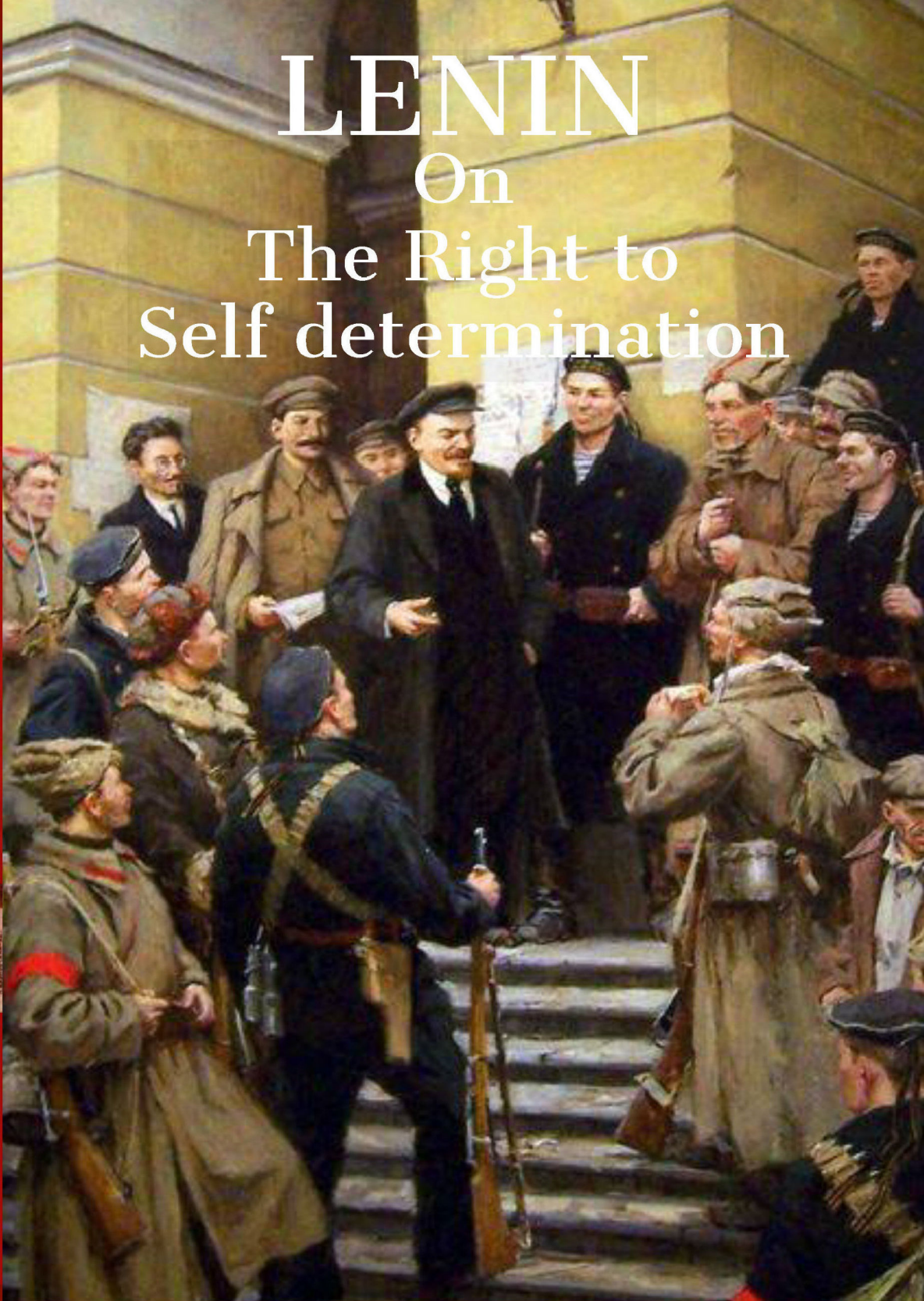


# LENIN

On  
The Right to  
Self determination



Erdogan A

# **On The Right to Self determination**

**Selected Writings  
from  
Lenin and Stalin**

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Selected writings from Lenin & Stalin researched and  
compiled for various articles on the subject. E. A



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## Introduction

Erdogan A

""Does recognition of the **right** of nations to self-determination really imply support of any **demand** of every nation for selfdetermination? After all, the fact that we recognize the **right** of all citizens to form free associations does not at all commit us"" (1)

## The right and demand to self determination

The largest confusion related to Marxist Leninist fundamental theories have been about the theory of "State", "Defense of fatherland", and the "Right to Self-determination", therefore eclectic approach has been widely applied by all sides concerned; eclecticism of bourgeois Liberals, chauvinists, nationalists and opportunistic ML tailgaters, inevitably continued to blur the subject and related confusion.

Taking the internationalist unity of the workers and oppressed people as the basic principle, Marxist-Leninist "Right to Self-determination" theory, counter-aims the cynical purpose of the bourgeoisie. Thus, the Importance of this theory should not be underestimated. Because this theory, to counter the bourgeois approach, has both theoretical and tactical content.

Stalin states;

The merits of this slogan are that it:

**Removes all grounds for suspicion** that the toilers of one nation entertain predatory designs against the toilers of another nation, and therefore **creates a basis** for mutual confidence and voluntary union;

1) **Tears the mask from the imperialists**, who hypocritically prate about self-determination but who are striving to keep the unequal peoples and colonies in subjection, to retain them within the framework of their imperialist state, and thereby intensifies the struggle for liberation that these nations and colonies are waging against imperialism. (2)

Due to the tactical nature of the theory, if and when the approach to the theory is partial, not to the entire context, it will inevitably be perceived as contradictory. Tweezing this "dual - contradictory content" will bring about the practical and "pseudo-right" results in accord with one's own ideological understanding and purpose.

### **The Conflicting Appearance**

When we carefully read the writings of Lenin on the Right to Self-determination, what strikes the eye first, is that Lenin's comments appear to be conflicting duality.

On the one hand Lenin and Stalin, while making an internationalist obligation to defend "The Right to Self-determination", on the other hand they indicate that the realization of this right **could only be** by a socialist revolution.

These examples of citations are related to the self-determination **RIGHTS** that we often see and read.

"" Whoever..... does not fight against all national oppression or inequality, is not a Marxist; he is not even a democrat "" (3)

"A nation has the right freely to determine its own destiny. It has the right to arrange its life as it sees fit, without, of course, trampling on the **rights** of other nations. That is beyond dispute." (4)

""...there is **one case** in which the **Marxists are duty bound**, if they do not want to betray democracy and the proletariat, to defend one special demand in the national question; that is, the **right** of nations to self-determination, i.e., the **right** to political secession."" (5)

On the other hand, this excerpt of the Self-Determination of Nations' transformation to an active **DEMAND** appears to be contradictory;

"" .... the revolutionary experience of recent years has again confirmed that: the national and colonial questions are **inseparable** from the question of

**emancipation from the rule of capital; ..... the unequal nations and colonies cannot be liberated without overthrowing the rule of capital;"** (6)

"the Communist International's **entire policy** on the national and the colonial questions should rest **primarily** on a closer union of the proletarians and the working masses of all nations and countries for a joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie. **This union alone** will guarantee victory over capitalism, **without which** the abolition of national oppression and inequality is **impossible.**" (7)

So, there has to be a theoretic and practical difference between defending and promoting the **RIGHT** and its transformation into agenda as **DEMAND**, **since the first is absolute for socialism and latter, leaded by other classes, may contradict the interests of working class.** For Marxists the interests of working class and its struggle **cannot be subordinated to** any other class and its struggle. Here the question arises.

Stalin summarizes this "duality", "contradiction":

"while **not contradicting** the **rights** of these nations, **do contradict** "the precise meaning" of the programme"" , meaning the demand for secession.



""Obviously, "the rights of nations" and the "precise meaning" of the programme are **on two entirely different planes**. Whereas the "**precise meaning**" of the programme expresses the interests of the proletariat, as scientifically formulated in the programme of the latter, **the rights of nations may express the interests of any class** – bourgeoisie, aristocracy, clergy, etc. – depending on the strength and influence of these classes. On the one hand are **the duties of Marxists**, on the other **the rights of nations**, which consist of various classes. "" (8)

### **Attitude to the "Right and to the actual "Demand"**

Marxist Leninists always defend and support the **RIGHT**. This constitutes the essence of the tactical theory, but when the actual **DEMAND** comes to the agenda, an approach to support the **DEMAND** at any cost, is contradictory to the soul and **to** the fundamental theories of Marxism Leninism. It would be a bourgeois approach to support and defend a **DEMAND** without assessing its impact on working class. Marxist Leninists have to assess the specific conditions, and their practice should be in the interests of laboring people and of their struggle. **This fundamental approach is never rendered secondary to any democratic demands.**

As Lenin explains;

"".... our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination **does not in any way commit us** to supporting every **demand** for national self-determination. As the party of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party considers it to be its positive and principal task to further the self-determination of the proletariat in each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations. We must always and unreservedly work for the very closest unity of the proletariat of all nationalities"" (1)

Lenin clarifies the distinction between Marxist and Bourgeois approach to the question;

""In contrast to the petty-bourgeois democrats, **Marx regarded every democratic demand without exception not as an absolute**, but as an historical expression of the struggle of the masses of the people, led by the bourgeoisie, against feudalism. **There is not one of these demands** which could not serve and has not served, under certain circumstances, as an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie for deceiving the workers. **To single out, in this respect, one of the demands of political democracy, specifically the selfdetermination of nations, and to oppose it to the rest, is fundamentally wrong in theory.** In practice, the proletariat can retain its independence only by subordinating its struggle for all democratic demands, not excluding the demand for a republic, to its revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. "" "(9)

## The RIGHT to Self Determination

If in a reactionary society where a woman is not entitled to any saying at all, where women has no right to divorce, yet men can divorce her with just one word, "divorced", the **RIGHT** to divorce for women must be defended, same way, the **RIGHT** of a nation to secede should be defended, in all circumstances. The **RIGHT** that the women would win, is for free, voluntary association and distinct from forcible association. The most important difference not being understood is to defend and support the **RIGHT** to divorce, and to propose and support the actual **DEMAND** of divorce.

Lenin while criticizing Semkovsky states;

"It would seem that even with Mr. Semkovsky's mental abilities it is not difficult to deduce that **"the right to divorce"** does **not require** that one **should vote for divorce!** But such is the fate of those who criticize -**they forget the ABC of logic.** "" (10)

Theory speaks of the **RIGHT** and the **DEMAND** differently; ""our programme (on the self-determination of nations) cannot be interpreted to mean anything but political self-determination, i.e., the **right** to secede and form a separate state " (11)

and explains the reasons clearly;

"The championing of this **right**, far from encouraging the formation of small states, leads, **on the contrary**, to the freer, fearless and therefore wider and more widespread formation of very big states and federations of states, which are more beneficial for the masses and more fully in keeping with economic development." (12)

So, the championed **RIGHT** is not one suggesting the separation, but one tactical support theory that is **aimed at freely formation of the association**. Because, as noted below, anti-imperialist, and socialist struggle is the current agenda.

Since capitalism is the beginning of the nations, inevitably, there are two historic periods to the right of Nations Self-determination. ""**The first** is the awakening of national life and national movements, the struggle against all national oppression, and the creation of national states So "the awakening of national life and national movements and the creation of national states", bourgeois national movements,""(13) Second period ", a mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society"

(13) corresponds to the imperialist era.

Lenin explains the dual approach and purpose;

"" The Marxists' national programme takes both tendencies into account, and advocates, firstly, the equality of nations and languages and the impermissibility of all privileges in this respect ....; secondly, the principle of internationalism and **uncompromising struggle** against **contamination** of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism, **even of the most refined kind..** "" (13)

"the main thing today is to stand against the united, aligned front of the imperialist powers, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the socialimperialists, and **for the utilization of all national movements against imperialism** for the purposes of the socialist revolution " (14)

If we want to stay true to the tactical nature of the theory, in this period too, the **RIGHT** must be supported in all circumstances. Lenin emphasizes that this **RIGHT** should be recognized even in the most adverse conditions.

"The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations persistently utilize the slogans of national liberation to deceive the workers....

The fact that the **struggle** for national liberation **against one imperialist power** may, under certain conditions, be utilized by another "great" power for its own, equally imperialist, aims, is **just as unlikely** to make the Social Democrats refuse to recognize the **right** of

nations to self-determination as the numerous cases of bourgeois utilization of republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial plunder are unlikely to make the Social-Democrats reject their republicanism" (15)

(We have seen articles trying to pass theoretical sheath for the cooperation with imperialists, especially in Syria, by the writers' eclecticism where the words "against **an imperialist power** " is deleted.)

On the extent and limit of support, or what is to be supported at what degree, and with what precautions Lenin states;

"Marxism **cannot be reconciled with nationalism**, be it even of the "most just", "purest", most refined and civilized brand..... The principle of nationality is historically inevitable in bourgeois society and, taking this society into due account, the Marxist fully recognizes the historical legitimacy of national movements. **But** to prevent this **recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism**, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements, in order that this recognition may **not lead to bourgeois ideology obscuring proletarian consciousness.**" (16)

**When the DEMAND to secede is on the agenda**

Confusion and problem arise when the **RIGHT** comes to the actual agenda as **DEMAND**. These words of Lenin below, clarifies that the decision to an actual DEMAND should be depending on the outcome of the evaluation of concrete conditions. And he emphasizes that it should be based on the **interests of the struggle** of the laboring people. Marxist Leninists **cannot say "yes" or "no"** to an actual DEMAND **before** making an assessment guarding the interests of the working class and her struggle.

