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LECTUR 11

SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM

11.0 CLASS AND NATION

Class struggles are tightly bound up with national struggles at every stage in the growth of capitalism, from the early days of merchant capital to the 'last stage', which is imperialism. Socialists have therefore found it necessary to define their attitudes to the 'nation' in a number of different social formations and under varying historical conditions. These have risen from:

- a) bourgeois democratic revolutions against feudal autocracies in the period of ocommercial capital;
- b) the expansion of industrial capital in its search for markets, resulting in the seizure of colonies;
- c) wars between imperialist states for domination and the redivision of the world;
- d) the overthrOw of tsarist feudal-capitalism, the achievement of the socialist revolution, and the emergence of a workers' and peasants' State and Nation in the Soviet Union;
- 6) wars fought by small nations and their struggle for national liberation;
- f) relations between socialist nation-states;
- g) relations between the sbcialist world, imperialism, and emerging nations of liberated countries.

11.1 SQCIALIST PRINCIPLES

Socialists have worked Out a set of general principles to guide them in dealings with nations and national movements. The mOSt important of these principles are:

- a) no nation shall have privileges at the expense of another nation or language community within the State;
- b) no nation shall Oppress another nation or refuse to grant it fair and equal treatment;
- 0) every nation shall have the rights of self-determination and secession;
- d) workers of an oppressor nation must oppose national Oppression and demand the rights of self-determination and secession for the Oppressed nation;
- e) in applying the general principles to specific situations, socialists must take into account all relevant factors, including historical background, class and natiOnal divisions, political and economic systems and the interests of the revolution;
- f) a revolutionary party or movement must in all acases adopt a national policy that will strengthen the revolution.

In arriving at these principles, socialists have discussed at great length questions and issues that are important to our revolution, as will be seen from the following items:

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- a) what is a nation?
- b) how to achieve equality between nations?
- c) the difference between nation-states and multinational states;
- d) the difference between bourgeois nations and proletarian nations;
- e) the contradiction- between 'love of fatherland' and proletarian class consciousness;
- f) when is it correct to demand self-determination and secession?

11.2 NATION-STATE

A nation is made up of people with a common culture and feeling of nationhood slowly and over a long period of time.

Every nation has a tradition of origin and struggle, between factions or classes within itself or against external enemies. The nation is therefore a product of history; it emerges under specific social conditions. Outstanding examples of nation-building are the Zulu, Sotho and Swazi nations. In South Africa states are usually called 'tribes'. This is a colonial word, like 'native', and has no scientific basis. The word suggests inferiority in comparison with European 'nations' and will not be used in this series of lectures. The chief objection is that what are called 'tribes' in South Africa have all the characteristics of nations as generally understood. They are

- a) a common territory, occupied by members of the nation, who call it their 'father' or 'mother' land, love it and defend it against their enemies;
- b) a single government, which in South African states centred in an hereditary ruler, the king, whose office, authority and right to rule are acknowledged by the nation, even though there may be revolts and coups against the individual holder of office;
- c) a common body of laws and customs, observed by members of the nation and enforced by the king, his officials, courts and people through regional chiefs and headmen;
- d) a community of language, the main medium of communication, socialisation and national identity, which distinguishes the nation from other language communities;
- e) a single economy, under the administration of the ruler, who collects taxes or tribute, supports his officials and staff at his palace, and feeds people whose crops have failed;
- f) an armed force, consisting of able-bodied men of military age, who are organised to fight in wars of defence or aggression and to protect the ruler against subversion.

These were the characteristics of South African states. They are the same as the characteristics of nations everywhere.

They were states because they had a coercive machinery, consisting of the ruler, advisers, courts of law, police (messengers of the court) and a people's militia. The existence of a state organisation shows that the nation had within it the seeds of class divisions, between royals and commoners, the founders of the nation and conquered people, and, in some

systems, between freemen and serfs or slaves. But the common ownership of land, the right of all nationals to use the land, and the absence of wage-labour prevented the formation of sharp class antagonisms.

11.3 BOURGEOIS NATIONS

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Capitalist nation-States took shape in revolutionary struggles against feudal autocracies. Each nation within a multinational State, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, demanded the right of self-determination. Or the bourgeoisie of small, separate feudalistic States with a common culture fought to unite them in a single state, as in Germany, under a bourgeois democratic government.

In each case the capitalist class mobilised other classes - the petty bourgeoisie, workers and peasants - into a mass movement behind the demand for national liberation, supremacy of the national language, legal equality and democracy for members of the nation. There developed a national consciousness shared by all classes of the oppressed nation.

