

Gmb/027/0100/4

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THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE NATIONAL RELATIONS
IN THE USSR

A paper presented at the meeting in Leverkusen (FRG)
October, 24-27, 1988

The views expressed are
those of the author

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I

The facts show the national question to be of eternal urgency for most nations in the world. It is a factor in the life of virtually every nation but it assumes a special urgency and acuteness in multinational and multiracial states such as South Africa.

Though my report deals with the theory and practice of the solution of national question in the USSR, I, with an eye on the main objective of our seminar, cannot help touching on the national question in South Africa and our attitude to it - the way we see it. When comparing the USSR's theory and practical steps toward the solution of the national question in our country with our view of the national question in South Africa, we stand on the same principles, the same criteria and demands.

Its ideology, world outlook, home policies and UN decisions make the USSR denounce firmly and resolutely the system of apartheid and race discrimination; moreover, it has severed any ties with the apartheid regime and renders a moral, political and humanitarian aid to the anti-apartheid fighters. This is our principal course toward the liberation of all nations from the colonial and national yoke and we pursue it firmly and consistently in our home and foreign policy.

To be frank, I was not surprised when Dr. Boraine during our Moscow meeting suggested that our side prepares a paper on the theoretical views of Soviet scholars on the national question and the practice of national relations in the USSR, including the correlation of our theory and our practice. We have accumulated a rich experience in this field and have a lot to be proud of. But this does not mean that we have no problems or mistakes in this field.

Starting with the theory, history and practical experience of the Soviet Union on the national issue I am asking you to keep in mind that the Soviet experience in this field is unique so it cannot be automatically applied to other countries and in other historic conditions.

What is so unique about this experience?

First, before the socialist revolution, the Russian Empire incorporated historically established states such as Poland, Finland, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Georgia, Armenia, and others. All these ^{etc} peoples and nations had found their identity long before, they had statehood of their own. Historically, many of those states were more ancient than Russia itself. It was this fact that predetermined a federation and union nature of the newly-born socialist state from the very start. Second, the formation of the Soviet state took place in the course of a socialist revolution and a wide-scale civil war, and the attitudes of various social groups and nations to those events was different.

The federation structure of the socialist state was chosen with due consideration to these feelings of various peoples and social groups.

We should also add that during the socialist revolution the national question was not the principal one. It was resolved, so to speak, jointly with the principal issue, that is elimination of capitalist and other exploitation relations.

II

We, the Soviet marxists, long believed that the national question in the Soviet Union had been solved by the Great October Socialist Revolution once and for all. We based this opinion on the fact that our country put an end to the conditions for the emergence of antagonistic contradictions between nations and ethnic groups when the revolution eradicated the national and colonial oppression of other nations in the Russian colonial empire by Russian tsarism, and proclaimed and put into practice a complete political and economic equality of all nations. It is a great achievement of socialism in the USSR that Soviet power has provided for an accelerated economic, social and cultural development of formerly backward and oppressed nations.

The policies of the Soviet state and the CPSU was aimed at providing for higher rates of the economic, social and cultural development in the former outskirts of the tsarist empire at the expense of better developed areas. We had to do that, because the socio-economic relations of small ethnic groups and entire nations in the Far North, Kazakhstan and other parts of

the USSR's Asia were on the primitive - communal or feudal-level at the time of the revolution. Some ethnic groups did not have a written language, literature and schools.

Within a historically short period the central state power in the USSR was able to eliminate the economic backwardness in these regions and republics, to raise the nations' education and culture.

A faster industrial and social development of these regions was achieved by pumping there the means from the central regions of Russia and the Ukraine, the two most developed regions in the USSR.

I believe that our experience in eradicating the backwardness of these vast areas and bringing them up to this country's average level has an international significance. It was this policy that set the stage for a harmonious development of every nation and ethnic group in the USSR.

But practice has shown that these objective socio-economic conditions alone are insufficient if multinational relations are to develop harmoniously. The recent developments in Armenia and Azerbaijan have highlighted an entire complex of negative aspects in international relations in our country.