"" Does **recognition of the right** of nations to self-determination really **imply support of any demand** of every nation for selfdetermination? After all, the fact that we recognize the right of all citizens to form free associations does not at all commit us, SocialDemocrats, to supporting the formation of any new association; nor does it prevent us from opposing and campaigning against the formation of a given association as an inexpedient and unwise step. We even recognize the right of the Jesuits to carry on agitation freely, "" (17)

""In conformity with its fundamental task of combating bourgeois democracy and exposing its falseness and hypocrisy, the Communist Party, as the avowed champion of the proletarian struggle to overthrow the bourgeois yoke, **must base** its policy, in the national question too, **not on abstract and formal principles but, first, on a precise appraisal of the specific historical situation** ""

""the need constantly to **explain and expose** among the broadest working masses of all countries, and particularly of the backward countries, the **deception systematically practiced by the imperialist powers**, which, under the guise of politically **independent** states, set up states that are wholly dependent upon them economically, financially and militarily."" (18)

In reference to being "practical" and saying "yes" or "no",

Lenin's criticism of Rosa's approach touches the core of the subject; "" "What does the **demand for "practicality"** in the national question mean?

""It means one of three things: support for all national aspirations; the answer **"yes" or "no"** to the question of secession by any nation; or that national demands are in general **immediately "practicable"**.

The bourgeoisie, which naturally assumes the leadership at the start of every national movement, says that support for all national aspirations is practical. **However, the proletariat's policy in the national question** (as in all others) supports the bourgeoisie **only in a certain direction, but it never coincides with the bourgeoisie's policy**. The working class supports the bourgeoisie **only in order to secure national peace** (which the bourgeoisie cannot bring about completely, and which can be achieved only with complete democracy), in order to secure equal



rights and to create the best conditions for the class struggle. Therefore, it is in opposition to the practicality of the bourgeoisie that the proletarians advance their principles in the national question; **they always give the bourgeoisie only conditional support.** What every bourgeoisie is out for in the national question is either privileges for its own nation, or exceptional advantages for it; this is called being "practical". **The proletariat is opposed to all privileges, to all exclusiveness. To demand that it should be "practical" means following the lead of the bourgeoisie, falling into opportunism. "**

(.....)

The bourgeoisie is most of all interested in the "**feasibility**" of a given **demand**—hence the invariable 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.

**This may not be "practical" as far as the opportunists are concerned, but it is the only real guarantee, the guarantee of the greater national equality and peace, despite the feudal landlords and the nationalist bourgeoisie.**

The **whole task of the proletarians** in the national question is **“unpractical” from the standpoint of the nationalist bourgeoisie of every nation**, because the proletarians, opposed as they are **to nationalism of every kind**, demand “abstract” equality; they demand, as a matter of principle, that there should be no privileges, however slight.

On the plea that its demands are “practical”, **the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations** will call upon the proletariat **to support its aspirations unconditionally**. The most practical procedure is to say a plain “yes” in favor of the secession of a particular nation rather than in favor of all nations **having the right to secede!**

**The proletariat is opposed to such practicality**. While recognizing equality and equal rights to a national state, **it values above all and places foremost the alliance of the proletarians of all nations**, and **assesses any national demand**, any national separation, from the angle of the workers’ class struggle. This call for practicality is in fact merely a call for **uncritical acceptance of bourgeois aspirations**.  
(19)

Lenin outlines most clearly this difference between the **RIGHT** and the **DEMAND** and the cause for the rejection of demand;

"The several **demands** of democracy, **including self-determination**, are **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**. It is possible that the republican movement in one country may be merely an instrument of the clerical or financialmonarchist intrigues of other countries; **if so, we must not support this particular**, concrete movement, but it would be ridiculous to delete the **demand** for a republic from the programme of international Social-Democracy on these grounds." (20)

In this citation Lenin talks about **DEMAND** being **not absolute**, chauvinists cite this as for the **RIGHT** being not absolute.

The conditions for the **DEMAND** to be supported can be summarized in the following quotes where he emphasizes the quality over quantity;

" **it is not** so much a question of the **size of an organization**, as of the real, objective significance of **its policy**: does its policy represent the masses, does it serve them, i.e., **does it aim at their liberation from capitalism**, or does it represent the interests of the minority, **the minority's reconciliation with capitalism?** "" (21)

A national (ist) movement could be very strong with thousands of followers, yet for ML what matter is its policy and practice in regard to **its relation with the capitalism and imperialism**. Lenin states that *movements seeking exclusive rights to his own bourgeoisie against the other bourgeoisie would not be supported*.

If it is not through the revolution, as an alternative leaving in a peaceful manner Lenin indicates that it is reactionary... In the words of Lenin "separation through legislation from a minority of the other is a reactionary idea." (22)

### **Tactical content summarized**

Tactical content and importance of Lenin's Right to Selfdetermination theory can be summarized in two ways.

1 - The right to self-determination theory, based on the principles of Marxism and internationalism, is the theory of the practice of **providing voluntary merger** rather than by force and repression.

Lenin summarizes this tactical approach as following;

"" **If, in our political agitation, we fail to advance and advocate the slogan of the right to secession, we shall play into the hands, not only of the bourgeoisie, but also of the feudal landlords and the absolutism of the oppressor nation...**"(23)

He explains the essence of the theory and reasons;

"" **If we demand freedom of secession** for ... all other oppressed and unequal nations without exception, we do so **not because we favor secession**, but only because we stand for free, voluntary association and merging as distinct from forcible association. **That is the only reason!** ""

"....no self-respecting Social-Democrat will consider anyone opposing **the right of divorce** a democrat, let alone a socialist. **That is the crux of the matter.** All "democracy" consists in the proclamation and realization of "rights" which under capitalism are realizable only to a very small degree and only relatively. But **without the proclamation of these rights**, without a struggle to introduce them now, immediately, without training the masses in the spirit of this struggle, socialism is impossible. (24)

## **2 -National movements force the ruling classes to decide on problems**

Lenin explains this tactical approach as following;

"" The **right** to self-determination" **implies a democratic system** of a type in which there is not only democracy in general, but specifically one in which **there could not be an undemocratic solution of the question of secession.** .....When a democratic vote gives the reactionaries a majority, one of two things

may, and **usually does occur**: either the **decision of the reactionaries** is implemented and its harmful consequences **send the masses more or less speedily over to the side of democracy** and against the reactionaries; or the **conflict between democracy and reaction is decided by a civil or other war**, which is also quite possible under a democracy..." (25)

In short, Marxist theory of Right to Self Determination is a theory that weight tactical content.

### **On the Attitude of Marxists from each side**

Always keep in mind "" Bourgeois **nationalism** and proletarian **internationalism**—these are the two **irreconcilably** hostile slogans 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..." (26)

In terms of the defense of Right, on Marxists general attitude;

"Social-Democracy, therefore, must give most emphatic warning to the proletariat and other working people of all nationalities against direct deception by the nationalistic slogans of "their own" bourgeoisie," (27)

"Those who seek to serve the proletariat must unite the workers of all nations, and unswervingly **fight bourgeois nationalism, domestic and foreign.**" (28)

On the oppressor nations Marxist-Leninist attitude;

"" the Great-Russian Marxist (*oppressor nation's Marxist EA*) will be bogged down, not only in bourgeois, but also in Black-Hundred nationalism, **if** he loses sight, even for a moment, of the demand for complete equality for the Ukrainians (*oppressed nations'*) , or of their **right** to form an independent state.." "(29)

On the oppressed nations Marxists attitude;

"**workers** who place political unity with "**their own**" **bourgeoisie** above complete unity with the proletariat of all nations, **are acting against their own interests**, against the interests of socialism and **against the interests of democracy.**" (30)

"If a Ukrainian Marxist (*Marxist of oppressed nation*) allows himself to be swayed by his quite legitimate and natural hatred of the Great-Russian oppressors to such a degree that **he transfers even a particle of this hatred**, even if it be **only estrangement**, to the **proletarian culture and proletarian cause** of the Great-Russian workers, **then such a Marxist will get bogged down in bourgeois nationalism.**" "" (31)

## Risk of wrong approach

Wrong approach to the theory, -as the condition of the current revolutionary struggle in Turkey is the sad historical example of this - will end up as " **an apologia of nationalism** and will **lead to bourgeois ideology obscuring proletarian consciousness**", create division, hostility and hatred among the laboring masses of given country.

The approach and attitudes to the Right to self-determination cannot be identical to the DEMAND for secession. The decision to support or not the DEMAND for secession depends on the evaluation of the specific conditions in relation to the interests of the working class and the socialist struggle at that given time. If this fundamental approach is ignored, the theory of the Right to Self-determination, becomes the bourgeois theory of content. In Lenin's words;

""Self-determination of nations demand that's it (the working class) we **must subordinate the interests of the struggle**. The national question in our attitude to our bourgeois-democratic attitude of the difference precisely lies in these circumstances "" (32)

". It is **beyond doubt** that any national movement **can only be a bourgeois-democratic** movement, since the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consist of peasants who represent bourgeois-capitalist relationships. It would be **utopian to believe**



that proletarian parties in these backward countries, if indeed they can emerge in them, can pursue communist tactics and a communist policy, without establishing definite relations with the peasant movement and without giving it effective support. However, the objections have been raised that, if we speak of the bourgeois democratic movement, we shall be obliterating all distinctions between the reformist and the revolutionary movements. Yet that distinction has been very clearly revealed of late in the backward and colonial countries, **since the imperialist bourgeoisie** is doing everything in its power **to implant a reformist movement among the oppressed nations** too. There has been a certain rapprochement between the bourgeoisie of the exploiting countries and that of the colonies, so that very often—perhaps even **in most cases—the bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries**, while it does support the national movement, is in full accord with the imperialist bourgeoisie, i.e., joins forces with it against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes. This was irrefutably proved in the commission, and we decided that **the only correct attitude** was to take this distinction into account and, in nearly all cases, substitute the term “national-revolutionary” for the term “bourgeois-democratic”. The significance of this change is that we, as Communists, should and will support bourgeois-liberation movements in the colonies **only when they are genuinely revolutionary**, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organizing in a revolutionary spirit the

peasantry and the masses of the exploited. **If these conditions do not exist**, the Communists in these countries **must combat the reformist bourgeoisie.** ""  
(33)

## Conclusion

Theory cannot be taken independent from the class struggle, as an absolute theory by itself, especially as an empty slogan without content. To defend and support the **RIGHT** and to defend and promote **DEMAND** has different contents.

" If viewed from the Marxist angle," as Lenin said," and **if the slogans** are compared with the **interests and policies of classes**, and not with meaningless "general principles" ""we should approach the theory" **from the standpoint of the class struggle**" (34)

In this sense, the Right to Self Determination theory **should NOT be understood** in a theoretical and practical context where the interests of class struggle **are subordination and dependent**. On the contrary, parts and related theories, **should be subjected to the subordination** for the interests of the working class. Otherwise it cannot be Marxism but would be bourgeois conciliation and bourgeois tailing.

Lenin puts it in concrete terms;

"" **The national cause comes first and the proletarian cause second**, the bourgeois nationalists say, with the Yurkeviches, Dontsovs and similar would-be Marxists repeating it after them. **The proletarian cause must come first**, we say, because it not only protects the lasting and fundamental interests of **labor and of humanity**, but also those of democracy.....without democracy neither an autonomous nor an independent (nation is conceivable. "" (35)

In these days seeing widespread examples of opportunist nationalist movement tailgating (especially in Turkey) these words of Lenin must be digested;

**""But we cannot be in favor of a war between great nations, in favor of the slaughter of twenty million people for the sake of the problematical liberation of a small nation with a population of perhaps ten or twenty millions!" Of course not!** And it does not mean that we throw complete national equality out of our Programme; **it means that the democratic interests of one country must be subordinated to the democratic interests of several and all countries.** ""(36)

These two quotes above and below are crucially important in current situation where the DEMAND for secession in Syria is on the agenda. Even we are against the DEMAND, it emphasizes the need to be opposed to any would be active action against the demand taken by the bourgeoisie.

""**be unconditionally hostile** to the use of force in any form whatsoever **by the dominant nation** (or the nation which constitutes the majority of the population) in respect of a nation **that wishes to secede politically**"" (37)

"The Social-Democrats **will always combat** every attempt to influence national self-determination from without by violence or by any injustice. However, our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination **does not in any way commit us to supporting every demand for national self-determination.**" (38)

So, while the RIGHT to Self Determination is supported in any event, as Lenin states "" a Marxist can recognize the **DEMAND** for national independence only conditionally, namely, on the condition indicated above" (which is **subject to proletarian struggle**) ... But it is to the interests of this struggle that we must **subordinate** the **demand** for national self-determination.

"It is **this that makes all the difference between our approach to the national question and the bourgeois-democratic approach.** The bourgeois democrat (and the present-day socialist opportunist who follows in his footsteps) imagines that democracy eliminates the class struggle, and that is why he presents all his political demands in an abstract way, lumped together, "without reservations," from the standpoint of the

interests of the "whole people," or even from that of an eternal and **absolute moral principle**. Always and everywhere the Social-Democrat **ruthlessly exposes this bourgeois illusion**, whether it finds expression in an abstract idealist philosophy or in an absolute demand for national independence."" (38)

""In contrast to the petty-bourgeois democrats, Marx regarded every democratic demand without exception **not as an absolute**"" one. Every democratic demand, including the right to self-determination is **secondary to the interests of working class** and her struggle. While we defend and support the **RIGHT** to self-determination, we do not say "yes" to every actual **DEMAND** to secede without assessing the concrete situation with the interest of working class in mind.

Stalin clearly states this approach on "Foundation of Leninism;

"Leninism .. recognizes the existence of revolutionary capacities in the national liberation movement of the oppressed countries, and the possibility of using these for overthrowing the common enemy, for overthrowing imperialism

This does not mean, of course, that the proletariat must support every national movement, everywhere and always, in every individual concrete case. It means that support must be given to such national movements as tend to weaken, to overthrow imperialism, and not to

strengthen and preserve it. Cases occur when the national movements in certain oppressed countries come into conflict with the interests of the development of the proletarian movement. In such cases support is, of course, entirely out of the question. The question of the rights of nations is not an isolated, self-sufficient question; it is a part of the general problem of the proletarian revolution, subordinate to the whole, and must be considered from the point of view of the whole."

