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LECTURE 12.

WORLD SOCIALISM: NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY.

12.0 SCIENCE IN ACTION

Socialist states are growth points of a new world order. They are a testing ground for the application of theories that the founders of scientific socialism presented more than a century ago. Lenin, the architect of proletarian revolution, closely studies the theories and put them into practice, while insisting that the principles are a guide to action and not a dogma.

Socialism is an expanding order, spreading under widely different conditions of revolutionary change. Socialist countries are at different stages of development, related to their individual historical background and national institutions. They have, however, a similar economic structure which conforms to the basic principles: social ownership of the means of production, social planning for maximum production, equal development of people and regions, proletariat dictatorship and a vanguard party.

People who practise socialism escape from the anarchy of the capitalist mode of production to a higher stage of human development. They are taking a great step forward to freedom that inspired Maxs and Engels. Natural science enables humans to understand and utilise the forces of nature. Scientific socialism, which is the science of society, enables humans to understand and shape the forces of society.

12.1 CONSCIOUS, PLANNED ORGANISATION.

Engels made this comparison, nearly 100 years ago, in a passage that has stood the test of time and practice. He wrote (SOCIALISM:UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFI 1882) that:

"The forces operating in society work exactly like the forces operating in nature: blindly, violently, destrustively so long as we do not understand them and fail to take them into account. But when once we have recognised them and understand how they work, their direction and their effects, the gradual subjection of them to our will and the use of them for attainment of our aims depends entirely upon ourselves". Social practice is neccesary for understanding. "In practice man must prove the truth... The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it" (MA, THESES ON FEUERBACH, 1845)

When the working class understands the nature of productive forces and takes possession of them, it transforms them into willing servants. "This", Engels observed, "is the difference between the destructive forces of electricity in the lightning of a thunder-storm and tamed electricity in the telegraph and the arc light.... Such attainment opens the way to the replacement of the anarchy of social production by a socially planned regulation of production in accordance with the needs both of society as a whole and of each individual."

The forces of production have reached a level at which capitalist relations of production and capitalist superstructure have become a hindrance to social development. By seizing the means of production and therefore to the domination of the product over the producer. Engels continues: "Anarchy in social production is replaced by conscious organisation on a planned basis. The struggle for individual existence comes to an end.... The objective, external forces which have hitherto dominated history, will then pass under the control of men themselves. It is only from this point that men, with full consciousness, will fashion their own history.... It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom".

Engels had in mind a world-wide socialism in which people everywhere would free themselves from the burdens of all previous social formations: class oppression, ignorance, poverty and war.

This world order is now being built, but is threatened by the anarchy and enmity of world imperialism. Peace and friendship between the socialist nations is necessary for socialist construction and is guaranteed by firm adherence to basic socialist principles.

12.2 SELF-DETERMINATION

Two major principles apply: firstly, complete equality of rights between nations and, secondly, a unity of the working people of all nations. In discussing the first principles, Lenin wrote (THE WORKING CLASS AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION, 1913): "For different nations to live together in peace and freedom of to separate and form different states (if that is more convenient for them), a full democracy, upheld by the working class, is essential. No privileges for any nation or any one language. Not even the slightest degree of oppression or the slightest injustice in respect of a national minority - such are the principles of working-class democracy."

Our Revolution also aims at the elimination of national inequalities imposed on us by privileged white nations which oppress our SAFRU nations.

But we reject attempts by any South African national or language community 'to separate and form a different state. It is our intention to constitute the people, SAFRU nations of all languages, into a single nation. Does this programme mean that we reject the principle of nation self-determination?

The principle operates when a nation within a multi-national state wishes to separate politically and form an independence nation-state. It "would be wrong", Lenin argued, to interpret the right to self-determination as meaning anything but the right to existence as a separate state" (THE RIGHT OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION, 1914). Colonial peoples, who are in fact nations, demand this right in their struggle for national liberation.

