness. But the question cannot be evaded so easily. I am sure that if you ask the Negro people on what grounds they are oppressed, 99 out of 100 will give you a "racial" answer, in spite of the fact, as I have indicated, that they are beginning to develop, more and more, a national consciousness.

We know, of course, that science has shattered the "race theory." Nevertheless the term "race," loosely used, has served as a powerful instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie for the oppression of the Negro people, and we have got to trace much more carefully than we have in the past this relation of the concept of race to the whole question of the brutal oppression of the Negro people.

Secondly, there was another point that was not very well developed in our discussion, and it is one to which we also have to pay much more attention if we are to grasp the essence of this complex question and to make headway. I refer to the relation of the national minority of Negroes in the North to the main body of the Negro nation in the South. The connection between these two sections of the Negro people is a very close and a very vital one. We must pay very close attention to the material inter-relationships of one with the other, not the least because the leadership of the Negro people as a whole is developing chiefly among the national minority in the North. This is not to ignore the very striking new development that the Negro people in the South are courageously beginning to develop real leadership right in the heart of the Black Belt itself.

Another important question we shall have to study much more than we have done in this session is the concrete relations of the Negro nation to the American nation as a whole. In the past, when

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we first developed the self-determination slogan, we also brushed this question aside very cavalierly. There was a tendency to plump for a Negro Republic. But the situation is much more complicated than that. Talk of an American Negro Republic has no foundation in present-day reality. The relation of two or more peoples to each other within broader states is an extremely complicated one and assumes many forms in different nations. We have to become very familiar with these forms, especially as we begin to popularize the slogan of self-determination among the Negro people. I, for one, have no doubt that before very long, when we find the way of advancing the slogan more skillfully, the Negro people will begin to accept it. Especially I felt this when I listened to our brilliant young Negro Marxists discuss this question at this National Committee meeting.

The last point I want to touch upon is the practical use of the self-determination slogan in the national liberation struggle of the Negro people. We did not deal with this practical question sufficiently in our discussion. What we have done mostly has been to establish the validity of the slogan. The practical use we are going to make of the slogan in the struggle is going to take much more study than we have given it here. There are two things I am sure of: first, that this slogan is not going to be put on the shelf as one comrade indicated; and second, that we are not going to go to the sectarian extreme of using it to propagandize for the setting up of a Negro Republic. We have got to find the proper methods of using this slogan. In my opinion, our use of it will be pretty much in an educational sense in the beginning. But experience will teach us in this matter. Slogans are often two-edged swords. They can do great harm if wrongly applied, and this slogan can only be of value to us if we use it properly.

Now, comrades, this is all I have to say on the question of self-determination. In this meeting, although we have not discussed all phases of the question, we have certainly discussed the fundamental ones. This is very important. In my opinion we have established a correct and basic attitude toward the general question during the course of the discussion. We should, therefore, on the basis of our discussion, endorse Comrade Ben Davis' report and our draft resolution.