

11. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST OPPORTUNISM ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND THE NATIONAL AND COLONIAL QUESTION

Imperialism meant that capital had outgrown the framework of national states; it meant the extension and sharpening of national oppression on a new historical basis. The plunder and oppression of the colonial and dependent countries by the imperialists aroused the opposition of the people of the oppressed nations. The national-liberation movement was surging forward over vast areas. During the rise of capitalism, the national question had usually been regarded as one within the "civilized" countries in Europe. Under imperialism it outgrew the boundaries of the national states and became an international question of over-all importance, a worldwide question of the emancipation of the oppressed peoples in the dependent and colonial countries from the yoke of imperialism. A correct solution of the national question was essential if the international alliance of the proletariat of all nations was to be strengthened and victory in the anti-imperialist struggle of the proletariat and oppressed nations of the world was to be assured.

In the new historical conditions Lenin developed the teachings of Marx on the national question and formulated the programme and policy of the Bolshevik Party on the national question and on the national and colonial question. In his articles "Critical Remarks on the Na-

tional Question", "On the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", "Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up", "The Pamphlet by Junius" and "A Caricature of Marxism and 'Imperialist Economics'", all of which he wrote shortly before or during World War I, Lenin fully expounded the Party's programme and policy on the national question and the national and colonial question and sharply criticized the opportunist viewpoint on these questions.

THE DIVISION OF NATIONS INTO OPPRESSING AND OPPRESSED NATIONS, AND THE TWO HISTORICAL TRENDS ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The opportunists denied the existence of the antagonistic contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in each country on the one hand, and on the other, refused to acknowledge the existence of the antagonistic contradiction between the oppressed nations of the world and imperialism. Lenin pointed out that, as against the philistine, opportunist utopia of a peaceful union of equal nations under imperialism, "the programme of Social-Democracy must advance the thesis that the fundamental, essential and inevitable division of nations under imperialism is that between oppressing nations and oppressed nations".¹ This distinction "is the *essence* of imperialism, which is *falsely* evaded by the social-chauvinists, and by Kautsky. This distinction is not important from the point of view of bourgeois pacifism, or the petty-

¹ "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 271.

bourgeois utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most important from the point of view of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism."¹ He also said, "Europeans often forget that colonial peoples are *also* nations, but to tolerate such 'forgetfulness' is to tolerate chauvinism."²

Lenin enunciated the two historical trends on the national question during the development of capitalism. He said:

The first is the awakening of national life and national movements, the struggle against all national oppression, and the creation of national states. The second is the development and growing frequency of international intercourse in every form, the breakdown of national barriers, the creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.³

In accordance with Lenin's views, Stalin indicated, in "The Foundations of Leninism":

For imperialism these two tendencies represent irreconcilable contradictions; because imperialism cannot exist without exploiting colonies and forcibly retaining them within the framework of the "integral whole"; because imperialism can bring nations together only by means of annexations and colonial

¹"The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 284.

²"A Caricature of Marxism and 'Imperialist Economism'", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 250.

³"Critical Remarks on the National Question", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 20, p. 27.

conquest, without which imperialism is, generally speaking, inconceivable.

For communism, on the contrary, these tendencies are but two sides of a single cause — the cause of the emancipation of the oppressed peoples from the yoke of imperialism; because communism knows that the union of peoples in a single world economic system is possible only on the basis of mutual confidence and voluntary agreement, and that the road to the formation of a voluntary union of peoples lies through the separation of the colonies from the "integral" imperialist "whole," through the transformation of the colonies into independent states.¹

THE GREAT SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NATIONAL-LIBERATION MOVEMENT OF THE COLONIAL AND DEPENDENT COUNTRIES

Lenin repeatedly explained that the fundamental aim of the Marxists was to unite the working people of all countries to fight imperialism and build socialism together. To achieve this goal they must resolutely oppose national oppression, take a firm stand for national equality, uphold the right to self-determination of the oppressed nations of the colonial and dependent countries, and fully support the national-liberation movement against imperialism.

