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AMERICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
(South America)

LECTURE 8

NATIONAL LIBERATION.

8.0 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REVOLUTIONS

A social revolution such as the Great October Revolution of 1917 changes both the structure and superstructure of the old formation, thereby creating a new socio-economic formation.

The revolution is in the first place political: it puts political power, the control of the State machinery, in the hands of the revolutionary class. Secondly, the revolution is economic: it changes the relations of production which are property relations. Thirdly, the revolution is social: it changes the system of government, including army and police, law, education and ideology.

A revolution which transfers power from one socio-economic group of people to another, but which does not change the structure, is a political revolution. The old forces of production and relations of production remain in essence the same under the new government. Divisions between classes - employers and workers, property owners and the propertyless - persist, and may even grow stronger, more pronounced, under the new regime.

In summary: a social revolution changes the whole society: a political revolution changes only the superstructure, or a part of the superstructure.

8.1 BOURGEOIS REVOLUTIONS

To decide whether a specific revolution is social or political, we need to examine its history, component parts, aims and results. In particular, whether it changed the class system, property relations and ideology.

For example, bourgeois revolutions were in the first place political. They transferred political power from the nobility and church to a capitalist class of manufacturers, merchants and bankers. For this reason Marx and Engels stated in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO that "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie".

The bourgeoisie State, however, retained the property relations, based on the private ownership of the means of production, that had developed within the 'bowels' of feudalism, largely as a result of colonial trade. In the words of the MANIFESTO, "The guild-masters were pushed aside by the manufacturing middle class; division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labour in each single workshop".

Industrial capitalism introduced power-driven machines, increased the size and output of production units and, during this process created a huge proletariat. But the relations between workers and employers, between labour and capital, remained much the same as in the early days of modern capitalism.

According to our definition, therefore, the bourgeois revolution was a political and not a social revolution.

8.2 COLONIAL CAPITALISM

Colonial officials, traders, settlers, mine owners, missionaries and their agents imposed the capitalist mode of production on communal societies, feudal and semi-feudal systems. Marx and Engels summarised the effects in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO: The bourgeoisie "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e. to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image".

The colonial master introduced new forces of production: wage labour, machines, minerals and agricultural products. They introduced capitalist relations of production: private ownership of the means of production and divisions between owners of capital and propertyless workers. They imposed their system of government, law, education, religion and ideology on traditional rulers and their peoples. Colonial capitalism, coming from outside as an external, dominant force, therefore started a social revolution which changed the structure and superstructure of ancient societies.

Marx has given us an early insight into the colonial impact in a series of articles written between 1852 and 1859 on British rule in India. His main theme was that while the British greed for plunder and profit brought misery to India, it pushed the people out of a superstitious, feudal society into the stream of modern life. England, "in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests... but, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution".

Among other crimes, Britain

- (a) neglected to keep up public water-works and irrigation canals on which much of agriculture depended;
- (b) imported cheap factory-made cotton goods which destroyed the village industries of spinning and weaving;
- (c) allowed agriculture to deteriorate;
- (d) blew up the economic base and dissolved village communities of farmers and craft workers;
- (e) extorted great fortunes by exploiting India and plundering its accumulated wealth.

Britain 'modernised' India by building railways to transport raw materials for British factories and manufactured goods imported from Britain. But Indians would not reap the fruits of modernisation until they had thrown off the English yoke.

Wherever colonialism took root it started a social revolution with effects similar to those of British rule in India.

8.3 SOCIAL CATEGORIES

The grave-diggers of industrial capitalism are the working class. Who dig graves for colonialist?

There is no single answer because of big differences in the structures of traditional societies, the policies of colonial powers, degrees of economic development, and ideologies.

A starting point for an inquiry into the nature of colonial social formations is the class system. A class, in the strict sense, is a group of people occupying a special and common position in relation to the means of production. The two great classes in capitalism are the owners of the means of production and the workers, whose only property is their labour-power or capacity to work.

Typically, in a colonial situation, the capitalists belong to the dominant, foreign group of colonisers. The workers are members of the colonised group (the 'natives') but many have property: land rights and livestock in the villages from which they migrate. Class distinctions are sharper in colonies with a feudalistic structure, as in the Emirates of Northern Nigeria, or the monarchies of Buganda and Buluzi. For the purpose of generalisation, however, it is advisable to specify categories rather than classes.

The categories commonly found are:

- (a) traditional rulers incorporated in the colonial administration as its agents (for example, under British 'Indirect Rule').
- (b) officials, clerks, interpreters, teachers, nurses, professionals: the educated, 'white collar' salaried employees of government and capitalist firms;
- (c) petty bourgeoisie: shopkeepers, marketeers, small-scale manufacturers, owners of 'service' undertakings (garages, beauty parlours, undertakers), commercial farmers;
- (d) wage workers: a small but growing urban proletariat and migrant peasant-workers;
- (e) villagers or peasant farmers: between 60% and 80% of the total population.

3.4 STATE AND NATION

The members of these socio-economic categories make up the population of an individual State system. They have a common economic structure and superstructure.

The colonialists drew the boundaries of each State during the period of imperialist rivalries that led to the so-called 'partitioning' of Africa. They fixed these boundaries to suit the interests of one or another imperialist power and without taking note of the traditional rights and claims of the independent States that existed before colonial conquest.