Erdogan A

September - October , 2017

**""no Marxist, without renouncing the principles of Marxism and of socialism generally, can deny that the interests of socialism are higher than the interests of the right of nations to self-determination." *Lenin, On The History Of The Question Of The Unfortunate Peace***

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- (2) Stalin, Concerning the Presentation of the National Question
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- (38) Lenin, The National Question in Our Programme
- (38) Stalin, The Foundation of Leninism



## **The National Question in Our Programme**

Iskra, No. 44, July 15, 1903.

Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964,  
Moscow, Volume 6,

In our draft Party programme we have advanced the demand for a republic with a democratic constitution that would guarantee, among other things, "recognition of the right to self-determination for all nations forming part of the state." Many did not find this demand in our programme sufficiently clear, and in issue No. 33, in speaking about the Manifesto of the Armenian Social-Democrats, we explained the meaning of this point in the following way. The Social-Democrats will always combat every attempt to influence national self-determination from without by violence or by any injustice. However, our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination does not in any way commit us to supporting every demand for national self-determination. As the party of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party considers it to be its positive and principal task to further the self-determination of the proletariat in each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations. We must always and unreservedly work for the very closest unity of the proletariat of all nationalities, and it is only in isolated and exceptional cases that we can advance and actively support demands conducive to the establishment of a new class state or to the substitution of a looser federal unity, etc.,

for the complete political unity of a state.[\* See pp. 326-29 of this volume.—Ed.]

This explanation of our programme on the national question has evoked a strong protest from the Polish Socialist Party (P.S.P.). In an article entitled "The Attitude of the Russian Social-Democrats Towards the National Question" (Przedświt,[Dawn.—Ed.] March 1903), the P.S.P. expresses indignation at this "amazing" explanation and at the "vagueness" of this "mysterious" self-determination of ours; it accuses us both of doctrinarism and of holding the

"anarchist" view that "the worker is concerned with nothing but the complete abolition of capitalism, since, we learn, language, nationality, culture, and the like are mere bourgeois inventions," and so on. It is worth considering this argument in detail, for it reveals almost all the misconceptions in the national question so common and so widespread among socialists.

What makes our explanation so "amazing"? Why is it considered a departure from the "literal" meaning? Does recognition of the right of nations to self-determination really imply support of any demand of every nation for self-determination? After all, the fact that we recognize the right of all citizens to form free associations does not at all commit us, Social-Democrats, to supporting the formation of any new association; nor does it prevent us from opposing and campaigning against the formation of a given

association as an inexpedient and unwise step. We even recognize the right of the Jesuits to carry on agitation freely, but we fight (not by police methods, of course) against an alliance between the Jesuits and the proletarians. Consequently, when the Przedświt says; "If this demand for the right to free self-determination is to be taken literally [and that is how we have taken it hitherto], then it would satisfy us"—it is quite obvious that it is precisely the P.S.P. that is departing from the literal meaning of the programme. Its conclusion is certainly illogical from the formal point of view.

We do not, however, wish to confine ourselves to a formal verification of our explanation. We shall go straight to the root of the matter: is Social-Democracy in duty bound to demand national independence always and unreservedly, or only under certain circumstances; if the latter is the case then under what circumstances? To this question the P.S.P. has always replied in favor of unreserved recognition; we are not in the least surprised, therefore, at the fondness it displays towards the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries, who demand a federal state system and speak in favor of "complete and unreserved recognition of the right to national self-determination" (*Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*, No. 18, the article entitled "National Enslavement and Revolutionary Socialism").

Unfortunately, this is nothing more than one of those bourgeoisdemocratic phrases which, for the hundredth and thousandth time, reveal the true nature of the so-called Party of so-called SocialistRevolutionaries. By falling for the bait presented by these phrases and yielding to the allurements of this clamor, the P.S.P. in its turn proves how weak in theoretical background and political activities is its link with the class struggle of the proletariat. But it is to the interests of this struggle that we must subordinate the demand for national self-determination. It is this that makes all the difference between our approach to the national question and the bourgeoisdemocratic approach. The bourgeois democrat (and the present-day socialist opportunist who follows in his footsteps) imagines that democracy eliminates the class struggle, and that is why he presents all his political demands in an abstract way, lumped together, "without reservations," from the standpoint of the interests of the "whole people," or even from that of an eternal and absolute moral principle. Always and everywhere the Social-Democrat ruthlessly exposes this bourgeois illusion, whether it finds expression in an abstract idealist philosophy or in an absolute demand for national independence.

If there is still need to prove that a Marxist can recognize the demand for national independence only conditionally, namely, on the condition indicated above, let us quote a writer who defended from the

Marxist viewpoint the Polish proletarians' demand for an independent Poland. In 1896 Karl Kautsky wrote in an article entitled "Finis Poloniae?" ["The End of Poland?"—Ed.]: "Once the proletariat tackles the Polish question it cannot but take a stand in favor of Poland's independence, and, consequently, it cannot but welcome each step that can be taken in this direction at the present time, insofar as this step is at all compatible with the class interests of the international militant proletariat."

"This reservation," Kautsky goes on to say, "should be made in any case. National independence is not so inseparably linked with the class interests of the militant proletariat as to make it necessary to strive for it unconditionally, under any circumstances. [Italics ours.] Marx and Engels took a most determined stand in favor of the unification and liberation of Italy, but this did not prevent them from coming out in 1859 against an Italy allied with Napoleon." (Neue Zeit, XIV, 2, 5. 520.)

As you see, Kautsky categorically rejects the unconditional demand for the independence of nations, and categorically demands that the question be placed not merely on a historical basis in general, but specifically on a class basis. And if we examine how Marx and Engels treated the Polish question, we shall see that this was precisely their approach to it from the very outset. Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung devoted much space to the Polish question, and

emphatically demanded, not only the independence of Poland, but also that Germany go to war with Russia for Poland's freedom. At the same time Marx, however, attacked Ruge, who had spoken in favor of Poland's freedom in the Frankfurt Parliament and had tried to settle the Polish question solely by means of bourgeois-democratic phrases about "shameful injustice," without making any attempt to analyse it historically. Marx was not like those pedants and philistines of the revolution who dread nothing more than "polemics" at revolutionary moments in history. Marx poured pitiless scorn on the "humane" citizen Ruge, and showed him, from the example of the oppression of the south of France by the north of France, that it is not every kind of national oppression that invariably inspires a desire for independence which is justified from the viewpoint of democracy and the proletariat. Marx referred to special social circumstances as a result of which "Poland ... became the revolutionary part of Russia, Austria, and Prussia.... Even the Polish nobility, although their foundations were still partly feudal, adhered to the democratic agrarian revolution with unparalleled selflessness. Poland was already a seat of East-European democracy at a time when Germany was still groping her way through the most platitudinous constitutional and high-flown philosophical ideology... So long as we [Germans] ... help to oppress Poland, so long as we keep part of Poland fettered to Germany, we shall remain fettered to Russia and Russian policy, we shall be unable completely to smash

patriarchal feudal absolutism at home. The creation of a democratic Poland is the primary prerequisite of the creation of a democratic Germany.”[3] We have quoted these statements in such detail because they graphically show the historical background at a time when the attitude of international Social-Democracy to the Polish problem took shape in a way which held good almost throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. To ignore the changes which have taken place in that back ground and to continue advocating the old solutions given by Marxism, would mean being true to the letter but not to the spirit of the teaching, would mean repeating the old conclusions by rote, without being able to use the Marxist method of research to analyze the new political situation. Those times and today—the age of the last bourgeois revolutionary movements, and the age of desperate reaction, extreme tension of all forces on the eve of the proletarian revolution— differ in the most obvious way. In those times Poland as a whole, not only the peasantry, but even the bulk of the nobility, was revolutionary. The traditions of the struggle for national liberation were so strong and deep-rooted that, after their defeat at home, Poland’s best sons went wherever they could find a revolutionary class to support; the memory of Dąbrowski and of Wróblewski is inseparably associated with the greatest movement of the proletariat in the nineteenth century, with the last—and let us hope the last unsuccessful—insurrection of the Paris workers. In those times complete victory for democracy in Europe was indeed

impossible without the restoration of Poland. In those times Poland was indeed the bulwark of civilization against tsarism, and the vanguard of democracy. Today the Polish ruling classes, the gentry in Germany and in Austria, and the industrial and financial magnates in Russia are supporting the ruling classes of the countries that oppress Poland, while the German and the Russian proletariat are fighting for freedom side by side with the Polish proletariat, which has heroically taken over the great traditions of the old revolutionary Poland. Today the advanced representatives of Marxism in the neighboring country, while attentively watching the political evolution of Europe and fully sympathizing with the heroic struggle of the Poles, nevertheless frankly admit that "at present St. Petersburg has become a much more important revolutionary center than Warsaw, and the Russian revolutionary movement is already of greater international significance than the Polish movement." This is what Kautsky wrote as early as 1896, in defending the inclusion in the Polish Social-Democrats' programme of the demand for Poland's restoration. And in 1902 Mehring, who has been studying the evolution of the Polish question since 1848, arrived at the following conclusion: "Had the Polish proletariat desired to inscribe on its banner the restoration of a Polish class state, which the ruling classes themselves do not want to hear of, it would be playing a historical farce; this may well happen to the propertied classes (as, for instance, the Polish nobility in 1791), but it should never happen to the working



class. If, on the other hand, this reactionary Utopia comes out to win over to proletarian agitation those sections of the intelligentsia and of the petty bourgeoisie which still respond in some measure to national agitation, then that Utopia is doubly untenable as an outgrowth of that unworthy opportunism which sacrifices the long-term interests of the working class to the cheap and paltry successes of the moment.

“Those interests dictate categorically that, in all three states that have partitioned Poland, the Polish workers should fight unreservedly side by side with their class comrades. The times are past when a bourgeois revolution could create a free Poland: today the renascence of Poland is possible only through a social revolution, in the course of which the modern proletariat will break its chains.”

We fully subscribe to Mehring's conclusion. We shall only remark that this conclusion remains unassailable even if we do not go as far as Mehring in our arguments. Without any doubt the present state of the Polish question differs radically from that which obtained fifty years ago. However, the present situation cannot be regarded as permanent. Class antagonism has now undoubtedly relegated national questions far into the background, but, without the risk of lapsing into doctrinarism, it cannot be categorically asserted that some particular national question cannot appear temporarily in the foreground of the political

drama. No doubt, the restoration of Poland prior to the fall of capitalism is highly improbable, but it cannot be asserted that it is absolutely impossible, or that circumstances may not arise under which the Polish bourgeoisie will take the side of independence, etc. And Russian Social-Democracy does not in the least intend to tie its own hands. In including in its programme recognition of the right of nations to self-determination, it takes into account all possible, and even all conceivable, combinations. That programme in no way precludes the adoption by the Polish proletariat of the slogan of a free and independent Polish republic, even though the probability of its becoming a reality before socialism is introduced is infinitesimal. The programme merely demands that a genuinely socialist party shall not corrupt proletarian class-consciousness, or slur over the class struggle, or lure working class with bourgeois-democratic phrases, or break the unity of the proletariat's present-day political struggle. This reservation is the crux of the matter, for only with this reservation do we recognize self-determination. It is useless for the P.S.P. to pretend that it differs from the German or Russian Social-Democrats in their rejection of the right to self-determination, the right to strive for a free and independent republic. It is not this, but the fact that it loses sight of the class point of view, obscures it by chauvinism and disrupts the unity of the present-day political struggle, that prevents us from regarding the P.S.P. as a genuine Social-Democratic workers' party. This, for instance, is how the P.S.P. usually presents the

question: "...We can only weaken tsarism by wresting Poland from it; it is the task of the Russian comrades to overthrow it." Or again: "... After the overthrow of tsarism we would simply decide our fate by seceding from Russia." See to what monstrous conclusions this monstrous logic leads, even from the viewpoint of the programme demand for Poland's restoration. Because the restoration of Poland is one of the possible (but, whilst the bourgeoisie rules, by no means absolutely certain) consequences of democratic evolution, therefore the Polish proletariat must not fight together with the Russian proletariat to overthrow tsarism, but "only" to weaken it by wresting Poland from it. Because Russian tsarism is concluding a closer and closer alliance with the bourgeoisie and the governments of Germany, Austria, etc., therefore the Polish proletariat must weaken its alliance with the proletariat of Russia, Germany, etc., together with whom it is now fighting against one and the same yoke. This is nothing more than sacrificing the most vital interests of the proletariat to the bourgeois democratic conception of national independence. The disintegration of Russia which the P.S.P. desires, as distinct from our aim of overthrowing tsarism, is and will remain an empty phrase, as long as economic development continues to bring the different parts of a political whole more and more closely together, and as long as the bourgeoisie of all countries unite more and more closely against their common enemy, the proletariat, and in support of their common ally, the tsar. But the division of the forces of the proletariat,

which is now suffering under the yoke of this autocracy, is the sad reality, the direct consequence of the error of the P.S.P., the direct outcome of its worship of bourgeois-democratic formulas. To turn a blind eye to this division of the proletariat, the P.S.P. has to stoop to chauvinism and present the views of the Russian Social-Democrats as follows: "We [the Poles] must wait for the social revolution, and until then we must patiently endure national oppression." This is an utter falsehood. The Russian Social-Democrats have never advised anything of the sort; on the contrary, they themselves fight, and call upon the whole Russian proletariat to fight, against all manifestations of national oppression in Russia; they include in their programme not only complete equality of status for all languages, nationalities, etc., but also recognition of every nation's right to determine its own destiny. Recognizing this right, we subordinate to the interests of the proletarian struggle our support of the demand for national independence, and only a chauvinist can interpret our position as an expression of a Russian's mistrust of a non-Russian, for in reality this position necessarily follows from the class-conscious proletarian's distrust of the bourgeoisie. The P.S.P. takes the view that the national question is exhausted by the contrast—"we" (Poles) and "they" (Germans, Russians, etc.). The Social-Democrat, however, gives first place to the contrast—"we," the proletarians, and "they," the bourgeoisie. "We," the proletarians, have seen dozens of times how the bourgeoisie betrays the interests of freedom, motherland, language, and

nation, when it is confronted with the revolutionary proletariat. We witnessed the French bourgeoisie's surrender to the Prussians at the moment of the greatest humiliation and suppression of the French nation, the Government of National Defense becoming a Government of National Defection, the bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation calling to its aid the troops of the oppressing nation so as to crush its proletarian fellow countrymen, who had dared to assume power. And that is why, undeterred by chauvinist and opportunist heckling, we shall always say to the Polish workers: only the most complete and intimate alliance with the Russian proletariat can meet the requirements of the present political struggle against the autocracy; only such an alliance can guarantee complete political and economic emancipation.