At present this issue is widely discussed by the press, in the CPSU Central Committee, the USSR Supreme Soviet and at scholarly fora. The CPSU Central Committee is planning to devote a plenary ⁼Meeting to the national relations in the USSR.

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades!

I believe that the participants in the Seminar from South Africa may be interested to know how M.S.Gorbachev assesses the practice and the experience of international relations in the USSR. Here are some of his statements:

"National relations in our country are a living issue of a living life. We must be extremely attentive and tactful in everything that has to do with people's national interests or national sentiments, must provide for an exceedingly active participation of the working people of all nations and ethnic groups in the solution of diverse tasks in the life of our multinational society."

Later on M.S.Gorbachev emphasized:

"Friendship and cooperation between the USSR's nations are sacred for us. It was so and it will be so. This is in keeping with the spirit of Leninism, the traditions of the Great October, the fundamental interests of every nation and ethnic group in our homeland." ("Pravda", 2.4.1987).

M.S.Gorbachev reiterates the same ideas in his book "Perestroika, the new thinking for our country and the entire world". (p. 118-122).

One should probably emphasize another important point in M.S.Gorbachev's analysis of international relations in the USSR. He says: "A prominent role in the solution of the national question belongs to the Russian nation." (Ibid., p.119).

According to M.S.Gorbachev, the main pre-requisite of the development of good-neighbourly friendly relations and trust between nations and ethnic groups is to provide for a genuine

equality of nations. A refusal of better-developed and stronger nations to oppress other nations, a rejection of exploitation, a readiness of an economically better-developed nation to make sacrifices for the benefit of backward nations and ethnic groups - this is the essence of the USSR's national policy.

Following up this idea M.S.Gorbachev says:

"Noting today the brilliant achievements of the Leninist national policy, the nations of our country pay a tribute of profound respect and recognition to the great Russian people for its disinterestedness, genuine internationalism, an invaluable contribution to the creation, development and strengthening of the socialist union of free and equal republics, to the economic, social and cultural progress of all nations of the Soviet state". ("Pravda", 2.4.1987).

Despite the indisputable achievements in the solution of national problem in the USSR, friction in relations between nations and ethnic groups crop up time and again in our country.

What is the cause of such frictions? I am going to state my own point of view. I think the 70 year history of the Soviet state has proved the Leninist national policy's correctness and viability. National problems emerging in this country are caused by the distortions of this policy when it is put into practice. I believe that the list of these distortions includes:

- the negative consequences of Stalin's cult when during WWII against Germany the treason of individuals or individual ethnic communities caused the eviction of entire ethnic groups (Crimean Tartars, Chechens-Ingushes, citizens of German descent) from their ancestral homelands;

- a belated departure from supercentralization in planning, management and financing of the economic and social development of regions and republics. While in the early post-revolutionary years and after the Civil War the nations put up with supercentralization as an objective necessity, with the years it became an obstacle to the free and independent development of various nations and ethnic groups. They found themselves dependent in many respects on the bureaucratic centre. The incipient perestroika and the economic and political reforms are aimed among other things at boosting the economic and political autonomy of the national and autonomous republics;

- the predominance of mandatory-administrative methods in running the country and the economy has led to the development of corruption, regionalism, nationalism, the belittling of the creative activities of the masses. It has caused passivity in society and to a degree has driven a wedge between the leaders and the working masses;

- the absence of democracy and glasnost promoted the accumulation of negative phenomena in every sphere of the country's life, including in particular international relations.

Relying on the decentralization of the management of the economy, on democracy and glasnost, the policy of perestroika in Soviet society is called upon to eliminate distortions in the socialist construction, to return its true humanistic significance to socialism and to bring international relations back to normal.

Our positive and negative experience of international relations warrants a key conclusion: the level of democracy and social justice in society determines the character of relations between nations in a country. We can even say that the character of international relations is the barometer of the health of a nation and state.

III

When going over to the exposition of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the nationalities question, one should define such concepts as "nation" and "national question".