Lenin had a high opinion of the importance of the struggle for liberation of the oppressed nations. He held that their struggle inevitably intensified and enlarged the crisis of the capitalist world. It was a great force which

¹ Stalin, *Works*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, Vol. 6, p. 152.

dealt imperialism blows from the rear and shook the foundations of imperialist rule; it was a great ally of the proletarian revolution. He said:

. . . small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* power against imperialism to come on the scene, namely, the socialist proletariat.¹

Lenin paid very great attention to the national-liberation movement of the colonial and dependent countries and warmly praised the militant struggle of the people of these countries against imperialist oppression. In the article "The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx", he wrote:

. . . the opportunists had scarcely congratulated themselves on the inauguration of "social peace" and on the fact that storms were needless under "democracy" when a new source of great world storms opened up in Asia. The Russian Revolution was followed by the Turkish, the Persian and the Chinese revolutions. It is in this era of storms and their "repercussion" in Europe that we are now living.²

He held that the Chinese revolution showed that "one fourth of the population of the globe has passed, so to speak, from slumber to light, to movement, to struggle".³ In the article "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia" Lenin reiterated, "Everywhere in Asia a mighty dem-

¹ "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 303.

² *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 84.

³ "Regenerated China", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 4, p. 312.

ocratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining in strength. . . . *Hundreds* of millions of people are awakening to life, light and liberty."¹

SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL-LIBERATION MOVEMENT
OF THE OPPRESSED NATIONS AND OPPOSING
REACTIONARY NATIONALISM

Lenin pointed out that, under imperialism, the national and colonial question was part of the whole question of proletarian revolution. The proletarian revolutionary movement in the imperialist countries had to form an anti-imperialist united front with the national-liberation movement of the colonial and dependent countries in order to defeat the common enemy and attain final victory. He said that when the proletariat in the advanced countries rose to overthrow the bourgeoisie, the oppressed nations would by no means look on with folded arms; they would certainly take the opportunity to rise up and wage wars of national liberation. He added:

. . . what is needed for their success is either the combined efforts of an enormous number of the inhabitants of the oppressed countries . . . or a *particularly* favourable combination of circumstances in the international situation (for example, when the intervention of the imperialist Powers is paralysed by exhaustion, by war, by their mutual antagonisms, etc.), or a *simultaneous* uprising of the proletariat of one of the Great Powers against the bourgeoisie (this latter case stands first in order from the standpoint of what

¹ *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 315.

is desirable and advantageous for the victory of the proletariat).¹

He also stated:

. . . the hundreds of millions of toilers in Asia, have a reliable ally in the proletariat of all the civilized countries. No force on earth can prevent its victory, which will liberate both the peoples of Europe and the peoples of Asia.²

Lenin emphasized the need for the proletariat of the imperialist countries to give active support to the national-liberation movement of the oppressed nations. In his article "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", he indicated that Marx, placing the interests of the proletarian revolution above anything else, always put the fundamental principle of internationalism and socialism in the forefront, as when he said, "No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations." Lenin remarked:

Socialists must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation — and this demand in its political expression signifies nothing more nor less than the recognition of the right to self-determination — but they must render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their rebellion

¹"The Pamphlet by Junius", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 206.

²"Backward Europe and Advanced Asia", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 316.

— and if need be, their revolutionary war — *against* the imperialist powers that oppress them.¹

In the article "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up", he said:

If we do not want to betray socialism, we *must* support *every* rebellion against our main enemy, the bourgeoisie of the big states, provided it is not the rebellion of a reactionary class. By refusing to support rebellions of annexed territories we objectively become annexationists. Precisely "in the era of imperialism," which is the era of the incipient social revolution, the proletariat makes special efforts to support the rebellion of annexed territories today, in order that tomorrow, or simultaneously with the rebellion, it may attack the bourgeoisie of the "Great" Power which is weakened by that rebellion.²

At the same time Lenin also stressed that Marxists only support what is progressive in the national movement. It is progressive to abolish all kinds of feudal and national oppression and fight for the right of the people and nations to self-determination. They should be firmly supported. To go beyond this line of demarcation and give support to reactionary nationalism is to betray the proletariat and side with the bourgeoisie. The opportunists forget precisely this line of demarcation on the national question.

Lenin taught that in every country the proletariat should value "the alliance of the proletarians of all nations" above everything else and place it above every-

¹*Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 276.

²*Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 279.

thing else, and should evaluate "every national demand . . . *from the angle* of the class struggle of the workers".¹ He pointed out that the bourgeoisie always tried to present the demands of its own class as those of the entire nation and placed them in the forefront, and what the bourgeoisie was most concerned with was guarantees for its own interests — "hence the perennial policy of coming to terms with the bourgeoisie of other nations to the detriment of the proletariat. For the proletariat, however, the important thing is to strengthen its class against the bourgeoisie and to educate the masses in the spirit of consistent democracy and Socialism."² Lenin said:

. . . the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations *merely talks* about national revolt, while in actual practice it enters into reactionary agreements with the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nations behind the backs of, *and against*, its own people.³

He further declared:

Inasmuch as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressing one, we are always, in every case, and more resolutely than anyone else, *in favour*; for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But *inasmuch* as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for *its own* bourgeois nationalism we are opposed. We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressing nation and do not in any

¹"The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 335.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 334-35.