What we have said on the Polish question is wholly applicable to every other national question. The accursed history of autocracy has left us a legacy of tremendous estrangement between the working classes of the various nationalities oppressed by that autocracy. This estrangement is a very great evil, a very great obstacle in the struggle against the autocracy, and we must not legitimize this evil or sanctify this outrageous state of affairs by establishing any such "principles" as separate parties or a "federation" of parties. It is, of course, simpler and easier to follow the line of least resistance, and for everyone to make himself comfortable in his own corner following the rule, "it's none of my business,"

as the Bund now wants to do. The more we realize the need for unity and the more firmly we are convinced that a concerted offensive against the autocracy is impossible without complete unity, the more obvious becomes the necessity for a centralized organization of the struggle in the conditions of our political system—the less inclined are we to be satisfied with a “simple,” but specious and, at bottom, profoundly false solution of the problem. So long as the injuriousness of estrangement is not realized, and so long as there is no desire to put an end radically and at all costs to this estrangement in the camp of the proletarian party, there is no need for the fig-leaf of “federation,” and no use in under taking to solve a problem which one of the “sides” concerned has no real desire to solve. That being the case, it is better to let the lessons of experience and of the actual movement prove that centralism is essential for success in the struggle waged by the proletarians of all nationalities oppressed by autocracy against that autocracy and against the international bourgeoisie, which is becoming more and more united.

## Concerning the Presentation of the National Question

J. V. Stalin

May 2, 1921

The presentation of the national question as given by the Communists differs essentially from the presentation adopted by the leaders of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals and by all the various "Socialist," "Social-Democratic," Menshevik, SocialistRevolutionary and other parties.

It is particularly important to note four principal points that are the most characteristic and distinguishing features of the new presentation of the national question, features which draw a line between the old and the new conceptions of the national question.

The first point is the merging of the national question, as a part, with the general question of the liberation of the colonies, as a whole. In the epoch of the Second International it was usual to confine the national question to a narrow circle of questions relating exclusively to the "civilised" nations. The Irish, the Czechs, the Poles, the Finns, the Serbs, the Armenians, the Jews and some other European nationalities—such was the circle of unequal nations in whose fate the Second International took an interest. The tens and

hundreds of millions of people in Asia and Africa who are suffering from national oppression in its crudest and most brutal form did not, as a rule, come within the field of vision of the "socialists." They did not venture to place whites and blacks, "uncultured" Negroes and "civilized" Irish, "backward" Indians and "enlightened" Poles on the same footing. It was tacitly assumed that although it might be necessary to strive for the liberation of the European unequal nations, it was entirely unbecoming for "respectable socialists" to speak seriously of the liberation of the colonies, which were "necessary" for the "preservation" of "civilization." These socialists, save the mark, did not even suspect that the abolition of national oppression in Europe is inconceivable without the liberation of the colonial peoples of Asia and Africa from imperialist oppression that the former is organically bound up with the latter. It was the Communists who first revealed the connection between the national question and the question of the colonies, who proved it theoretically and made it the basis of their practical revolutionary activities. That broke down the wall between whites and blacks, between the "cultured" and the "uncultured" slaves of imperialism. This circumstance greatly facilitated the coordination of the struggle of the backward colonies with the struggle of the advanced proletariat against the common enemy, imperialism.

The second point is that the vague slogan of the right of nations to self-determination has been replaced by



the clear revolutionary slogan of the right of nations and colonies to secede, to form independent states. When speaking of the right to self-determination, the leaders of the Second International did not as a rule even hint at the right to secede—the right to self-determination was at best interpreted to mean the right to autonomy in general. Springer and Bauer, the "experts" on the national question, even went so far as to convert the right to self-determination into the right of the oppressed nations of Europe to cultural autonomy, that is, the right to have their own cultural institutions, while all political (and economic) power was to remain in the hands of the dominant nation. In other words, the right of the unequal nations to self-determination was converted into the privilege of the dominant nations to wield political power, and the question of secession was excluded. Kautsky, the ideological leader of the Second International, associated himself in the main with this essentially imperialist interpretation of self-determination as given by Springer and Bauer. It is not surprising that the imperialists, realizing how convenient this feature of the slogan of self-determination was for them, proclaimed the slogan their own. As we know, the imperialist war, the aim of which was to enslave peoples, was fought under the flag of self-determination. Thus, the vague slogan of self-determination was converted from an instrument for the liberation of nations, for achieving equal rights for nations, into an instrument for taming nations, an instrument for keeping nations in subjection to

imperialism. The course of events in recent years all over the world, the logic of revolution in Europe, and, lastly, the growth of the liberation movement in the colonies demanded that this, now reactionary slogan should be cast aside and replaced by another slogan, a revolutionary slogan, capable of dispelling the atmosphere of distrust of the laboring masses of the unequal nations towards the proletarians of the dominant nations and of clearing the way towards equal rights for nations and towards the unity of the toilers of these nations. Such a slogan is the one issued by the Communists proclaiming the right of nations and colonies to secede.

The merits of this slogan are that it:

- 1) removes all grounds for suspicion that the toilers of one nation entertain predatory designs against the toilers of another nation, and therefore creates a basis for mutual confidence and voluntary union;
- 2) tears the mask from the imperialists, who hypocritically prate about self-determination but who are striving to keep the unequal peoples and colonies in subjection, to retain them within the framework of their imperialist state, and thereby intensifies the struggle for liberation that these nations and colonies are waging against imperialism.

It scarcely needs proof that the Russian workers would not have gained the sympathy of their

comrades of other nationalities in the West and the East if, having assumed power, they had not proclaimed the right of nations to secede, if they had not demonstrated in practice their readiness to give effect to this inalienable right of nations, if they had not renounced their "rights," let us say, to Finland (1917), if they had not withdrawn their troops from North Persia (1917), if they had not renounced all claims to certain parts of Mongolia, China, etc., etc.

It is equally beyond doubt that if the policy of the imperialists, skillfully concealed under the flag of self-determination, has nevertheless lately been meeting with defeat after defeat in the East, it is because, among other things, it has encountered there a growing liberation movement, which has developed on the basis of the agitation conducted in the spirit of the slogan of the right of nations to secede. This is not understood by the heroes of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals, who roundly abuse the Baku "Council of Action and Propaganda" for some slight mistakes it has committed; but it will be understood by everyone who takes the trouble to acquaint himself with the activities of that "Council" during the year it has been in existence, and with the liberation movement in the Asiatic and African colonies during the past two or three years.

The third point is the disclosure of the organic connection between the national and colonial question and the question of the rule of capital, of overthrowing

capitalism, of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the epoch of the Second International, the national question, narrowed down to the extreme, was usually regarded as an isolated question, unrelated to the coming proletarian revolution. It was tacitly assumed that the national question would be settled "naturally," before the proletarian revolution, by means of a series of reforms within the framework of capitalism; that the proletarian revolution could be accomplished without a radical settlement of the national question, and that, on the contrary, the national question could be settled without overthrowing the rule of capital, without, and before, the victory of the proletarian revolution. That essentially imperialist view runs like a red thread through the well-known works of Springer and Bauer on the national question. But the past decade has exposed the utter falsity and rottenness of this conception of the national question. The imperialist war has shown, and the revolutionary experience of recent years has again confirmed that:

- 1) the national and colonial questions are inseparable from the question of emancipation from the rule of capital;
- 2) imperialism (the highest form of capitalism) cannot exist without the political and economic enslavement of the unequal nations and colonies;
- 3) the unequal nations and colonies cannot be liberated without overthrowing the rule of capital;

4) the victory of the proletariat cannot be lasting without the liberation of the unequal nations and colonies from the yoke of imperialism.

If Europe and America may be called the front or the arena of the major battles between socialism and imperialism, the unequal nations and the colonies, with their raw materials, fuel, food and vast store of manpower, must be regarded as the rear, the reserve of imperialism. To win a war it is necessary not only to triumph at the front, but also to revolutionize the enemy's rear, his reserves. Hence, the victory of the world proletarian revolution may be regarded as assured only if the proletariat is able to combine its own revolutionary struggle with the liberation movement of the laboring masses of the unequal nations and the colonies against the rule of the imperialists and for the dictatorship of the proletariat. This "trifle" was overlooked by the leaders of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals, who divorced the national and colonial question from the question of power in the epoch of growing proletarian revolution in the West.

The fourth point is that a new element has been introduced into the national question—the element of the actual (and not merely juridical) equalization of nations (help and co-operation for the backward nations in raising themselves to the cultural and economic level of the more advanced nations), as one of the conditions necessary for securing fraternal co-

operation between the laboring masses of the various nations. In the epoch of the Second International the matter was usually confined to proclaiming "national equality of rights"; at best, things went no further than the demand that such equality of rights should be put into effect. But national equality of rights, although a very important political gain in itself, runs the risk of remaining a mere phrase in the absence of adequate resources and opportunities for exercising this very important right. It is beyond doubt that the laboring masses of the backward peoples are not in a position to exercise the rights that are accorded them under "national equality of rights" to the same degree to which they can be exercised by the laboring masses of advanced nations. The backwardness (cultural and economic), which some nations have inherited from the past, and which cannot be abolished in one or two years, makes itself felt. This circumstance is also perceptible in Russia, where a number of peoples have not gone through, and some have not even entered, the phase of capitalism and have no proletariat, or hardly any, of their own; where, although complete national equality of rights has already been established, the laboring masses of these nationalities are not in a position to make adequate use of the rights they have won, owing to their cultural and economic backwardness. This circumstance will make itself felt still more "on the morrow" of the victory of the proletariat in the West, when numerous backward colonies and semi-colonies, standing at most diverse levels of development, will inevitably appear on the

scene. For that very reason the victorious proletariat of the advanced nations must assist, must render assistance, real and prolonged assistance, to the laboring masses of the backward nations in their cultural and economic development, so as to help them to rise to a higher stage of development and to catch up with the more advanced nations. Unless such aid is forthcoming it will be impossible to bring about the peaceful co-existence and fraternal co-operation of the toilers of the various nations and nationalities within a single world economic system that are so essential for the final triumph of socialism.

But from this it follows that we cannot confine ourselves merely to "national equality of rights," that we must pass from "national equality of rights" to measures that will bring about real equality of nations that we must proceed to work out and put into effect practical measures in relation to:

- 1) the study of the economic conditions, manner of life and culture of the backward nations and nationalities;
- 2) the development of their culture;
- 3) their political education;
- 4) their gradual and painless introduction to the higher forms of economy;
- 5) the organisation of economic co-operation between the toilers of the backward and of the advanced nations.

Such are the four principal points which distinguish the new presentation of the national question given by the Russian Communists.

Pravda, No. 98, May 8, 1921



## THE NATIONALIST BOGEY OF "ASSIMILATION"

Lenin

### Critical Remarks on the National Question

The question of assimilation, i. e., of the shedding of national features, and absorption by another nation, strikingly illustrates the consequences of the nationalist vacillations of the Bundists and their fellow-thinkers.

Mr. Liebman, who faithfully conveys and repeats the stock arguments, or rather, tricks, of the Bundists, has qualified as "the old assimilation story" the demand for the unity and amalgamation of the workers of all nationalities in a given country in united workers' organizations (see the concluding part of the article in *Severnaya Pravda*).

"Consequently," says Mr. F. Liebman, commenting on the concluding part of the article in *Severnaya Pravda*, "if asked what nationality he belongs to, the worker must answer: I am a SocialDemocrat."

Our Bundist considers this the acme of wit. As a matter of fact, he gives himself away completely by such witticisms and outcries about "assimilation", levelled against a consistently democratic and Marxist slogan.

Developing capitalism knows two historical tendencies in the national question. 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 break-down of national barriers, the creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.

Both tendencies are a universal law of capitalism. The former predominates in the beginning of its development, the latter characterizes a mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society. The Marxists' national programme takes both tendencies into account, and advocates, firstly, the equality of nations and languages and the impermissibility of all privileges in this respect (and also the right of nations to self-determination with which we shall deal separately later); secondly, the principle of internationalism and uncompromising struggle against contamination of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism, even of the most refined kind.

The question arises: what does our Bundist mean when he cries out to heaven against "assimilation"? He could not have meant the oppression of nations, or the privileges enjoyed by a particular nation, because the word "assimilation" here does not fit at all, because all

Marxists, individually, and as an official, united whole, have quite definitely and unambiguously condemned the slightest violence against and oppression and inequality of nations, and finally because this general Marxist idea, which the Bundist has attacked, is expressed in the *Severnaya Pravda* article in the most emphatic manner.

No, evasion is impossible here. In condemning “assimilation” Mr. Liebman had in mind, not violence, not inequality, and not privileges. Is there anything real left in the concept of assimilation, after all violence and all inequality have been eliminated?

Yes, there undoubtedly is. What is left is capitalism’s world-historical tendency, to break down national barriers, obliterate national distinctions, and to assimilate nations—a tendency which manifests itself more and more powerfully with every passing decade, and is one of the greatest driving forces transforming capitalism into socialism.

Whoever does not recognize and champion the equality of nations and languages and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality, is not a Marxist; he is not even a democrat. That is beyond doubt. But it is also beyond doubt that the pseudo-Marxist who heaps abuse upon a Marxist of another nation for being an “assimilator” is simply a nationalist philistine. In this unhandsome category of people are all the Bundists and (as we shall shortly see) Ukrainian

nationalist-socialists such as L. Yurkevich, Dontsov and Co.

To show concretely how reactionary the views held by these nationalist philistines are, we shall cite facts of three kinds.