Many marxists, including the author, see in the concept "nation" a historically-formed community of people who inhabit or inhabited a specific territory, have or had economic ties, a common language, a culture of their own and share specific psychological traits. At present scholars continue to develop the doctrine of nation; specifically there has emerged the concept of "nation state". Every nation is thus the product of the historical development of human society, a product of economic and social progress.

The break-down of colonial empires and colonial domination in Africa and Asia after WW II gave rise to new national states, new nations and ethnic groups.

The "national question", the way we see it, encompasses a totality of interstate, economic, political, territorial, juridical, ideological, cultural, historical and linguistic relations between nations (peoples), national and ethnic groups and communities. In short, the national question covers every-

thing that describes the links and relations between nations and ethnic units.

For us, the "national-colonial question" comprises the history of colonial acquisitions, imperialist wars and wars between imperialist countries for colonies and their redistribution, colonial and national-racial domination, colonial and imperialist exploitation of colonial countries and peoples, wars for national liberation and revolutions, national-liberation movement.

As for the national question, and its political implications in South Africa, our point of view boils down to the following: we see in the apartheid system a special form of colonialism when the ruling nation (the white community) and the oppressed nation (the black majority including coloured people and Asians) inhabit the same territory but are divided by apartheid's system and a system of race laws that have stripped the oppressed nation of its political and economic rights.

In the light of this, we see in the ANC and other organizations fighting against the apartheid system, racism and the domination of the white nation over the black majority as organizations of national liberation. Every resolution of the UN on the struggle against colonialist and racism including the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960) applies to them. Our relations with the ANC are built on a strict adherence to the standards of international law elaborated by the UN.

Soviet scholars disagree on the issue of the formation of nations in South Africa. Most believe that the Afrikaners should be seen as a nation that prior to 1902 had a definite territory under its control, its home market that integrated members of the Boer community into a single economic body. The Boers or Afrikaners have a culture and history of their own and, as a nation, have a specific psychological character.

After the establishment of the Union of South Africa and the incorporation of both Boer republics into a single English-Boer state began, I believe, the process of the erosion and weakening of the national ties within the Boer nation began. This is an objective process for both ethnic groups within the white community - Afrikaners and English-speaking. Historically they have to a degree a common destiny, trying to adjust to the new situation.

Formerly purely Boer, the Nationalist party has turned into a white party. But the formation of a single white community goes slowly and haltingly because both white groups have different historical and cultural roots, as well as language differences. We should also remember that the process of national consolidation in the South African society, both in the black and white communities, is taking place in parallel with the social and class differentiation of the society. Thus, the formerly united Afrikaner nation is now going through a process of social differentiation. This is supported by the fact that the National ~~ist~~ party has split into three wings: the liberals, the center (the National ~~ist~~ party proper), and the extreme right factions. It is difficult to forecast at this point what

this process will come to. After the collapse of the apartheid and the formation of a non-racial state conditions may change and this process may halt.

Important is the fact, that the processes of national consolidation in South African society - its both parts, black and white, - develop simultaneously with class and social differentiation. Once united the Boer nation is now divided on social and political lines.

National consolidation among South Africa's black population is a still more complex problem. Soviet African scholars have two conflicting points of view concerning this matter.

Some of the scholars including me believe that the development of capitalism in South Africa and the existence of a single economic market, urbanization and the migration from the countryside to urban and industrial centres has triggered a rapid process of the convergence of different ethnic groups into a single African nation. Working side-by-side in industries and mines, living together in urban and industrial centres, an overwhelming majority of the African population lose their ethnic identity. They consider South Africa and not bantustans their motherland.

Capitalism not only creates a single industrial and agricultural market but also brings about the formation of a single nation. In his theoretic studies of this issue, V.I. Lenin attached a great importance to economic factors in the formation of nations. He noted that a nation has an "economic trait". This is why we have every right to say that a process of the

formation of a single African nation in underway in South Africa.

And yet, we should emphasize that this process is far from completed. There are real racial, tribal and ethnic distinctions and the policy of the formation of bantustans even attempts to highlight them and to resurrect tribal divisions. Political parties and movements of national liberation have to take these facts into account. When solving the national question, it is dangerous to pursue a policy that puts a brake on national processes, or to attempt speeding them up. Experience shows that the best policy in the national question is the one that gives these processes a free hand.

