

This would mean that the Negro people in the Black Belt will have the right to choose for themselves between federation with or separation from the United States as a whole. The Soviet Power, the workers and their government, will guarantee this right: First, because there will be no reason for the forcible annexation of the Negro Republic. With the overthrow of capitalism, the basis of all exploitation will have been eliminated, thereby also the basis for the exploitation and oppression of the Negro people. Second, the free union of peoples on the basis of equality is possible only through free choice arrived at by the majority of the people. The very fact that the victorious working class and its Soviet government would guarantee complete and unlimited freedom of choice would in itself be a guarantee of freedom in the full sense of the word. Under such circumstances the Negro Communists would urge and fight for federation with the Soviet republic of the United States, for this course would be to the best interests of the Negro people and all workers. In the event, however, that the choice is against federation—the Communist Party and the Soviet government would respect the will of the Negro people.

In stating our position on this question, we are guided not only by the theoretical principles of the Communist Party but also by the actual experience of the Russian Revolution. Here a number of developments in the solution of the question of self-determination occurred simultaneously. The Great Russians, whose ruling class oppressed the other peoples within the Tsarist Empire, comprised only about 45 per cent of the population of the old Russia. Both during the first revolution in March, 1917, when the Tsar was overthrown, and during the second revolution of November, 1917, when the power of the capitalists and landowners was destroyed and the Soviet Government established, the workers had the support of the peasants not only in central Russia but also in a number of outlying regions where the oppressed national people lived. But the revolution did not develop evenly everywhere. Under these circumstances, how was the question of self-determination settled?

The first act of the Soviet Government was to issue a decree granting the right of self-determination to all the nations of the former Russian empire and full equal rights within the Federated Soviet Republics. In those regions which were not occupied by

troops of the foreign powers and where the workers and peasants had succeeded in establishing autonomous Socialist Soviet governments, these Soviet governments at once federated themselves to the central Russian Soviet Republic. Only as the revolution developed in the other regions and as the counter-revolutionary intervention armies were defeated, were Soviet governments established there. Although the working class of central Russia gave direct aid to the struggle of the peoples of the outlying regions against the intervention armies and the counter-revolutionists, none of these regions was forced to federate with the other Soviet Republics. To this very day, the constitution of the Soviet Union permits the right of self-determination to all the nations at present in the Union.

There were also other developments. In some regions the people were still under the influence of reactionary leaders who were supported by foreign powers. Either the proletarian revolution was suppressed or the proletariat was not yet strong enough nor independent enough from the bourgeois leaders to carry through the revolution to victory. Such a case was Finland, which at one time was a part of the Russian Empire. Towards the end of the World War Finland came under the domination of the German Army, with whose aid the Finnish ruling class suppressed the proletarian revolution and established an independent republic under the domination of the capitalists. Did the Soviet Government try to force Finland into the Union of Soviet Republics? On the contrary, Lenin, as the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Republic, himself personally acknowledged to a representative of the Finnish Republic the right of that country to secede and gave him official sanction to do so.

"I very well remember the scene at the Smolny," said Lenin later, "when it fell to my lot to grant the charter to Svinkhovod, the representative of the Finnish bourgeoisie who had played the part of hangman. He amiably shook my hand and we paid each other compliments. How unpleasant that was! But it had to be done because at that time the bourgeoisie falsely persuaded the people, the toiling masses, to believe that the Moscovites were chauvinists and that the Great Russians wanted to crush the Finns."

And if the Soviet Government had not granted the Finns the right to secede and attempted to keep them by force, this would have meant annexation. The Finnish masses would have looked upon the Soviet Government as a foreign oppressor, no better than