It is the Jewish nationalists' in Russia in general, and the Bundists in particular, who vociferate most about Russian orthodox Marxists being "assimilators". And yet, as the afore-mentioned figures show, out of the ten and a half million Jews all over the world, about half that number live in the civilized world, where conditions favoring "assimilation" are strongest, whereas the unhappy, down trodden, disfranchised Jews in Russia and Galicia, who are crushed under the heel of the Purishkeviches (Russian and Polish), live where conditions for "assimilation" least prevail, where there is most segregation, and even a "Pale of Settlement", a numerous clauses and other charming features of the Purishkevich regime.

The Jews in the civilized world are not a nation, they have in the main become assimilated, say Karl Kautsky and Otto Bauer. The Jews in Galicia and in Russia are not a nation; unfortunately (through no fault of their own but through that of the Purishkeviches), they are still a caste here. Such is the incontrovertible judgement of people who are undoubtedly familiar with the history of Jewry and take the above-cited facts into consideration.

What do these facts prove? It is that only Jewish reactionary philistines, who want to turn hack the wheel of history, and make it proceed, not from the conditions prevailing in Russia and Galicia to those prevailing in Paris and New York, but in the reverse direction— only they can clamour against “assimilation”.

The best Jews, those who are celebrated in world history, and have given the world foremost leaders of democracy and socialism, have never clamoured against assimilation. It is only those who contemplate the “rear aspect” of Jewry with reverential awe that clamour against assimilation.

A rough idea of the scale which the general process of assimilation of nations is assuming under the present conditions of advanced capitalism may be obtained, for example, from the immigration statistics of the United States of America. During the decade between 1891-1900, Europe sent 3,700,000 people there, and during the nine years between 1901 and 1909, 7,200,000. The 1900 census in the United States recorded over 10,000,000 foreigners. New York State, in which, according to the same census, there were over 78,000 Austrians, 136,000 Englishmen, 20,000 Frenchmen, 480,000 Germans, 37,000 Hungarians, 425,000 Irish, 182,000 Italians, 70,000 Poles, 166,000 people from Russia (mostly Jews), 43,000 Swedes, etc., grinds down national distinctions. And what is taking place on a grand, international scale in New York is

also to be seen in every big city and Industrial Township.

No one unobsessed by nationalist prejudices can fail to perceive that this process of assimilation of nations by capitalism means the greatest historical progress, the breakdown of hidebound national conservatism in the various backwoods, especially in backward countries like Russia.

Take Russia and the attitude of Great Russians towards the Ukrainians. Naturally, every democrat, not to mention Marxists, will strongly oppose the incredible humiliation of Ukrainians, and demand complete equality for them. But it would be a downright betrayal of socialism and a silly policy even from the standpoint of the bourgeois “national aims” of the Ukrainians to weaken the ties and the alliance between the Ukrainian and Great-Russian proletariat that now exist within the confines of a single state.

Mr. Lev Yurkevich, who calls himself a “Marxist” (poor Marx!), is an example of that silly policy. In 1906, Sokolovsky (Basok) and Lukashevich (Tuchapsky) asserted, Mr. Yurkevich writes that the

Ukrainian proletariat had become completely Russified and needed no separate organization. Without quoting a single fact bearing on the direct issue, Mr. Yurkevich falls upon both for saying this and cries out hysterically — quite in the spirit of the basest,

most stupid and most reactionary nationalism—that this is “national passivity”, “national renunciation”, that these men have “split [!!] the Ukrainian Marxists”, and so forth. Today, despite the “growth of Ukrainian national consciousness among the workers”, the minority of the workers are “nationally conscious”, while the majority, Mr. Yurkevich assures us, “are still under, the influence of Russian culture”. And it is our duty, this nationalist philistine exclaims, “not to follow the masses, hut to lead them, to explain to them their national aims (natsionalna sprava)” (Dzvin, p. 89).

This argument of Mr. Yurkevich’s is wholly bourgeois-nationalistic. But even from the point of view of the bourgeois nationalists, some of whom stand for complete equality and autonomy for the Ukraine, while others stand for an independent Ukrainian state, this argument will not wash. The Ukrainians’ striving for liberation is opposed by the Great-Russian and Polish landlord class and by the bourgeoisie of these two nations. What social force is capable of standing up to these classes? The first decade of the twentieth century provided an actual reply to this question: that force is none other than the working class, which rallies the democratic peasantry behind it. By striving to divide, and thereby weaken, the genuinely democratic force, whose victory would make national oppression impossible, Mr. Yurkevich is betraying, riot only the interests of democracy in general, but also the interests of his own country, the Ukraine. Given united action by the Great-Russian and Ukrainian proletarians, a

free Ukraine is possible; without such unity, it is out of the question.

But Marxists do not confine themselves to the bourgeois-national standpoint. For several decades a well-defined process of accelerated economic development has been going on in the South, i. e., the Ukraine, attracting hundreds of thousands of peasants and workers from Great Russia to the capitalist farms, mines, and cities. The “assimilation”—within these limits—of the Great-Russian and Ukrainian proletariat is an indisputable fact. And this fact is undoubtedly progressive. Capitalism is replacing the ignorant, conservative, settled muzhik of the Great-Russian or Ukrainian backwoods with a mobile proletariat whose conditions of life break down specifically national narrow-mindedness, both Great-Russian and Ukrainian. Even if we assume that, in time, there will be a state frontier between Great Russia and the Ukraine, the historically progressive nature of the “assimilation” of the Great-Russian and Ukrainian workers will be as undoubted as the progressive nature of the grinding down of nations in America. The freer the Ukraine and Great Russia become, the more extensive and more rapid will be the development of capitalism, which will still more powerfully attract the workers, the working masses of all nations from all regions of the state and from all the neighboring states (should Russia become a neighboring state in relation to the Ukraine) to the cities, the mines, and the factories.



Mr. Lev Yurkevich acts like a real bourgeois, and a short-sighted, narrow-minded, obtuse bourgeois at that, i. e., like a philistine, when he dismisses the benefits to be gained from, the intercourse, amalgamation and assimilation of the proletariat of the two nations, for the sake of the momentary success of the Ukrainian national cause (*sprava*). The national cause comes first and the proletarian cause second, the bourgeois nationalists say, with the Yurkeviches, Dontsovs and similar would-be Marxists repeating it after them. The proletarian cause must come first, we say, because it not only protects the lasting and fundamental interests of labour and of humanity, but also those of democracy; and without democracy neither an autonomous nor an independent Ukraine is conceivable.

Another point to be noted in Mr. Yurkevich's argument, which is so extraordinarily rich in nationalist gems, is this: the minority of Ukrainian workers are nationally conscious, he says; "the majority are still under the influence of Russian culture" (*bilshist perebuvaye shche pid vplyvom rosiiskoi kultury*).

Contraposing Ukrainian culture as a whole to Great-Russian culture as a whole, when speaking of the proletariat, is a gross betrayal of the proletariat's interests for the benefit of bourgeois nationalism.

There are two nations in every modern nation—we say to all nationalist-socialists. There are two national cultures in every national culture. There is the Great-Russian culture of the Purishkeviches, Guchkovs and Struves—but there is also the Great-Russian culture typified in the names of Chernyshevsky and Plekhanov. There are the same two cultures in the Ukraine as there are in Germany, in France, in England, among the Jews, and so forth. If the majority of the Ukrainian workers are under the influence of Great-Russian culture, we also know definitely that the ideas of Great-Russian democracy and Social-Democracy operate parallel with the Great-Russian clerical and bourgeois culture. In fighting the latter kind of “culture”, the Ukrainian Marxist will always bring the former into focus, and say to his workers: “We must snatch at, make use of, and develop to the utmost every opportunity for intercourse with the Great-Russian class-conscious workers, with their literature and with their range of ideas; the fundamental interests of both the Ukrainian and the Great-Russian working-class movements demand it.”

If a Ukrainian Marxist allows himself to be swayed by his quite legitimate and natural hatred of the Great-Russian oppressors to such a degree that he transfers even a particle of this hatred, even if it be only estrangement, to the proletarian culture and proletarian cause of the Great-Russian workers, then such a Marxist will get bogged down in bourgeois nationalism. Similarly, the Great-Russian Marxist will

be bogged down, not only in bourgeois, but also in BlackHundred nationalism, if he loses sight, even for a moment, of the demand for complete equality for the Ukrainians, or of their right to forum an independent state.

The Great-Russian and Ukrainian workers must work together, and, as long as they live in a single state, act in the closest organizational unity and concert, towards a common or international culture of the proletarian movement, displaying absolute tolerance in the question of the language in which propaganda is conducted, and in the purely local or purely national details of that propaganda. This is the imperative demand of Marxism. All advocacy of the segregation of the workers of one nation from those of another, all attacks upon Marxist "assimilation", or attempts, where the proletariat is concerned, to contrapose one national culture as a whole to another allegedly integral national culture, and so forth, is bourgeois nationalism, against which it is essential to wage a ruthless struggle.

## **THE NATION - Marxism and the National Question**

Stalin

What is a nation?

A nation is primarily a community, a definite community of people.

This community is not racial, nor is it tribal. The modern Italian nation was formed from Romans, Teutons, Etruscans, Greeks, Arabs, and so forth. The French nation was formed from Gauls, Romans, Britons, Teutons, and so on. The same must be said of the British, the Germans and others, who were formed into nations from people of diverse races and tribes.

Thus, a nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people.

On the other hand, it is unquestionable that the great empires of Cyrus and Alexander could not be called nations, although they came to be constituted historically and were formed out of different tribes and races. They were not nations, but casual and loosely-connected conglomerations of groups, which fell apart or joined together according to the victories or defeats of this or that conqueror.

Thus, a nation is not a casual or ephemeral conglomeration, but a stable community of people.

But not every stable community constitutes a nation. Austria and Russia are also stable communities, but nobody calls them nations. What distinguishes a national community from a state community? The fact, among others, that a national community is inconceivable without a common language, while a state need not have a common language. The Czech nation in Austria and the Polish in Russia would be impossible if each did not have a common language, whereas the integrity of Russia and Austria is not affected by the fact that there are a number of different languages within their borders. We are referring, of course, to the spoken languages of the people and not to the official governmental languages.

Thus, a common language is one of the characteristic features of a nation.

This, of course, does not mean that different nations always and everywhere speak different languages, or that all who speak one language necessarily constitute one nation. A common language for every nation, but not necessarily different languages for different nations! There is no nation which at one and the same time speaks several languages, but this does not mean that there cannot be two nations speaking the same language! Englishmen and Americans speak one language, but they do not constitute one nation. The same is true of the Norwegians and the Danes, the English and the Irish.

But why, for instance, do the English and the Americans not constitute one nation in spite of their common language?

Firstly, because they do not live together, but inhabit different territories. A nation is formed only as a result of lengthy and systematic intercourse, as a result of people living together generation after generation.

But people cannot live together, for lengthy periods unless they have a common territory. Englishmen and Americans originally inhabited the same territory, England, and constituted one nation. Later, one section of the English emigrated from England to a new territory, America, and there, in the new territory, in the course of time, came to form the new American nation. Difference of territory led to the formation of different nations.

Thus, a common territory is one of the characteristic features of a nation.

But this is not all. Common territory does not by itself create a nation. This requires, in addition, an internal economic bond to weld the various parts of the nation into a single whole. There is no such bond between England and America, and so they constitute two different nations. But the Americans themselves would not deserve to be called a nation were not the different parts of America bound together into an economic whole, as a result of division of Labour between them,

the development of means of communication, and so forth.

Take the Georgians, for instance. The Georgians before the Reform inhabited a common territory and spoke one language. Nevertheless, they did not, strictly speaking, constitute one nation, for, being split up into a number of disconnected principalities, they could not share a common economic life; for centuries they waged war against each other and pillaged each other, each inciting the Persians and Turks against the other. The ephemeral and casual union of the principalities which some successful king sometimes managed to bring about embraced at best a superficial administrative sphere, and rapidly disintegrated owing to the caprices of the princes and the indifference of the peasants. Nor could it be otherwise in economically disunited Georgia ... Georgia came on the scene as a nation only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the fall of serfdom and the growth of the economic life of the country, the development of means of communication and the rise of capitalism, introduced division of Labour between the various districts of Georgia, completely shattered the economic isolation of the principalities and bound them together into a single whole.

The same must be said of the other nations which have passed through the stage of feudalism and have developed capitalism.

Thus, a common economic life, economic cohesion, is one of the characteristic features of a nation.

But even this is not all. Apart from the foregoing, one must take into consideration the specific spiritual complexion of the people constituting a nation. Nations differ not only in their conditions of life, but also in spiritual complexion, which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture. If England, America and Ireland, which speak one language, nevertheless constitute three distinct nations, it is in no small measure due to the peculiar psychological make-up which they developed from generation to generation as a result of dissimilar conditions of existence.

Of course, by itself, psychological make-up or, as it is otherwise called, "national character," is something intangible for the observer, but in so far as it manifests itself in a distinctive culture common to the nation it is something tangible and cannot be ignored.

Needless to say, "national character" is not a thing that is fixed once and for all but is modified by changes in the conditions of life; but since it exists at every given moment, it leaves its impress on the physiognomy of the nation.

Thus, a common psychological make-up, which manifests itself in a common culture, is one of the characteristic features of a nation.



We have now exhausted the characteristic features of a nation.

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.

It goes without saying that a nation, like every historical phenomenon, is subject to the law of change, has its history, its beginning and end.

It must be emphasized that none of the above characteristics taken separately is sufficient to define a nation. More than that, it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation.

It is possible to conceive of people possessing a common "national character" who, nevertheless, cannot be said to constitute a single nation if they are economically disunited, inhabit different territories, speak different languages, and so forth. Such, for instance, are the Russian, Galician, American, Georgian and Caucasian Highland Jews, who, in our opinion, do not constitute a single nation.

It is possible to conceive of people with a common territory and economic life who nevertheless would not constitute a single nation because they have no common language and no common "national

character." Such, for instance, are the Germans and Letts in the Baltic region.