Different ethnic communities, each with its own language, customs and government, were grouped together in the new colonial State. Its boundaries cut across ethnic communities, distributing people of the same clan, tribe or national between two or more States - as between Namibia and Angola, Angola and Zaire, Zaire and Zambia, Zambia and Malawi, Malawi and Mozambique, Mozambique and the Transvaal, the Transvaal and Botswana.

Colonial powers created new States to further their aims of domination, to exploit resources, control labour supplies, monopolise investments and markets, and strengthen themselves for imperialist war. Colonial violence and force turned independent nations into subjects of the new States. Resistance to colonial conquest continued as resistance to colonial rule. New nations arose in the course of the struggle.

"The nation", wrote Lenin (THE TEACHINGS OF KARL MARX, 1914) "is a necessary product, an inevitable form, in the bourgeois epoch of social development". So it was in the colonies. Change, imposed from above on traditional social formations, created objective conditions for the emergence of nations. Among other things, colonialism.

- (a) deposed ruler or kept them as minor agents of administration;
- (b) imposed a central government and uniform laws throughout the colony;
- (c) developed a national economy, based on the production and exchange of a common market;
- (d) introduced new forces of production, giving rise to mining and manufacturing towns, which were also centres of commerce and administration;
- (e) turned villagers into wage workers, employed on farms and plantations, mines, works, railways, factories.
- (f) built schools for training the clerks and officials required to man the lower levels of administration, industry and commerce;
- (g) converted people to the Christian religion, thereby laying the basis for a common ideology and organisation;
- (h) made its language - English, French, Afrikaans, Portuguese German - the official language in government, courts, schools, commerce and industry.

8.5 NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Colonialists did not want to unite their subjects into a nation. Instead, governments divided the population. They propped up ethnic (tribal) systems in peasant communities; placed them under chiefs and headmen who were servants of the colonial state; upheld the customary law of marriage, family and inheritance but enforced colonial law to protect property and injustice.

- The protests came from different sections of the population;
- (a) traditional rulers in the early days who defended their state and people against the invaders;
 - (b) workers, who first took individual action deserting employment (breaking their contracts) and later acted collectively in strikes and through trade unions;
 - (c) ministers of religion, especially the independent churches, who protested against the failure to practice christian morality;
 - (d) small businessmen, struggling against colonialist monopolies and discrimination under licensing and land laws;
 - (e) teachers, clerks, professional people, who were most in contact with the colonial bureaucracy (officials) and recognised its dependence on the colonised population.

The educated, usually trained, section were also the first to understand and express the need of unity between chiefs and commoners, workers and peasants, educated and uneducated, tribes and nations for the overthrow of colonial rule. They formed early societies for the protection of people's rights. Out of these came national parties and movements, such as the African National Congress, forerunner of similar organisation in many other countries.

All national parties, though formed at different times and under varying conditions, had the same aim and demanded the same rights of self-determination and secession from the imperial State. Conditions were favourable to their struggle after the second imperialist world war. The defeats of the imperialist powers, the remarkable spread of socialism, the upsurge in national liberation movements in Asia and Africa, led to the collapse of colonialism.

Nationalist parties came to power, either through armed struggle or in a non-violent transition to national democracy.

8.6

POLITICAL REVOLUTIONS.

The national democracy revolution was a political revolution. It took control of the State machinery, did away with all legal and conventional forms of race discrimination, expended the system of education at all level, gave votes to ~~the~~ votes to the people, introduced elected lawmaking assemblies and allowed opposition parties to compete for office within the parliamentary system.

In a few States, where the people seized power through armed struggle, they created their own constitutions. In most cases, however, the new States began with constitutions drawn up by the imperial power after consultation and agreement. National democratic governments therefore seldom destroyed the old machinery of the States. More often, they took over the imperialist-colonial institutions: parliamentary procedures, multiparty systems, the courts and body of laws, army and police organisations, and the bureaucratic administration. They appointed their own nationals as soon as possible to the positions formerly held colonial officials. African cabinet ministers, ministers of states, permanent secretaries, assistant secretaries, clerks, judges, magistrates army and police chiefs took over the offices, houses and functions of the colonial bureaucracy.

Many states after ten years or so of independence introduced their own constitutions, providing for one-party governments, military regimes or various kinds of autocracy. The general effect was to narrow the popular basis of government and reduce the amount of participation by workers and peasants.

8.7.

CAPITALISM REMAINS.

Political revolutions may change the superstructure, but keep the economic structure and property relations of the previous social formation.

This principle operated in most national democratic governments. Few national democratic governments did away with the capitalist mode of production which the colonialists had introduced.

The forces of Nationalism, however, penetrated the capitalists relations of production in two important ways. Firstly, the State extended its control over the economy by acquiring some of the shares in private enterprises, either owned by foreign capital. Secondly nationals were encouraged and assisted to establish their own private, profit making enterprises, either on their own or in partnership with foreign capital. The interactions between public and private capital produced forms of State capitalism, of which the dominant aim is to make profits and not to serve the people's interests.

State capitalism may develop along a 'non-capitalist' road into socialism. Whether it does this, or reverts to wholesale capitalism, will depend on the nature of the class forces, the political strength and maturity of working people, the ideology of the ruling party, and the relations between the people and the world of SOCIALISM.