Socialists, while supporting that struggle, call on the working people of all nations to unite and merge their nations. "We ourselves", Lenin wrote in 1916 "are sure to implement this right, and grant this freedom (to secede), as soon as we capture power". Socialists will do this when they are the government "not in order to 'recommend' secession, but, on the contrary, in order to facilitate the democratic association and merge of nations" (A CAPTURE OF MARXISM AND IMPERIALIST ECONOMISM, 1916)^

12.3 FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The position under discussion is that of a socialist government which has seized power from an oppressor nation. The revolutionary government, on the one hand, grants a free right of secession to the oppressed nations and, on the other hand, recommends against secession, call on them to associate or merge with the new socialist state.

There is no contradiction between these two acts, As Lenin explained, "We favour their merger, but now there can be no transition from forcible merge and annexation to voluntary merge unless they (the oppressed nations) have freedom of secession." Freedom to separate is a necessary condition for a free association or merger.

Proletarian internationalism is aimed at an alliance between workers of all nations. The ultimate goal is therefore a merger between nations. Self-determination is not the ideal conditions, but a means to the end... If granted the right to secede must be given unconditionally, 'without strings'. In some cases, however, a socialist government will not concede the right.

12.4 LENIN'S PRINCIPLES.

Lenin, in the following passages, stressed the relative nature of the right and the conditions under which it might not be conceded.

- a) A Marxist Party by no means an independent appraisal of the advisability of the advisability of the state secession of any nation in every separate case". Self-determination may take the form of autonomy within a given state rather of secession (THESE ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION, 1913)
- b) "The demand for a "yes" or "no" reply to the question of secession in the case of every nation may seem a very 'practical' one. In reality it is absurd; it is metaphysical in theory, while in practise it leads to subordination the proletariat to the bourgeoisie's policy. The bourgeoisie always places its national demands in the forefront, and does so in categorical fashion. With the proletariat, however, these demands are subordinated to the interests of the class struggle... That is why the proletariat confines itself, so to the negative demand for recognition of the right to self-determination, "without giving guarantees to any nation, and without undertaking to give anything at the expense of another nation" (THE RIGHT OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION, 1914).
- c) The right to self-determination arises under specific historical conditions and must be assessed from a class standpoint. The right "is not an absolute, but only a small part of the general-democratic (now: general-socialist) world movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected". (THE DISCUSSION ON NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION SUMMED UP, 1916).

Applying these principles to our situation, we conclude that the fiction of 'self-determination' imposed from above by the oppressor nation on any race, or language community

- a) serves the interest of the oppressor nation;
- b) contradicts our 'general-democratic' movement;
- c) takes place at the expense of our SAFRI nation;
- d) conflicts with the aims of our revolution for national unity and equality;
- e) and must therefore be rejected.

12.5 CIVIL WAR AND ARMED INTERVENTION

The Soviet government applied its policy of national self-determination under tremendous difficulties resulting from the civil war and armed intervention which swept through most of the country between the middle of 1918 and the end of 1920 and continued in the Far East against Japanese troops into 1922.

The national bourgeoisie of the 'rimlands' - Ukraine, Byelorussia, Transcaucasia, Armenia, Turkestan - demanded self-determination, proclaimed

independence, and organised a counter-revolutionary war in alliance with the feudalists and capitalists of central Russia and with the imperialists, V.S. Shevstov (NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND THE SOVIET STATE, 1974) observes:

"The separatist trends among the nationalists bourgeoisie of the borderlands of Russia became clearly defined on the eve of the October Revolution, and they even intensified after the Revolution... The Russian bourgeoisie and the nationalist bourgeoisie of the fringe areas had the same class aim of disuniting the proletariat and the masses of various national communities, and suppressing the revolution, national liberation movement".