Finally, the Norwegians and the Danes speak one language, but they do not constitute a single nation owing to the absence of the other characteristics.

It is only when all these characteristics are present together that we have a nation.

It might appear that "national character" is not one of the characteristics but the sole essential characteristic of a nation, and that all the other characteristics are, properly speaking, only conditions for the development of a nation, rather than its characteristics. Such, for instance, is the view held by R. Springer, and more particularly by O. Bauer, who are Social-Democratic theoreticians on the national question well known in Austria.

Let us examine their theory of the nation.

According to Springer, "a nation is a union of similarly thinking and similarly speaking persons." It is "a cultural community of modern people no longer tied to the 'soil.'"

Thus, a "union" of similarly thinking and similarly speaking people, no matter how disconnected they may be, no matter where they live, is a nation.

Bauer goes even further.

"What is a nation?" he asks. "Is it a common language which makes people a nation? But the English and the Irish ... speak the same language without, however, being one people; the Jews have no common language and yet are a nation."

What, then, is a nation?

"A nation is a relative community of character."

But what is character, in this case national character?

National character is "the sum total of characteristics which distinguish the people of one nationality from the people of another nationality – the complex of physical and spiritual characteristics which distinguish one nation from another."

Bauer knows, of course, that national character does not drop from the skies, and he therefore adds:

"The character of people is determined by nothing so much as by their destiny.... A nation is nothing but a community with a common destiny" which, in turn, is determined "by the conditions under which people produce their means of subsistence and distribute the products of their Labour."

We thus arrive at the most "complete," as Bauer calls it, definition of a nation:

"A nation is an aggregate of people bound into a community of character by a common destiny."

We thus have common national character based on a common destiny, but not necessarily connected with a common territory, language or economic life.

But what in that case remains of the nation? What common nationality can there be among people who are economically disconnected, inhabit different territories and from generation to generation speak different languages?

Bauer speaks of the Jews as a nation, although they "have no common language"; but what "common destiny" and national cohesion is there, for instance, between the Georgian, Daghestanian, Russian and American Jews, who are completely separated from one another, inhabit different territories and speak different languages?

The above-mentioned Jews undoubtedly lead their economic and political life in common with the Georgians, Daghestanians, Russians and Americans respectively, and they live in the same cultural atmosphere as these; this is bound to leave a definite impress on their national character; if there is anything common to them left, it is their religion, their common origin and certain relics of the national character. All this is beyond question. But how can it be seriously maintained that petrified religious rites and fading

psychological relics affect the "destiny" of these Jews more powerfully than the living social, economic and cultural environment that surrounds them? And it is only on this assumption that it is possible to speak of the Jews as a single nation at all.

What, then, distinguishes Bauer's nation from the mystical and selfsufficient "national spirit" of the spiritualists?

Bauer sets up an impassable barrier between the "distinctive feature" of nations (national character) and the "conditions" of their life, divorcing the one from the other. But what is national character if not a reflection of the conditions of life, a coagulation of impressions derived from environment? How can one limit the matter to national character alone, isolating and divorcing it from the soil that gave rise to it?

Further, what indeed distinguished the English nation from the American nation at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, when America was still known as New England? Not national character, of course; for the Americans had originated from England and had brought with them to America not only the English language, but also the English national character, which, of course, they could not lose so soon; although, under the influence of the new conditions, they would naturally be developing their own specific character. Yet, despite their more or less common character, they at that time

already constituted a nation distinct from England! Obviously, New England as a nation differed then from England as a nation not by its specific national character, or not so much by its national character, as by its environment and conditions of life, which were distinct from those of England.

It is therefore clear that there is in fact no single distinguishing characteristic of a nation. There is only a sum total of characteristics, of which, when nations are compared, sometimes one characteristic (national character), sometimes another (language), or sometimes a third (territory, economic conditions), stands out in sharper relief. A nation constitutes the combination of all these characteristics taken together.

Bauer's point of view, which identifies a nation with its national character, divorces the nation from its soil and converts it into an invisible, self-contained force. The result is not a living and active nation, but something mystical, intangible and supernatural. For, I repeat, what sort of nation, for instance, is a Jewish nation which consists of Georgian, Daghestanian, Russian, American and other Jews, the members of which do not understand each other (since they speak different languages), inhabit different parts of the globe, will never see each other, and will never act together, whether in time of peace or in time of war?!

No, it is not for such paper "nations" that Social-Democracy draws up its national programme. It can

reckon only with real nations, which act and move, and therefore insist on being reckoned with.

Bauer is obviously confusing nation, which is a historical category, with tribe, which is an ethnographical category.

However, Bauer himself apparently feels the weakness of his position. While in the beginning of his book he definitely declares the Jews to be a nation, he corrects himself at the end of the book and states that "in general capitalist society makes it impossible for them (the Jews) to continue as a nation," by causing them to assimilate with other nations. The reason, it appears, is that "the Jews have no closed territory of settlement," whereas the Czechs, for instance, have such a territory and, according to Bauer, will survive as a nation. In short, the reason lies in the absence of a territory.

By arguing thus, Bauer wanted to prove that the Jewish workers cannot demand national autonomy, but he thereby inadvertently refuted his own theory, which denies that a common territory is one of the characteristics of a nation.

But Bauer goes further. In the beginning of his book he definitely declares that "the Jews have no common language, and yet are a nation." But hardly has he reached p. 130 than he effects a change of front and just as definitely declares that "unquestionably, no nation is possible without a common language" (our italics).

Bauer wanted to prove that "language is the most important instrument of human intercourse," but at the same time he inadvertently proved something he did not mean to prove, namely, the unsoundness of his own theory of nations, which denies the significance of a common language.

Thus, this theory, stitched together by idealistic threads, refutes itself.



## **The National Programme of the R.S.D.L.P.**

Lenin

Sotsial-Demokrat No. 32, December 15 (28), 1918

The Conference of the Central Committee has adopted a resolution on the national question, which has been printed in the "Notification", and has placed the question of a national programme on the agenda of the Congress.

Why and how the national question has, at the present time, been brought to the fore—in the entire policy of the counter-revolution, in the class-consciousness of the bourgeoisie and in the proletarian Social-Democratic Party of Russia—is shown in detail in the resolution itself. There is hardly any need to dwell on this in view of the clarity of the situation. This situation and the fundamentals of a national programme for Social-Democracy have recently been dealt with in Marxist theoretical literature (the most prominent place being taken by Stalin's article. We therefore consider that it will be to the point if, in this article, we confine ourselves to the presentation of the problem from a purely Party standpoint and to explanations that cannot be made in the legal press, crushed as it is by the StolypinMaklakov oppression.

Social-Democracy in Russia is taking shape by drawing exclusively on the experience of older countries, i.e., of

Europe, and on the theoretical expression of that experience, Marxism. The specific feature of our country and the specific features of the historical period of the establishment of Social-Democracy in our country are: first, in our country, as distinct from Europe, Social-Democracy began to take shape before the bourgeois revolution and continued taking shape during that revolution. Secondly, in our country the inevitable struggle to separate proletarian from general bourgeois and petty-bourgeois democracy—a struggle that is fundamentally the same as that experienced by every country—is being conducted under the conditions of a complete theoretical victory of Marxism in the West and in our country. The form taken by this struggle, therefore, is not so much that of a struggle for Marxism as a struggle for or against petty-bourgeois theories that are hidden behind “almost Marxist” phrases.

That is how the matter stands, beginning with Economism (1895–1901) and “legal Marxism” (1895–1901, 1902). Only those who shrink from historical truth can forget the close, intimate connection and relationship between these trends and Menshevism (1903–07) and liquidationism (1908–13).

In the national question the old Iskra, which in 1901–03 worked on and completed a programme for the R.S.D.L.P. as well as laying the first and fundamental basis of Marxism in the theory and practice of the Russian working-class movement, had to struggle, in

the same way as on other questions, against petty-bourgeois opportunism. This opportunism was expressed, first and foremost, in the nationalist tendencies and waverings of the Bund. The old Iskra conducted a stubborn struggle against Bund nationalism, and to forget this is tantamount to becoming a Forgetful John again, and cutting oneself off from the historical and ideological roots of the whole Social-Democratic workers' movement in Russia.

On the other hand, when the Programme of the R.S.D.L.P. was finally adopted at the Second Congress in August 1903, there was a struggle, unrecorded in the Minutes of the Congress because it took place in the Programme Commission, which was visited by almost the entire Congress—a struggle against the clumsy attempts of several Polish Social-Democrats to cast doubts on “the right, of nations to self-determination”, i.e., attempts to deviate towards opportunism and nationalism from a quite different angle.

And today, ten years later, the struggle goes on along those same two basic lines, which shows equally that there is a profound connection between this struggle and all the objective conditions affecting the national question in Russia.

At the Bruunn Congress in Austria (1899) the programme of “cultural-national autonomy” (defended by Kristan, Ellenbogen and others and

expressed in the draft of the Southern Slavs) was rejected. Territorial national autonomy was adopted, and Social-Democratic propaganda for the obligatory union of all national regions was only a compromise with the idea of “cultural-national autonomy”. The chief theoreticians of this unfortunate idea themselves lay particular emphasis on its inapplicability to Jewry.

In Russia—as usual—people have been found who have made it their business to enlarge on a little opportunist error and develop it into a system of opportunist policy. In the same way as Bernstein in Germany brought into being the Right Constitutional-Democrats in Russia—Struve, Bulgakov, Tugan & Co.—so Otto Bauer’s

“forgetfulness of internationalism” (as the supercautious Kautsky calls it!) gave rise in Russia to the complete acceptance of “cultural national autonomy” by all the Jewish bourgeois parties and a large number of petty-bourgeois trends (the Bund and a conference of Socialist-Revolutionary national parties in 1907). Backward Russia serves, one might say, as an example of how the microbes of West European opportunism produce whole epidemics on our savage soil.

In Russia people are fond of saying that Bernstein is “tolerated” in Europe, but they forget to add that nowhere in the world, with the exception of “holy” Mother Russia, has Bernsteinism engendered

Struivism, or has "Bauerism" led to the justification, by Social Democrats, of the re refined nationalism of the Jewish bourgeoisie.

"Cultural-national autonomy" implies precisely the most refined and, therefore, the most harmful nationalism, it implies the corruption of the workers by means of the slogan of national culture and the propaganda of the profoundly harmful and even antidemocratic segregating of schools according to nationality. In short, this programme undoubtedly contradicts the internationalism of the proletariat and is in accordance only with the ideals of the nationalist petty bourgeoisie.

But there is one case in which the Marxists are duty bound, if they do not want to betray democracy and the proletariat, to defend one special demand in the national question; that is, the right of nations to self-determination (§ 9 of the R.S.D.L.P. Programme), i.e., the right to political secession. The Conference resolution explains and motivates this demand in such detail that there is no place left for misunderstanding.

We shall, therefore, give only a brief description of those amazingly ignorant and opportunist objections that have been raised against this section of the Programme. In connection with this let us mention that in the course of the ten years' existence of the Programme not one single unit of the R.S.D.L.P., not one single national organization, not one single

regional conference, not one local committee and not one delegate to a congress or conference, has attempted to raise the question of changing or annulling § 9!

It is necessary to bear this in mind. It shows us at once whether there is a grain of seriousness or Party spirit in the objections raised to this point.

Take Mr. Semkovsky of the liquidators' newspaper. With the casual air of a man who has liquidated a party, he announces: "For certain reasons we do not share Rosa Luxemburg's proposal to remove § 9 from the Programme altogether" (Novaya Rabochaya Gazeta No. 71).

So the reasons are a secret! But then, how can secrecy be avoided in face of such ignorance of the history of our Programme? Or when that same Mr. Semkovsky, incomparably casual (what do the Party and the Programme matter!) makes an exception for Finland?

"What are we to do ... if the Polish proletariat wants to carry on a joint struggle together with the whole proletariat of Russia within the framework of one state, and the reactionary classes of Polish society, on the contrary, want to separate Poland from Russia and, through a referendum, obtain a majority of votes in favor of separation; are we, Russian Social-Democrats, to vote in a central parliament together with our Polish comrades against secession, or, in order not to infringe

on the 'right to self-determination', vote in favor of secession?"

What, indeed, are we to do when such naive and so hopelessly confused questions are raised?

The right to self-determination, my dear Mr. Liquidator, certainly does not imply the solution of the problem by a central parliament, but by a parliament, a diet, or a referendum of the seceding minority. When Norway seceded from Sweden (1905) it was decided by Norway alone (a country half the size of Sweden).

Even a child could see that Mr. Semkovsky is hopelessly mixed up.

"The right to self-determination" implies a democratic system of a type in which there is not only democracy in general, but specifically one in which there could not be an undemocratic solution of the question of secession. Democracy, speaking generally, is compatible with militant and tyrannical nationalism. The proletariat demands a democracy that rules out the forcible retention of any one of the nations within the bounds of the state. "In order not to infringe on the right to self-determination", therefore, we are duty bound not "to vote for secession", as the wily Mr. Semkovsky assumes, but to vote for the right of the seceding region to decide the question itself.

It would seem that even with Mr. Semkovsky's mental abilities it is not difficult to deduce that "the right to divorce" does not require that one should vote for divorce! But such is the fate of those who criticize § 9—they forget the ABC of logic.

At the time of Norway's secession from Sweden, the Swedish proletariat, if they did not want to follow the nationalist petty bourgeoisie, were duty bound to vote and agitate against the annexation of Norway by force, as the Swedish priesthood and landed proprietors desired. This is obvious and not too difficult to understand. Swedish nationalist democrats could refrain from a type of agitation that the principle of the right to self-determination demands of the proletariat of ruling, oppressor nations.

"What are we to do if the reactionaries are in the majority?" asks Mr. Semkovsky. This is a question worthy of a third-form schoolboy. What is to be done about the Russian constitution if democratic voting gives the reactionaries a majority? Mr. Semkovsky asks idle, empty questions that have nothing to do with the matter in hand—they are the kind of questions that, as it is said, seven fools can ask more of than seventy wise men can answer.