³"A Caricature of Marxism and 'Imperialist Economism'", *op. cit.*, p. 248.

way condone the strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation.¹

REFUTING THE FALLACY OF THE OPPORTUNISTS ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The opportunists made frenzied attacks on the programme which Lenin put forward for solving the national question. On the pretext that the strengthening of ties between nations played a progressive role in the epoch of imperialism, the opportunists of the Second International, the Russian Liquidators and the bourgeois nationalists took up a stand in favour of the imperialist policy of annexations and strongly opposed national self-determination. The Kautskyites hypocritically gave verbal support to national self-determination, but actually chimed in completely with the opportunists and their like, saying it was "excessive" to demand that the oppressed nations should have freedom of secession. Trotsky took an eclectic stand and, by evading an answer to the practical question of how the oppressed nations should be treated, objectively supported social-chauvinism. The opportunists of Russia and of the Second International, following in the wake of the bourgeoisie, counterposed such national reformist slogans of theirs as "cultural-national autonomy" to the revolutionary programme on the self-determination of nations drawn up by Lenin.

Lenin said:

The imperialist epoch has transformed all the "Great" Powers into oppressors of a number of nations, and the

¹"The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", *op. cit.*, p. 336.

development of imperialism will inevitably lead to a clearer division of trends on this question also in international Social-Democracy.¹

He censured the opportunists' betrayal of Marxism on the national question, saying that if in advocating the amalgamation of nations in general the Social-Democrats of an oppressing nation were to forget even for a moment that the rulers of their own countries also stood for amalgamation with small nations — by means of annexations — then those Social-Democrats would be abettors of imperialism.

Lenin exposed the reactionary essence of the slogan "cultural-national autonomy", pointing out that it was a bourgeois swindle. Every national culture, he said, contained elements of democratic and socialist culture. But every nation also had a culture of the landlords, priests and bourgeoisie which was in the dominant position. The "cultural-national autonomy" advocated by the opportunists and the faith in a "supra-class national culture" which they spread fully conformed to the interests of the bourgeoisie and helped the landlords, priests and bourgeoisie to use their ruling position in the realm of culture to fool and deceive the working people.

The so-called "cultural-national autonomy", Lenin pointed out, would actually separate culture and education from the sphere of economic and political struggle. He said:

It is primarily in the economic and political sphere that a serious class struggle is waged in any capitalist society. To separate the sphere of education from

¹"The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up", *op. cit.*, p. 305.

this is, firstly, absurdly utopian, because schools (like "national culture" in general) cannot be separated from economics and politics; secondly, it is the economic and political life of a capitalist country that *necessitates* at every step the smashing of the absurd and outmoded national barriers and prejudices, whereas separation of the school system and the like, would only perpetuate, intensify and strengthen "pure" clericalism and "pure" bourgeois chauvinism.¹

Some of the Left Social-Democrats also held wrong views on the national question. They maintained that there would be no more national wars, and that all wars were imperialist in the epoch of imperialism. Lenin pointed out that this view was not only obviously fallacious in theory, but very harmful in a practical political sense. He said:

... it gives rise to the stupid propaganda for "disarmament," as if no other war but reactionary wars are possible; it is the cause of the still more stupid and downright reactionary indifference towards national movements.²

He affirmed, "National wars *against* the imperialist Powers are not only possible and probable, they are inevitable, they are *progressive* and *revolutionary*..."³

Lenin said:

Bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism — these are the two irreconcilably hostile slogans

¹"Critical Remarks on the National Question", *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²"The Pamphlet by Junius", *op. cit.*, p. 206.

³*Ibid.*

that correspond to the two great class camps throughout the capitalist world, and express the *two* policies (nay, the two world outlooks) in the national question.¹

Lenin was resolutely opposed to reactionary bourgeois nationalism and the diverse opportunist ideological trends on the national question, and demonstrated an extremely clear-cut and firm proletarian-internationalist stand. His teachings are the guiding principles for the Bolshevik Party and revolutionaries of all countries in dealing with the national question and the national and colonial question.

¹“Critical Remarks on the National Question”, *op. cit.*, p. 26.