Another school of Soviet scholars believes that there is the process of the formation of several nations - i.e., the Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana etc. - among the black population of South Africa. As for me, I do not support this point of view. On the other hand, the presence of tribal, ethnic, linguistic and historical distinctions among the African majority in South Africa cannot be dismissed. We believe that the ANC has every right to state that in a future democratic state all ethnic groups and nationalities will have full-right to develop their cultures and languages, to preserve their traditions.

This difference of opinion among Soviet scholars on the national question stems from the difference of assessments of various factors, influencing the formation of nations, and also from the lack of knowledge of real processes. Do not forget that in analysing all social and national processes in South Africa the Soviet scholars have to use second-hand information. Those who think that Africa is witnessing the process

of the formation of a single South African nation believe the influence of the economy and the social conditions to be the decisive factor in the formation of nations (a single capitalist market, urbanization, common objectives of anti-apartheid struggle). The scholars who believe that many nations are being formed in South Africa point to cultural, historical and linguistic roots.

We conduct wide and open discussion of these problems and hope to understand them better.

IV

In our studies and political declarations we often speak of the Leninist national policy and often cite Lenin's statements. So what is the essence of the Leninist national policy and how is it implemented in the practice of our state? What kind of lessons can be derived from it? What is the connection between the Leninist policy on the national ~~question~~ question and the policy of perestroika conducted by the CPSU today?

Let me note first of all that the Russian revolutionary thinkers, beginning with A.I. Gertsen, and, in particular, the Russian social democratic movement and the Russian Bolsheviks always paid a great attention to the national question for reasons that are quite easy to understand. Russia is a conglomerate of nations big and small; it was a huge colonial empire, and no revolution in Russia could avoid tackling the national question, the liberation of the oppressed nations from the national oppression of the Russian tsarism. At that time the

Russian Empire was inhabited by peoples on different levels of socio-economic development. It included such culturally advanced states as Poland, Finland, the Baltic states. On the other hand, it included the backward peoples of the Far East and eastern Asia who were on the level of a primitive-communal system or feudalism. The Russian social-democratic movement raised the issue of the liberation of all oppressed and dependent nations from the domination of tsarism. Russian revolutionaries described Russia as a prison of nations.

But the national question in Russia had one more aspect, namely, how the revolutionaries in Russia should have fought against tsarism - within a common front, one social-democratic party irrespective of the nationality, or the revolutionaries of every nationality would create their national parties, and each would attack tsarism on its own?

V.I.Lenin and the Bolsheviks in general advocated a single social-democratic party for the whole of the Russian Empire because all revolutionaries and working masses that inhabited the territory of the Russian Empire had a common enemy in tsarism and its system. The working masses both in Russia and those of the oppressed nations suffered from the tsarism and its oppression. National domination and oppression hurts both the working masses of the oppressed nation and those of the oppressing one. F.Engels wrote in his 1874 essay "Polish Proclamation" that a nation oppressing other nations could not be free: the power it needs for the oppression of another nation eventually always turns against itself (K. Marx and F.Engels, Complete Works, vol.18, p.509). Though Engels

referred to Russia's oppression of Poland, I believe that the correctness of this thesis (stated over 100 years ago) is fully confirmed by the situation in today's South Africa. The machinery of oppression of the apartheid regime directed first and foremost against the black majority cannot help restricting the freedom and democracy of the white minority.

To conclude the discussion of the forms of the revolutionary struggle the Russian social-democratic movement fought against tsarism, it is necessary to mention that from the very outset the Bolshevik Party set up by V.I.Lenin was a multinational, common party for the representatives of many nations and ethnic groups of the Russian Empire.