When a democratic vote gives the reactionaries a majority, one of two things may, and usually does occur: either the decision of the reactionaries is implemented and its harmful consequences send the



masses more or less speedily over to the side of democracy and against the reactionaries; or the conflict between democracy and reaction is decided by a civil or other war, which is also quite possible (and no doubt even the Semkovskys have heard of this) under a democracy.

The recognition of the right to self-determination is, Mr. Semkovsky assures us, “playing into the hands of the most thorough-paced bourgeois nationalism”. This is childish nonsense since the recognition of the right does not exclude either propaganda and agitation against separation or the exposure of bourgeois nationalism. But it is absolutely indisputable that the denial of the right to secede is “playing into the hands” of the most thoroughpaced reactionary Great-Russian nationalism!

This is the essence of Rosa Luxemburg’s amusing error for which she was ridiculed a long time ago by German and Russian (August 1903) Social-Democrats; in their fear of playing into the hands of the bourgeois nationalism of oppressed nations, people play into the hands not merely of the bourgeois but of the reactionary nationalism of the oppressor nation.

If Mr. Semkovsky had not been so virginally innocent in matters concerning Party history and the Party Programme he would have understood that it was his duty to refute Plekhanov, who, eleven years ago, in defending the draft programme (which became the

Programme in 1903) of the R.S.D.L.P. in Zarya, made a special point (page 38) of the recognition of the right to self-determination and wrote the following about it:

“This demand, which is not obligatory for bourgeois democrats, even in theory, is obligatory for us as Social-Democrats. If we were to forget about it or were afraid to put it forward for fear of impinging on the national prejudices of our compatriots of Great-Russian origin, the battle-cry of world Social-Democracy, ‘Workers of all countries, unite!’ would be a shameful lie upon our lips.”

As long ago as the Zarya days, Plekhanov put forward the basic argument which was developed in detail in the conference resolution, an argument to which the Semkovskys have not attempted to draw attention for eleven years. In Russia there are 43 per cent Great Russians, but Great-Russian nationalism rules over the other 57 per cent of the population and oppresses all nations. The National-Liberals (Struve & Co., the Progressists, etc.) have already joined forces with our national-reactionaries and the “first swallows” of national democracy have appeared (remember Mr. Peshekhonov’s appeal in August 1906 to be cautious in our attitude to the nationalist prejudices of the muzhik).

In Russia only the liquidators consider the bourgeois-democratic revolution to be over, and the concomitant of such a revolution all over the world always has been

and still is national movements. In Russia in particular there are oppressed nations in many of the border regions, which in neighboring states enjoy greater liberty. Tsarism is more reactionary than the neighboring states, constitutes the greatest barrier to free economic development, and does its utmost to foster Great-Russian nationalism. For a Marxist, of course, all other conditions being equal, big states are always preferable to small ones. But it would be ridiculous and reactionary even to suppose that conditions under the tsarist monarchy might be equal to those in any European country or any but a minority of Asian countries.

The denial of the right of nations to self-determination in present-day Russia is, therefore, undoubted opportunism and a refusal to fight against the reactionary Great-Russian nationalism that is still all-powerful.

## **Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions**

Lenin

For The Second Congress Of The Communist International, June 5, 1920

An abstract or formal posing of the problem of equality in general and national equality in particular is in the very nature of bourgeois democracy. Under the guise of the equality of the individual in general, bourgeois democracy proclaims the formal or legal equality of the property-owner and the proletarian, the exploiter and the exploited, thereby grossly deceiving the oppressed classes. On the plea that all men are absolutely equal, the bourgeoisie is transforming the idea of equality, which is itself a reflection of relations in commodity production, into a weapon in its struggle against the abolition of classes. The real meaning of the demand for equality consists in its being a demand for the abolition of classes.

1) In conformity with its fundamental task of combating bourgeois democracy and exposing its falseness and hypocrisy, the Communist Party, as the avowed champion of the proletarian struggle to overthrow the bourgeois yoke, must base its policy, in the national question too, not on abstract and formal principles but, first, on a precise appraisal of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of economic conditions; second, on a clear distinction between the

interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class; third, on an equally clear distinction between the oppressed, dependent and subject nations and the oppressing, exploiting and sovereign nations, in order to counter the bourgeois-democratic lies that play down this colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's population by an insignificant minority of the richest and advanced capitalist countries, a feature characteristic of the era of finance capital and imperialism.

2) The imperialist war of 1914-18 has very clearly revealed to all nations and to the oppressed classes of the whole world the falseness of bourgeois-democratic phrases, by practically demonstrating that the Treaty of Versailles of the celebrated "Western democracies" is an even more brutal and foul act of violence against weak nations than was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of the German Junkers and the Kaiser. The League of Nations and the entire post war policy of the Entente reveal this truth with even greater clarity and distinctness. They are everywhere intensifying the revolutionary struggle both of the proletariat in the advanced countries and of the toiling masses in the colonial and dependent countries. They are hastening the collapse of the petty-bourgeois nationalist illusions that nations can live together in peace and equality under capitalism.

3) From these fundamental premises it follows that the Communist International's entire policy on the

national and the colonial questions should rest primarily on a closer union of the proletarians and the working masses of all nations and countries for a joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie. This union alone will guarantee victory over capitalism, without which the abolition of national oppression and inequality is impossible.

4) The world political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day. World political developments are of necessity concentrated on a single focus—the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouped, on the one hand, the Soviet movements of the advanced workers in all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, who are learning from bitter experience that their only salvation lies in the Soviet system's victory over world imperialism.

5) Consequently, one cannot at present confine oneself to a bare recognition or proclamation of the need for closer union between the working people of the various nations; a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development of the communist movement in the proletariat of each country, or of the bourgeois democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries or among backward nationalities.

6) Federation is a transitional form to the complete unity of the working people of different nations. The feasibility of federation has already been demonstrated in practice both by the relations between the R.S.F.S.R. and other Soviet Republics (the Hungarian, Finnish and Latvian in the past, and the Azerbaijan and Ukrainian at present), and by the relations within the R.S.F.S.R. in respect of nationalities which formerly enjoyed neither statehood nor autonomy (e.g., the Bashkir and Tatar autonomous republics in the R.S.F.S.R., founded in 1919 and 1920 respectively).

7) In this respect, it is the task of the Communist International to further develop and also to study and test by experience these new federations, which are arising on the basis of the Soviet system and the Soviet movement. In recognizing that federation is a transitional form to complete unity, it is necessary to strive for ever closer federal unity, bearing in mind, first, that the Soviet republics, surrounded as they are by the imperialist powers of the whole world—which from the military standpoint are immeasurably stronger—cannot possibly continue to exist without the closest alliance; second, that a close economic alliance between the Soviet republics is necessary, otherwise the productive forces which have been ruined by imperialism cannot be restored and the well-being of the working people cannot be ensured; third, that there is a tendency towards the creation of a single world economy, regulated by the proletariat of all nations as an integral whole and according to a common plan. This tendency has already revealed

itself quite clearly under capitalism and is bound to be further developed and consummated under socialism.

8) The Communist International's national policy in the sphere of relations within the state cannot be restricted to the bare, formal, purely declaratory and actually non-committal recognition of the equality of nations to which the bourgeois democrats confine themselves—both those who frankly admit being such, and those who assume the name of socialists (such as the socialists of the Second International).

In all their propaganda and agitation—both within parliament and outside it—the Communist parties must consistently expose that constant violation of the equality of nations and of the guaranteed rights of national minorities which is to be seen in all capitalist countries, despite their “democratic” constitutions. It is also necessary, first, constantly to explain that only the Soviet system is capable of ensuring genuine equality of nations, by uniting first the proletarians and then the whole mass of the working population in the struggle against the bourgeoisie; and, second, that all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies.

Without the latter condition, which is particularly important, the struggle against the oppression of dependent nations and colonies, as well as recognition



of their right to secede, are but a false signboard, as is evidenced by the parties of the Second International.

9) Recognition of internationalism in word, and its replacement in deed by petty-bourgeois nationalism and pacifism, in all propaganda, agitation and practical work, is very common, not only among the parties of the Second International, but also among those which have withdrawn from it, and often even among parties which now call themselves communist. The urgency of the struggle against this evil, against the most deep-rooted petty-bourgeois national prejudices, looms ever larger with the mounting exigency of the task of converting the dictatorship of the proletariat from a national dictatorship (i.e., existing in a single country and incapable of determining world politics) into an international one (i.e., a dictatorship of the proletariat involving at least several advanced countries, and capable of exercising a decisive influence upon world politics as a whole). Petty-bourgeois nationalism proclaims as internationalism the mere recognition of the equality of nations, and nothing more. Quite apart from the fact that this recognition is purely verbal, petty-bourgeois nationalism preserves national self-interest intact, whereas proletarian internationalism demands, first, that the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world-wide scale, and, second, that a nation which is achieving victory over the bourgeoisie should be able and willing to make the greatest

national sacrifices for the overthrow of international capital.

Thus, in countries that are already fully capitalist and have workers' parties that really act as the vanguard of the proletariat, the struggle against opportunist and petty-bourgeois pacifist distortions of the concept and policy of internationalism is a primary and cardinal task.

10) With regard to the more backward states and nations, in which feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominate, it is particularly important to bear in mind:

first, that all Communist parties must assist the bourgeois democratic liberation movement in these countries, and that the duty of rendering the most active assistance rests primarily with the workers of the country the backward nation is colonially or financially dependent on;

Second, the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries;

third, the need to combat Pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc.;

fourth, the need, in backward countries, to give special support to the peasant movement against the landowners, against landed proprietorship, and against all manifestations or survivals of feudalism, and to strive to lend the peasant movement the most revolutionary character by establishing the closest possible alliance between the West European communist proletariat and the revolutionary peasant movement in the East, in the colonies, and in the backward countries generally. It is particularly necessary to exert every effort to apply the basic principles of the Soviet system in countries where pre-capitalist relations predominate—by setting up “working people’s Soviets”, etc.

fifth, the need for a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist coloring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries; the Communist International should support bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks, i.e., those of the struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations. The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the

proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form; sixth, the need constantly to explain and expose among the broadest working masses of all countries, and particularly of the backward countries, the deception systematically practiced by the imperialist powers, which, under the guise of politically independent states, set up states that are wholly dependent upon them economically, financially and militarily. Under present-day international conditions there is no salvation for dependent and weak nations except in a union of Soviet republics.

12) The age-old oppression of colonial and weak nationalities by the imperialist powers has not only filled the working masses of the oppressed countries with animosity towards the oppressor nations but has also aroused distrust in these nations in general, even in their proletariat. The despicable betrayal of socialism by the majority of the official leaders of this proletariat in 1914-19, when “defense of country” was used as a social-chauvinist cloak to conceal the defense of the “right” of their “own” bourgeoisie to oppress colonies and fleece financially dependent countries, was certain to enhance this perfectly legitimate distrust. On the other hand, the more backward the country, the stronger is the hold of small-scale agricultural production, patriarchalism and isolation, which inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest of petty-bourgeois prejudices, i.e., to national egoism and national narrow-mindedness.

These prejudices are bound to die out very slowly, for they can disappear only after imperialism and capitalism have disappeared in the advanced countries, and after the entire foundation of the backward countries' economic life has radically changed. It is therefore the duty of the class-conscious communist proletariat of all countries to regard with particular caution and attention the survivals of national sentiments in the countries and among nationalities which have been oppressed the longest; it is equally necessary to make certain concessions with a view to more rapidly overcoming this distrust and these prejudices. Complete victory over capitalism cannot be won unless the proletariat and, following it, the mass of working people in all countries and nations throughout the world voluntarily strive for alliance and unity.

## THE CAUCASIANS, THE CONFERENCE OF THE LIQUIDATORS

Stalin

### MARXISM AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

We spoke above of the waverings of one section of the Caucasian

Social-Democrats who were unable to withstand the nationalist "epidemic." These waverings were revealed in the fact that, strange as it may seem, the above-mentioned Social-Democrats followed in the footsteps of the Bund and proclaimed cultural-national autonomy.

Regional autonomy for the Caucasus as a whole and cultural national autonomy for the nations forming the Caucasus – that is the way these Social-Democrats, who, incidentally, are linked with the Russian Liquidators, formulate their demand.

Listen to their acknowledged leader, the not unknown N.

"Everybody knows that the Caucasus differs profoundly from the central gubernias, both as regards the racial composition of its population and as regards its territory and agricultural development. The exploitation and material development of such a

region require local workers acquainted with local peculiarities and accustomed to the local climate and culture. All laws designed to further the exploitation of the local territory should be issued locally and put into effect by local forces. Consequently, the jurisdiction of the central organ of Caucasian self-government should extend to legislation on local questions.... Hence, the functions of the Caucasian centre should consist in the passing of laws designed to further the economic exploitation of the local territory and the material prosperity of the region."

Thus – regional autonomy for the Caucasus.

If we abstract ourselves from the rather confused and incoherent arguments of N., it must be admitted that his conclusion is correct. Regional autonomy for the Caucasus, within the framework of a general state constitution, which N. does not deny, is indeed essential because of the peculiarities of its composition and its conditions of life. This was also acknowledged by the Russian Social-Democratic Party, which at its Second Congress proclaimed "regional self-government for those border regions which in respect of their conditions of life and the composition of their population differ from the regions of Russia proper."

When Martov submitted this point for discussion at the Second Congress, he justified it on the grounds that "the vast extent of Russia and the experience of our centralized administration point to the necessity and

expediency of regional self-government for such large units as Finland, Poland, Lithuania and the Caucasus."

But it follows that regional self-government is to be interpreted as regional autonomy.

But N. goes further. According to him, regional autonomy for the Caucasus covers "only one aspect of the question."