Self-determination is progressive when used against feudalism, colonialism, and oppressor nations of all kinds; it becomes a counter-revolutionary demand when used to weaken the struggle for proletarian unity and socialism. The workers and peasants of the border nations, under the leadership of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), defeated the counter-revolutionary armies of the national bourgeoisie in an heroic war to defend Soviet power and socialism. In his address to the second all-Russia congress of Communist Organisations of the peoples of the East on November 22, 1919, Lenin pointed out that who have emancipated themselves... were people to be found in such a backward country as Russia, worn out as she was by four years of imperialist war, who were strong-willed enough to carry on that war during two years of incredible and unparalleled hardship and difficulty" (Lenin: THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN THE EAST, 1952, p.243).

The Red Army stopped the advance of German troops against Petrograd on February 23, 1918, since celebrated as Red Army Day. Deposed feudalists and capitalist formed large armies, the so-called White Guards, with the assistance of troops, ammunitions and finance supplied by 14 imperialist countries. The bourgeoisie of national 'homelands' took the opportunity to proclaim 'independence', and entered the counter-revolutionary war.

Their aim was to drive out Soviet power, restore the rule of landlords and industrial capitalists, undermine the people's State, and bring the 'fringe areas' under the umbrella of international imperialism. We may expect similar policies from the national bourgeoisie of the 'Bantustan' fringe during our revolution.

6 12.6 PROLETARIAN NATIONS

The Soviet Republic remained a unitary state, comprising all the territories included in the Russian Empire, but only for a few weeks after the October Revolution. As early as November, 15, 1917 the government issued a Declaration of Rights, proclaiming the equality and sovereignty of nations, their free development, and the abolition of national privileges.

Independence was granted to Finland, which seceded to become a separate state, the Ukraine and Turkish Armenia in December 1917. Similar independence decrees were issued in 1918-19 in respect of Russian Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Byelorussia. Early in 1919, at the height of the civil war, there were five independent Soviet Republics on the territory of the former Russian Empire.

Capitalism, aided by imperialist armies, regained control of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. These became separate, independent bourgeois States, Led by the Communist Party, the workers and peasants of other national border lands - Ukraine, Byelorussia, Transcaucasia, and the smaller nations such as Tatars, Bashkirs, Yakuts - defeated the national bourgeoisie, expelled the foreign invaders, and formed Soviet Socialist Republics, autonomous republics or autonomous regions.

A federal constitution was proposed as the best means of reconciling national sovereignty and proletarian unity. Lenin, who had earlier opposed federation, revised his opinions shortly before and particularly after the October Revolution. A Soviet federation, he wrote in 1918, was a step towards democratic centralism. The Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets in January 1918 adopted a Declaration of Rights establishing the Russian Soviet Republics "on the principle of a free union of free nations, as a federation of Soviet national republics" (V.S. Shevtsov, p. 49).

Military and economic treaties between the republics formed a basis for closer cooperation. Lenin urged them to form a union to strengthen the fight against imperialism, establish a single planned socialist economy, and develop resources for the benefit of all Soviet peoples.

Delegates from all national communities decided at the First All-Union Congress of Soviets in 1922 to unite into a single union. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) was born as a voluntary union of equal nations. The Second All-Union Congress of January 1924 approved a constitution which stressed the need for a central authority in matters of defence, foreign relations and external trade; introduced new guarantees of equality and sovereign rights of the republics and insisted on the voluntary nature of their union.

12.7 SOCIALIST INTERNATIONALISM

Soviet power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, a socialist economy and socialist planning are cornerstones of unity between nations and language communities. The peoples of the USSR have shown that self-determination is the proper basis for union between nations within a socialist State.

The USSR now consists of 15 Soviet Socialist Republics, 20 Autonomous Republics, 8 Autonomous Regions, and 10 National Areas - a total of 53 territorial entities, accommodating 131 nations, national minorities and language communities. All are represented in the central and regional organs of government.