This internationalist core of the Bolshevik Party ensured collaboration and cooperation among various nations, peoples and ethnic groups during the revolution and Civil War, even before the creation of the single state body: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Marxism-Leninism believed and believes that at the heart of the solution of the national question is the right of every nation to self-determination and the right of oppressed nations to fight their oppressors to ensure this sacred right. There was a time when V.I.Lenin criticized West-European social democrats who reduced the right of oppressed nations to self-determination to the right to a cultural and national autonomy.

The Soviet state has made the right of nations to self-determination the foundation of the national policy both in the international arena and on the domestic scene. The right of

nations to self-determination has been the guiding principle in the activities of the Comintern and the CPSU throughout their history.

V

From the very first days of its existence Soviet power and the Soviet government led by V.I.Lenin advocated the formation of a voluntary union of nations without any oppression of one nations by another, a union based on full confidence, on a full awareness of fraternal unity, on a totally voluntary consent (V.I.Lenin, Complete Works, vol.40, p.43).

The 2nd All-Russia Congress of Soviets (November 7-8, 1917) that formed the first Soviet government led by V.I.Lenin adopted a law on land and on peace, and proclaimed officially that Soviet power would accord every nation inhabiting Russia a genuine right to self-determination (Concise History of the USSR, vol.2, p.56).

A few days later this proclamation was implemented in the practical steps of the Soviet government:

On November 15, 1917 "The Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia" was proclaimed. It stated total elimination of national oppression in Russia and formulated the principles of relations between the peoples of Russia: equality and sovereignty, a right to self-determination up to and including secession and the formation of independent states; the elimination of any and all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions; the free development of the national minorities and ethnographic groups living on the territory of the Russian Republic.

tories of Russia;

- on December 3, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars adopted "The Appeal to Working Muslims of Russia and the East" proclaiming that henceforth the religious beliefs and traditional customs, national and cultural institutions of these peoples were free and inviolable: the entire power of the Soviets was to protect and defend the rights of all peoples (Ibid., p.58);

- fulfilling its commitments to oppressed peoples, the Soviet government accorded national independence to the Bukhara Emirate and Khiva Khanate that had earlier been Russian protectorates. Bukhara and Khiva were relieved of all obligations imposed on them by the former tsarist government;

- on December 31, 1917, the Soviet government recognized the independence of Finland, and on January 11, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars recognized the right of Armenia to self-determination;

- the Soviet government was the first to recognize Poland's right to self-determination and independence. The Soviet state returned to the Polish people the relics of the past and works of art previously brought from Poland to Russia.

Thus, all peoples ^{formerly} living in the Russian Empire received a real right to an autonomous and independent development. However, only some of the peoples and countries (Finland, Poland, Far-Eastern Republic, Tuva and Bukhara) used their right to secede from Soviet Russia. Ukraine was independent for some time too. Later on the Far-Eastern Republic, Ukraine, Khiva and Bukhara joined the USSR.

Since many peoples and countries within the Russian Empire declared their wish to remain part of Russia or to maintain union relations with it, the 3rd All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies (January 23-31, 1918) proclaimed the Russian Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) that, along with Russia, had many other peoples and ethnic groups as members with the status of a federative or autonomous body.

Summing up the results of this congress, V.I.Lenin said:

"The new system of the socialist Soviet Republic, as a federation of free republics of the different nations inhabiting Russia, has been finally accepted in this country in the sphere of domestic relations." (V.I.Lenin, Complete Works, vol.35, p.286).

In June 1918 the state structure of the socialist state, its national policy and citizens' rights were enshrined in the first Soviet constitution.

Despite the exceeding difficulties the Soviet Republic was faced with during the first years of its existence in connection with the attacks of internal and international reaction, the socialist revolution spread throughout the whole of the former Russian Empire, and even new socialist republics were established. On May 13, 1918, the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed that incorporated the present-day Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenia, Tajikistan, and a part of Kazakhstan.

On December 12 Soviet power was established in Estonia, and in late December the Lithuanian and Latvian Socialist Republics were formed;

On January 14, 1919, Soviet power was proclaimed in Byelorussia and in April, in Bashkiria.

On April 19, 1920, the Far-Eastern Republic was formed that we describe as a "buffer state".

