

# Self-determination

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All workers, regardless of national background, have the same class interests. They all need to eliminate capitalist exploitation and replace the rule of the bosses with the rule of the workers — socialism.

It is clear that this tremendous task can't be achieved without the closest possible unity and trust among all workers. But when one or several sections of the working class are oppressed over and above the class as a whole, when in fact they belong to a people who constitute an oppressed nation, then the problems of unity are complicated.

Racism and national oppression are tools of the bosses. They divide the workers by making the more privileged group feel it is in their interest to go along with the terrible conditions imposed on the oppressed. The result is that all workers suffer, but the oppressed groups suffer by far the most.

The kind of solidarity that is needed to fight the bosses in the days ahead can only be built up through a struggle to break down the racism and inequality dividing the workers. The white workers must show by their actions that they will fight to extend to the oppressed people all the rights and benefits they already have.

But national oppression is not confined to the workplace. It is not expressed merely in lower wages and worse jobs. An oppressed nation is subject to humiliation, deprivation, scorn and repression in every area of social life. Therefore, much of their struggle is a political one to achieve democratic rights denied them.

Beginning with Karl Marx, communists or revolutionary socialists have always supported the right of oppressed nations to self-determination at the same time that

they endeavored to unite the workers of all nationalities into a common fighting party of the working class.

Supporting the right of self-determination means supporting the oppressed people in whatever choice they may make about the type of political form that best suits their historical circumstances. This could be a federation of their national states with others; they might choose to form an autonomous region; they might feel that assimilation into the dominant nation with full equality can best serve their interests. Or they might want to establish a separate independent state of their own.

In the U.S. today, only the dominant white nation has a state of its own, and this is run by the billionaires. But the Black, Native, Latinx and other oppressed nations don't have any type of state of their own, let alone a state run by the workers. They are systematically denied political power at all levels.

For white workers to understand the right of self-determination doesn't mean they should advocate separation, any more than it means that they should abandon the struggle to win over and change the view of backward whites who want to exclude Blacks and other oppressed peoples from their schools, neighborhoods, etc.

It is by supporting both the right of self-determination and the struggle for equality that white workers can help break down the racism that has divided our class and bring closer the day when all workers can cooperate in the struggle to tear down capitalist exploitation and oppression.

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## Additional reading

- [The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination](#) - by V.I. Lenin
- [The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination](#) - by

V.I. Lenin

- [The right of self-determination and the class struggle](#) - by Sam Marcy

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- Return to [What is Marxism?](#)