The bourgeois nation's economic basis is the home market. Capitalism requires the free, unobstructed flow of commodities; and conquers the home market for commodity production, for which purpose it puts an end to obstructions from feudal lords, tariffs, levies, taxes and dues. That is the material purpose of the revolution against feudal superstructure. Lenin drew attention to the importance of the international, domestic market for the capitalist mode of production and, furthermore, of a national language for the growth of the market. He wrote (THE RIGHT OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION, 1914)!

"Throughout the world, the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked up with national movements. For the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language, with all obstacles to the development of that language and to its consolidation in literature eliminated. Therein is the economic foundation of national movements".

Language is also the primary instrument for developing an ideology, creating a national consciousness, unifying members of different classes into a nation. i. language has a great emotional appeal. Those who speak it bitterly resent interference by an oppressor nation. But language also has an economic basis which Lenin described:

"Language is the most important means of human intercourse. Unity and unimpeded development of language are the most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commerce on a scale commensurate with modern capitalism, for a free and broad grouping of the population in all its various classes and lastly, for the establishment of a close connection between the markets and each and every proprietor, big or little, and between buyer and seller".

Conflicts over language rights within a single state are conflicts between rival sections of the bourgeoisie. Afrikaner nationalists resisted domination by the English language community, demanded full equality between the two 'official' languages, used Afrikaans to consolidate an Afrikaner nation, penetrate all fields of employment, and capture the domestic commodity market. Attempts to force Afrikaans on South Africa serve the economic and political interest of the Afrikaner bourgeoisie in their struggle for supremacy over the more powerful English capital.

IMPERIALIST MULTI-NATIONALISM

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The growth of capitalist productive forces in the machine age outstrip the capacity of the home market. Big powers compete fiercely for new markets, raw materials, and outlets for capital investment. Competition in the period of imperialist expansion took the form of colonial wars, the seizure of territories, the suppression of independent nation-states and the final division of the world. Imperialism, Lenin wrote, "means that capital has outgrown the framework of national states; it means that national oppression has been extended and heightened on a new historic foundation" (THE REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAT AND THE RIGHTS OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION, 1915).

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The capitalist class, once the champion of national self-determination, become in turn oppressors of nation. Three stages in this process can be distinguished:

the collapse of feudal absolutism, formation of the bourgeois democratic state, mass national movements of all classes; industrial capitalist states with democratic institutions mature, conscious working class, and Oppressed nations in colonial countries; imperialist wars for the redivision of the world; socialist revolutions under the dictatorship of the proletariat; national revolutions for the liberation of colonial peoples.

Socialists follow their general principles in each stage, while always taking into account the historical and social conditions of a particular situation. The main guiding line is to support an oppressed nation against its oppressor nation and to safeguard the interests of the proletarian revolution.

OPPRESSORS AND OPPRESSED

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Socialists support progressive movement and were for national liberation. In the words of the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, "they fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy (landed gentry), and the petty bourgeoisie".

The alliance does not last. When the capitalist class takes power, it uses the state machinery to strengthen private property, expand its markets, seize colonial territories and oppress small nations.

Revolutionary workers of Oppressor nations have a duty to reject such policies of capitalist plunder and aggression. The International Congress of Socialist Workers and Trade Unions stated their objections in 1896:

A show of sympathy is not enough to meet socialist requirements. These call for active, militant struggle through workers' parties and trade unions against racism, national oppression, apartheid and for national liberation. Lenin wrote (THE QUESTION OF PEACE, 1915):

"This Congress declares that it stands for the full right of all nations to self-determination and expresses its sympathy for the workers of every country now suffering under the yoke of military, national or any kind of absolute rule".

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"we stand for a revolutionary struggle against imperialism, imperialism consists in a striving of nations that oppress a number of other nations to extend and increase that oppression and to repartition the colonies.

That is why the question of self-determination of nations today hinders on the conduct of socialists of the oppressor nations. A socialist of any of the oppressor nations (Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, the United States of America, etc.) who does not recognise and does not struggle for the right of oppressed nations to self-determination (i.e. the right to secession) is in reality a chauvinist".

Lenin wrote these during the first world imperialist war. It brought to the surface and sharpened the contradictions between national sentiment and international socialism.

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The Bolsheviks of tsarist Russia and the South African International Socialist League, forerunners of the S.A. Communist Party, were among the few working class parties to oppose the war and call for the defeat of their governments. The great majority of self-democratic parties gave 'loyal' support to their 'fatherland' in its war against the 'fatherland' of fellow workers speaking a different language

A 'chauvinist' is a person who shouts: 'my country, my nation, right or wrong', who throws all principles aside except one, which is to follow the flag, that is to carry out the orders of his bourgeois government. With honourable exceptions, members of the oppressor Afrikaner and English nations in South Africa are chauvinists who refuse to condemn national oppression in our country, or elsewhere.