In the same year 1920 Soviet power was established in Khorezm, Azerbaijan, Tataria, Bukhara, Kazakhstan, Armenia etc.

What is more, many of these new socialist republics joined the RSFSR voluntarily and without any coercion by an outside power. This naturally raised the issue of the creation of a state system best suited to the interests of the multinational state and the free expression of the will of free nations and ethnic groups before the Soviet government and the supreme legislative body of the new socialist state: the All-Union Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR.

V.I.Lenin and the Bolshevik Communist Party assigned a priority importance to ensuring a voluntary character of the consolidation of various nations and ethnic groups into a Union of Republics. Prior to the adoption of the resolution to form a Union, V.I.Lenin emphasized the importance of withholding ammunition from the "independents",^{x)} of not destroying their independence, and of creating still another echelon, a federation of equal republics. (V.I.Lenin, Complete works, vol.45, p.212).

The resolution on the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was adopted at the 1st Congress of the

^{x)} The "independents" were non-Russian political figures who opposed the formation of the USSR. They advocated a full independence of their nations from Russia.

Soviets in late December 1922 attended by delegates from every Soviet socialist republic.

The founding members of the USSR were the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian SSR, the Byelorussian SSR and the Trans-Caucasian Soviet Federative Republic that included Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

All the republics that became members of the "Union" retained the right of free secession from the "Union". The treaty on the "Union" made it possible for other socialist republics to join it.

In 1924 the 2nd Congress of the Soviets of the USSR adopted the USSR Constitution that enshrined the principle of the voluntary accession of every republic to the Union and the right of free secession from it. Every member republic retained the right to be represented in the supreme legislative body, to preserve its national language and customs.

We should acknowledge however, that the sovereignty of the Union republics in such fields as foreign policy, defense and finances became the province of the central government. On the other hand, not only these spheres but also planning and the management of the economy became centralized.

The founders of the USSR - representatives of all Union republics including V.I.Lenin - saw in federation a transitional form on the way to a centralized socialist state. Those who adopted the resolution on the formation of the USSR were members of a single political party, the Bolshevik party, and they wanted to see their peoples live in a single state. But apart from ideological motifs there were objective factors

that made it necessary for the Soviet republics to unite in a single socialist state.

V.I.Lenin and other leaders of the Soviet state at that time sought to make the federation a step to a closer economic and political union of various nations, subject to the condition of the voluntary access to the "Union" and the right to a free secession from it.

This point of view concerning the national~~ist~~ question was formed among the members of the Bolshevik Party even before the revolution. V.I.Lenin repeatedly addressed the issues of national policy. Below is his statement as regards the policy of the social-democratic movement made in 1915. V.I.Lenin believed that the social-democrats of both the oppressor and the oppressed nations must demand "the right to self-determination - the right to secession for oppressed nations..." However, Lenin believed that "Social-democrats of the oppressed nations must demand the fullest, including organizational, merging, and not merely rapprochement, of the workers of the workers of the oppressed nations."

Further on V.I.Lenin stated the key conclusion: "Social-Democrats of all countries must uphold, not the federative principle, not the formation of small states, as the ideal, but the closest unity of nations, stressing the harmfulness of all separation of nations, the harmfulness of cultural-national autonomy, the advantage of democratic centralism, the advantage of every big states and unions of states." (V.I.Lenin, Complete works, vol.27, p.438).

This theoretical view of V.I.Lenin on the national question has provided the basis of the practical policies of the Soviet state when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed.

Were there any opponents of the formation of the Union of Republics? Yes, there were, specifically, among Ukrainian, Georgian and Azerbaijanian communists there were those who opposed the accession to the Union, the so-called "independents". There were opponents of the federation in the other republics too. But the working masses in every republic came out for the consolidation of all Soviet republics into a single state.

On the other hand, there were leaders - for instance, Stalin - who suggested that the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia join the RSFSR as autonomous republics and that the RSFSR supreme bodies were automatically made the Union's supreme bodies. In short, Stalin and his supporters opposed the equality of nations and their right to the national sovereignty. This policy was the reflection of the Great Russia chauvinism. V.I.Lenin opposed this concept because it ignored the nations' sovereign right and their equality. In this case Russia would have got preferential treatment. This was inadmissible, being at odds with the party policies and the very substance of the socialist revolution.