The Soviet Republics have equal representation in the Soviet of Nationalities, regardless of their size of territory and population. This chamber consists of delegates from the various republics, autonomous regions and outlying national areas. The Supreme Soviet, which is the main legislative organ, has representatives of 58 different national communities. The town chambers meet at the same time and have equal rights and responsibilities.

All nation States and communities retain their traditional superstructure of language, literature, music, traditions, life styles - that is to say, their own culture. At the same time they build their societies on a common foundation: socialist ownership, socialist planning, workers' participation in government and economy and the proletarian dictatorship.

The Constitution provides for a single Union citizenship. The Union republics have their own citizenship, but all citizens of the republics are at the same time citizens of the Soviet Union. All have equal legal status.

South Africa's policy is the direct opposite. It is based on national oppression, inequality and separate citizenship for peoples of Bantustans. These continue to be backward, underdeveloped reserves of labour, economic dependences of the more advanced region, in which whites hold 87% of the country's land surface and almost all the modern forces of production.

12.8 EQUAL DEVELOPMENT

The Soviet Union's policy of 'national in form, socialist in content' guarantees the levelling up of development of all nations and national communities in the USSR. Small nations - Buryats, Yakuts, Koryaks, Chukchis, Khantis and others - made a leap from early communism to large-scale production. All autonomous republics and regions are now highly industrialised.

Small factories and cottage industries predominated in Central Asia and Transcaucasia before the October Revolution. Today they have large metallurgical, chemical, electricity, engineering and other industries. Kazakhstan, formerly the home of nomadic horse-men, exports over 300 kinds

of machinery, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, metals and other industrial products. Its output of electric power per head of population outstrips that of France, Belgium, Turkey, and Iran. Turkmenia, which had only a few handicraft industries, now contains more than 300 large industrial plants.

The principle of distribution according to needs applies in the allocation of funds, technology and science between nation States. A greater share of the Union budget goes to the less developed regions in terms of population than to the industrialised regions of Central Russia and the Ukraine, which also train many thousands of skilled workers and specialists for production in their own national communities. Socialist emulation and the exchange of skilled persons and specialists between national regions contribute much to the process of raising all to the same high level of economic and cultural progress.

Education has advanced by leaps and bounds in all national regions. Most have achieved total literacy in their national language while 42 million non-Russians, at the time of the 1970 census, knew Russian or some other language apart from their mother tongue. The former backward areas, such as Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenia, have between two and three times as many students per 10,000 of population as Italy, Britain and West Germany. Uzbekistan, which had 29,000 primary and secondary pupils before the Revolution, now has over 9,000 general education schools with 3 million pupils, two universities, 36 institutes and 156 technical schools with 370,000 students.

The development of national languages stimulates the growth of a national literature, art and science in all their forms. At the same time, the spread of Russian as the universal Soviet language, and the mingling of peoples of different nations in every national regions promotes the growth of an international Soviet culture, share by all citizens irrespective of nationality, race or language. Unity on the basis of diversity is an important aspect of proletarian internationalism, the most important precondition of which is socialist ownership in the process of administration.

12.9 WORLD SOCIALISM

Countries become socialist at different times and in different circumstances. They are not at the same level of socio-economic development. Some have a more advanced production system than those with a predominantly peasant population.

Differences of this kind may give rise to contradictions between socialist States, as between the Soviet Union and China. Where the contradictions appear in the form of sharp political conflict, one or other socialist country has departed from the basic principles of socialism.

For example, China supports PAC and other movements in opposition to the ANC, China has also supported forces opposed to MPLA in the Angolan Revolution. These actions are dictated by China's hostility to the USSR and not by the realities of the revolution or the interest of the peoples engaged in revolutionary struggle.

On the other hand, relations between socialist countries with similar economic and political systems conform to the principles of state sovereignty, self-determination, cooperation and equal development. The progress made by the Socialist World to higher levels of economic and social well-being brings humanity closer to the goal of a universal culture, international in form and socialist in content.