Revolutionary socialists in a war between imperialist powers will work for the defeat of their own government on both sides in the war "Present-day democracy will remain true to itself only if it says neither one nor the other imperialist bourgeoisie, only if it says that the two sides are equally bad, and if it wishes the defeat of the imperialist bourgeoisie in every country (Lenin, UNDER A FALSE FLAG, 1915).

At all times, in peace or in war, workers of an oppressor nation who do not fight for the liberation of oppressed nations are incapable of practising socialist policies or of emancipating themselves. "A people which enslaves another people forges its own chains", wrote Marx in a resolution passed in 1869 on the Irish struggle for independence. The International Workers' Association (First International), which adopted the resolution: declared that the separation of Ireland from Britain was "the essential preliminary conditions of the emancipation of the English working class".

This statement is true also for South African white workers. To emancipate themselves, they must join our revolutionary struggle for national liberation. For as long as they support Apartheid, follow the policies of bourgeois parties I actively take part in our oppression, they are incapable of waging a struggle for working class power.

PROLETARIAT INTERNATIONALISM

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Imperialism creates privileged sections of workers who benefit from the profits of monopoly capital and colonial exploitation. Engels commented on this tendency as early as 1858 in a letter to Marx: 'The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois'; He wrote in 1882 that 'the workers daily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies'.

Revolutionary socialists counteract national chauvinism by supporting the cause of national liberation. "The most difficult and most important task in this", Lenin wrote, "is to unite the class struggle of the workers of the oppressor nations with that of the workers of the oppressed nations".

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The October Revolution of 1917, the establishment of the first Socialist State; the formation of the Communist International in March, 1919, the spread of Communist Parties in both oppressor and oppressed nations, the split between the Third (Communist) International and the Second (Socialist) International .. these events laid a firm basis for a revolutionary policy of national liberation.

The Third International's Programme of 1928 set out the guidelines. Communist Parties are instructed to:

- a) maintain close co-operation between workers of the oppressor and oppressed countries;
- b) support every movement in the colonies against imperialist violence;
; expose all forms of chauvinism and imperialist oppression;
give systematic, material aid to revolutionary liberation movements,
and recognise the right of oppressed nations to rebellion and revolutionary war;
- c) lead the people in a revolutionary situation in a direct attack on the bourgeois state;
- d) organise workers and peasants independently in trade unions, peasant leagues and Communist Parties;
- e) form alliances with the national bourgeoisie for a genuine struggle against imperialism;
- f) campaign for the withdrawal of imperialist troops, conduct propaganda in the armed forces for support of oppressed nations fighting for liberation, call on workers to refuse to transport troops and munitions for use against freedom fighters.

The Soviet Union and Communist Parties have followed these guidelines for more than half a century. The alliance between Proletarian Internationalism and National Liberation is a major cause of the setbacks suffered by imperialism and colonialism. Our Revolution will continue to benefit from that alliance in all phases of our struggle.

TWO STREAMS MERGE

International capitalism is the common enemy of Socialist Revolution and National Democratic Revolution. Each strengthens the other in their common struggle. Lenin drew attention to this basis of united action in November 1919 when addressing the Second All-Russian Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East (THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN THE EAST. 1952. p.250):

"Hence, the socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their 'bourgeoisie' - no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism and the civil war of the working people against

the imperialists and exploiters in all the advanced countries is beginning to be combined with national wars against international imperialism".

Lenin's confidence has been fully justified. One third of mankind has taken the socialist road; colonial oppression is making its last desperate stand in Southern Africa. Imperialism, which once reigned supreme, is on the defensive. Anti-imperialist forces now determine the main content and trend of social development. Although divided on many issues, the socialist and liberated countries present a united front against Apartheid and its imperialist supporters. For such reasons, Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev correctly speaks of a 'merging' of the two revolutionary streams:

A major feature of the SCF year period since the October Revolution is the merging of the national-liberation movement and the struggle of the working class into one revolutionary torrent. The 1,500 million people living in the former colonies and semi-colonies have gained independence and emerged as an active force on the political scene. This has extended the bounds of the world revolutionary movement and accelerated social progress" (THE CPSU IN THE STRUGGLE FOR UNITY OF ALL REVOLUTIONARY AND PEACE FORCES, 1975, P.47).

The merger of the two streams is a dynamic, progressive process based on principles of mutual respect for national sovereignty, fraternal cooperation in social and economic development, and unity in defence of peace against the divisive, militaristic character of monopoly capitalism. Of primary importance for the growth of unity is the advance of peasant societies with a relatively small working class to a socialist order along the road of non-capitalist development.

Non-capitalism means that liberated countries which are at an early stage of industrialisation can bypass capitalism. That possibility did not exist before the October Revolution.

Now, in alliance with a socialist world, such countries can advance from National Liberation to Socialist liberation.