V.I.Lenin was gravely ill during the 1st Congress of Soviets of the USSR. Nevertheless he submitted his notes "Toward the Issue of Nationalities or "Autonomization". He wrote that it was necessary for the representatives of the Russian nations to show the greatest attention to the interests of smaller na-

tions, to prevent any injustices, any slights of the national feeling. The priority task of the party's national policies was the elimination of the inherited actual inequality of the nations. "He who does not realize that does not understand the truly proletarian attitude toward the national question," wrote Lenin. (V.I.Lenin, Complete Works, vol.45, p.359).

V.I.Lenin always - before the revolution and in particular during the years of the construction of the new socialist state - attached an exceedingly great significance to international relations, the national policy of the party and the Soviet state. I believe that at this point it would be appropriate to cite Lenin's remarks about nationalism, a topic of heated discussion in our country today. He wrote:

"A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.

"In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence...

"This is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or "great" nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies) must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but also in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice." (V.I.Lenin, vol.45, p.159).

I have quoted from V.I. Lenin's letter so as to show the essence of our state's national policy, the attitude of the Russian nation to all other small nations and ethnic groups. This is our experience, the practice of solving the national problem in the Soviet Union.

Despite its numerical and economic preponderance in the Soviet Union, the Russian nation has never sought to usurp power or to build its relations with other nations to the detriment of other nations and ethnic groups. Every nation living in the USSR is represented in the highest party and state bodies, the central administration, and the managerial machinery. None of the nations gets preferential treatment in admission to higher school or in filling any posts in any institution or in the army. The equality of all nations is our sacred principle. Our Constitution prohibits the propaganda of racism and national strife.

As I have said above, the 70-year history of the Soviet state has ~~seen~~ errors and miscalculation in the solution of the national ~~question~~ question; nevertheless, under our historical conditions the federative-centralized state system set up in 1922 and uniting many nations and ethnic groups into a single socialist state has withstood the test of time. Over this period none of the republics not only seceded from the Union but even raised this question, that despite the harshest trials and tribulations the peoples of the Soviet Union have seen. During the 2nd World War a number of Soviet republics - the Ukraine, Byelorussia, all Baltic republics, part of Russia - were occupied by the German army but none of them seceded from the Union;

on the contrary, their people rose in arms to defend the national sovereignty and unity of the Soviet Union. For instance, one out of every four residents of Byelorussia died during the Nazi occupation of the republic but the Byelorussian people were not conquered. They fought the German occupation till the complete liberation of the republic.

This is our historical experience of solving the national question. It can't be automatically used in other countries. But it is useful to know it.

What conclusions can we draw from our experience of the solution of the national ~~ities~~ question?

The main thing is that the policy of the CPSU and the Soviet state in this respect has proved its worth and has made it possible not only to defend the unity of all socialist nations, to defend the socialist system during the years of the Great Patriotic War but also to achieve great successes in the economic development, and elimination of the social and economic inequality between the peoples in the Union.

True, the perestroika has exposed negative aspects: an excessive centralization of the management of the economy, the swelling of the bureaucracy apparatus, the hypertrophy of command and administrative methods in the centre and in the provinces.

The perestroika is called upon to rectify the distortions in the national policies of the Soviet state and to increase the rights and autonomy of the Union republics.

In conclusion I want to say that the USSR is not going to export its social system and theory to South Africa. We uphold the theoretical views of the ANC and the SACP that regard the present-day state of the struggle against apartheid as a stage of the national-liberation struggle for a non-racial democratic state in which all nations and races would have equal rights.

We believe that the problem of the elimination of the apartheid system that threatens peace and stability not only in South Africa but throughout the entire South-African region and throughout the world is not only the internal problem of the South-Africans themselves but also that of the world community because the apartheid system is at odds with the generally recognized standards of international law, democracy, the world community moral.