"So far we have spoken only of the material development of local life. But the economic development of a region is facilitated not only by economic activity but also by spiritual, cultural activity."... "A culturally strong nation is strong also in the economic sphere."... "But the cultural development of nations is possible only in the national languages."... "Consequently, all questions connected with the native language are questions of national culture. Such are the questions of education! the judicature, the church, literature, art, science, the theatre, etc. If the material development of a region unites nations, matters of national culture disunite them and place each in a separate sphere. Activities of the former kind are associated with a definite territory."... "This is not the case with matters of national culture. These are associated not with a definite territory but with the existence of a definite nation. The fate of the Georgian language interests a Georgian, no matter where he lives. It would be a sign of profound ignorance to say that Georgian culture concerns only the Georgians



who live in Georgia. Take, for instance, the Armenian Church. Armenians of various localities and states take part in the administration of its affairs. Territory plays no part here. Or, for instance, the creation of a Georgian museum interests not only the Georgians of Tiflis, but also the Georgians of Baku, Kutais, St. Petersburg, etc. Hence, the administration and control of all affairs of national culture must be left to the nations concerned. We proclaim in favor of cultural-national autonomy for the Caucasian nationalities."

In short, since culture is not territory, and territory is not culture, cultural-national autonomy is required. That is all N. can say in the latter's favor.

We shall not stop to discuss again national-cultural autonomy in general; we have already spoken of its objectionable character. We should like to point out only that, while being unsuitable in general, cultural-national autonomy is also meaningless and nonsensical in relation to Caucasian conditions.

And for the following reason:

Cultural-national autonomy presumes more or less developed nationalities, with a developed culture and literature. Failing these conditions, autonomy loses all sense and becomes an absurdity. But in the Caucasus there are a number of nationalities each possessing a primitive culture, a separate language, but without its own literature; nationalities, moreover, which are in a

state of transition, partly becoming assimilated and partly continuing to develop. How is cultural-national autonomy to be applied to them? What is to be done with such nationalities? How are they to be "organized" into separate cultural-national unions, as is undoubtedly implied by cultural national autonomy?

What is to be done with the Mingrelians, the Abkhazians, the Adjarians, the Svanetians, the Lesghians, and so on, who speak different languages but do not possess a literature of their own? To what nations are they to be attached? Can they be "organized" into national unions? Around what "cultural affairs" are they to be "organized"?

What is to be done with the Ossetians, of whom the Transcaucasian Ossetians are becoming assimilated (but are as yet by no means wholly assimilated) by the Georgians, while the Cis-Caucasian Ossetians are partly being assimilated by the Russians and partly continuing to develop and are creating their own literature? How are they to be "organized" into a single national union?

To what national union should one attach the Adjarians, who speak the Georgian language, but whose culture is Turkish and who profess the religion of Islam? Shall they be "organized" separately from the Georgians with regard to religious affairs and together with the Georgians with regard to other cultural

affairs? And what about the Kobuletiens, the Ingushes, the Inghilois?

What kind of autonomy is that which excludes a whole number of nationalities from the list?

No, that is not a solution of the national question, but the fruit of idle fancy.

But let us grant the impossible and assume that our N.'s nationalcultural autonomy has been put into effect. Where would it lead to, what would be its results? Take, for instance, the Transcaucasian Tatars, with their minimum percentage of literates, their schools controlled by the omnipotent mullahs and their culture permeated by the religious spirit.... It is not difficult to understand that to "organize" them into a cultural national union would mean to place them under the control of the mullahs, to deliver them over to the tender mercies of the reactionary mullahs, to create a new stronghold of spiritual enslavement of the Tatar masses to their worst enemy.

But since when have Social-Democrats made it a practice to bring grist to the mill of the reactionaries?

Could the Caucasian Liquidators really find nothing better to "proclaim" than the isolation of the Transcaucasian Tatars within a cultural-national union which would place the masses under the thrall of vicious reactionaries?

No, that is no solution of the national question.

The national question in the Caucasus can be solved only by drawing the belated nations and nationalities into the common stream of a higher culture. It is the only progressive solution and the only solution acceptable to Social-Democracy. Regional autonomy in the Caucasus is acceptable because it would draw the belated nations into the common cultural development; it would help them to cast off the shell of small nation insularity; it would impel them forward and facilitate access to the benefits of higher culture. Culturalnational autonomy, however, acts in a diametrically opposite direction, because it shuts up the nations within their old shells, binds them to the lower stages of cultural development and prevents them from rising to the higher stages of culture.

In this way national autonomy counteracts the beneficial aspects of regional autonomy and nullifies it.

That is why the mixed type of autonomy which combines nationalcultural autonomy and regional autonomy as proposed by N. is also unsuitable. This unnatural combination does not improve matters but makes them worse, because in addition to retarding the development of the belated nations it transforms regional autonomy into an arena of conflict between the nations organized in the national unions.

Thus cultural-national autonomy, which is unsuitable generally, would be a senseless, reactionary undertaking in the Caucasus.

So much for the cultural-national autonomy of N. and his Caucasian fellow-thinkers.

Whether the Caucasian Liquidators will take "a step forward" and follow in the footsteps of the Bund on the question of organization also, the future will show. So far, in the history of Social-Democracy federalism in organization always preceded national autonomy in programme. The Austrian Social-Democrats introduced organizational federalism as far back as 1897, and it was only two years later (1899) that they adopted national autonomy. The Bundists spoke distinctly of national autonomy for the first time in 1901, whereas organizational federalism had been practiced by them since 1897.

The Caucasian Liquidators have begun from the end, from national autonomy. If they continue to follow in the footsteps of the Bund they will first have to demolish the whole existing organizational edifice, which was erected at the end of the 'nineties on the basis of internationalism.

But, easy though it was to adopt national autonomy, which is still not understood by the workers, it will be difficult to demolish an edifice which it has taken years to build and which has been raised and cherished by

the workers of all the nationalities of the Caucasus. This Herostratian undertaking has only to be begun and the eyes of the workers will be opened to the nationalist character of cultural national autonomy.

While the Caucasians are settling the national question in the usual manner, by means of verbal and written discussion, the All-Russian Conference of the Liquidators has invented a most unusual method. It is a simple and easy method. Listen to this:

"Having heard the communication of the Caucasian delegation to the effect that... it is necessary to demand national-cultural autonomy, this conference, while expressing no opinion on the merits of this demand, declares that such an interpretation of the clause of the programme which recognizes the right of every nationality to self-determination does not contradict the precise meaning of the programme."

Thus, first of all they "express no opinion on the merits" of the question, and then they "declare." An original method....

And what does this original conference "declare"?

That the "demand" for national-cultural autonomy "does not contradict the precise meaning" of the programme, which recognizes the right of nations to self-determination.

Let us examine this proposition.

The clause on self-determination speaks of the rights of nations. According to this clause, nations have the right not only of autonomy but also of secession. It is a question of political self-determination. Whom did the Liquidators want to fool when they endeavored to misinterpret this right of nations to political self-determination, which has long been recognized by the whole of international Social Democracy?

Or perhaps the Liquidators will try to wriggle out of the situation and defend themselves by the sophism that cultural-national autonomy "does not contradict" the rights of nations? That is to say, if all the nations in a given state agree to arrange their affairs on the basis of cultural-national autonomy, they, the given sum of nations, are fully entitled to do so and nobody may forcibly impose a different form of political life on them. This is both new and clever. Should it not be added that, speaking generally, a nation has the right to abolish its own constitution, replace it by a system of tyranny and revert to the old order on the grounds that the nation, and the nation alone, has the right to determine its own destiny? We repeat: in this sense, neither cultural-national autonomy nor any other kind of nationalist reaction "contradicts" the rights of nations.

Is that what the esteemed conference wanted to say?

No, not that. It specifically says that cultural-national autonomy "does not contradict," not the rights of nations, but "the precise meaning" of the programme. The point here is the programme and not the rights of nations.

And that is quite understandable. If it were some nation that addressed itself to the conference of Liquidators, the conference might have directly declared that the nation has a right to culturalnational autonomy. But it was not a nation that addressed itself to the conference, but a "delegation" of Caucasian Social-Democrats – bad Social-Democrats, it is true, but Social-Democrats nevertheless. And they inquired not about the rights of nations, but whether culturalnational autonomy contradicted the principles of Social-Democracy, whether it did not "contradict" "the precise meaning" of the programme of Social-Democracy.

Thus, the rights of nations and "the precise meaning" of the programme of Social-Democracy are not one and the same thing.

Evidently, there are demands which, while they do not contradict the rights of nations, may yet contradict "the precise meaning" of the programme.

For example. The programme of the Social-Democrats contains a clause on freedom of religion. According to this clause any group of persons have the right to



profess any religion they please: Catholicism, the religion of the Orthodox Church, etc. Social Democrats will combat all forms of religious persecution, be it of members of the Orthodox Church, Catholics or Protestants. Does this mean that Catholicism, Protestantism, etc., "do not contradict the precise meaning" of the programme? No, it does not. Social Democrats will always protest against persecution of Catholicism or Protestantism; they will always defend the right of nations to profess any religion they please; but at the same time, on the basis of a correct understanding of the interests of the proletariat, they will carry on agitation against Catholicism, Protestantism and the religion of the Orthodox Church in order to achieve the triumph of the socialist world outlook.

And they will do so just because there is no doubt that Protestantism, Catholicism, the religion of the Orthodox Church, etc., "contradict the precise meaning" of the programme, i.e., the correctly understood interests of the proletariat.

The same must be said of self-determination. Nations have a right to arrange their affairs as they please; they have a right to preserve any of their national institutions, whether beneficial or harmful – nobody can (nobody has a right to!) forcibly interfere in the life of a nation. But that does not mean that Social Democracy will not combat and agitate against the harmful institutions of nations and against the

inexpedient demands of nations. On the contrary, it is the duty of Social-Democracy to conduct such agitation and to endeavor to influence the will of nations so that the nations may arrange their affairs in the way that will best correspond to the interests of the proletariat. For this reason Social-Democracy, while fighting for the right of nations to self-determination, will at the same time agitate, for instance, against the secession of the Tatars, or against culturalnational autonomy for the Caucasian nations; for both, while not contradicting the rights of these nations, do contradict "the precise meaning" of the programme, i.e., the interests of the Caucasian proletariat.

Obviously, "the rights of nations" and the "precise meaning" of the programme are on two entirely different planes. Whereas the "precise meaning" of the programme expresses the interests of the proletariat, as scientifically formulated in the programme of the latter, the rights of nations may express the interests of any class – bourgeoisie, aristocracy, clergy, etc. – depending on the strength and influence of these classes. On the one hand are the duties of Marxists, on the other the rights of nations, which consist of various classes. The rights of nations and the principles of Social-Democracy may or may not "contradict" each other, just as, say, the pyramid of Cheops may or may not contradict the famous conference of the Liquidators. They are simply not comparable.

But it follows that the esteemed conference most unpardonably muddled two entirely different things. The result obtained was not a solution of the national question but an absurdity, according to which the rights of nations and the principles of Social-Democracy "do not contradict" each other, and, consequently; every demand of a nation may be made compatible with the interests of the proletariat; consequently, no demand of a nation which is striving for selfdetermination will "contradict the precise meaning" of the programme!

They pay no heed to logic....

It was this absurdity that gave rise to the now famous resolution of the conference of the Liquidators which declares that the demand for national-cultural autonomy "does not contradict the precise meaning" of the programme.

But it was not only the laws of logic that were violated by the conference of the Liquidators.

By sanctioning cultural-national autonomy it also violated its duty to Russian Social-Democracy. It most definitely did violate "the precise meaning" of the programme, for it is well known that the Second Congress, which adopted the programme, emphatically repudiated cultural-national autonomy. Here is what was said at the congress in this connection:

"Goldblatt (Bundist): ...I deem it necessary that special institutions be set up to protect the freedom of cultural development of nationalities, and I therefore propose that the following words be added to § 8: 'and the creation of institutions which will guarantee them complete freedom of cultural development.'" (This, as we know, is the Bund's definition of cultural-national autonomy. – J. St.)

"Martynov pointed out that general institutions must be so constituted as to protect particular interests also. It is impossible to create a special institution to guarantee freedom for cultural development of the nationalities.

"Yegorov: On the question of nationality we can adopt only negative proposals, i.e., we are opposed to all restrictions upon nationality. But we, as Social-Democrats, are not concerned with whether any particular nationality will develop as such. That is a spontaneous process.

"Koltsov: The delegates from the Bund are always offended when their nationalism is referred to. Yet the amendment proposed by the delegate from the Bund is of a purely nationalist character. We are asked to take purely offensive measures in order to support even nationalities that are dying out."

In the end "Goldblatt's amendment was rejected by the majority, only three votes being cast for it."

Thus, it is clear that the conference of the Liquidators did "contradict the precise meaning" of the programme. It violated the programme.

The Liquidators are now trying to justify themselves by referring to the Stockholm Congress, which they allege sanctioned cultural national autonomy. Thus, V. Kossovsky writes:

"As we know, according to the agreement adopted by the Stockholm Congress, the Bund was allowed to preserve its national programme (pending a decision on the national question by a general Party congress). This congress recorded that national-cultural autonomy at any rate does not contradict the general Party programme."

But the efforts of the Liquidators are in vain. The Stockholm Congress never thought of sanctioning the programme of the Bund – it merely agreed to leave the question open for the time being. The brave Kossovsky did not have enough courage to tell the whole truth. But the facts speak for themselves. Here they are:

"An amendment was moved by Galin: 'The question of the national programme is left open in view of the fact that it is not being examined by the congress.' (For – 50 votes, against – 32.)

"Voice: What does that mean – open?

"Chairman: When we say that the national question is left open, it means that the Bund may maintain its decision on this question until the next congress"

As you see, the congress even did "not examine" the question of the national programme of the Bund – it simply left it "open," leaving the Bund itself to decide the fate of its programme until the next general congress met. In other words, the Stockholm Congress avoided the question, expressing no opinion on cultural-national autonomy one way or another.

The conference of the Liquidators, however, most definitely undertakes to give an opinion on the matter, declares culturalnational autonomy to be acceptable, and endorses it in the name of the Party programme.

The difference is only too evident.

Thus, in spite of all its artifices, the conference of the Liquidators did not advance the national question a single step.

All it could do was to squirm before the Bund and the Caucasian national-Liquidators.

# THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE RIGHT OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION

Lenin

## THESES

### 1. IMPERIALISM, SOCIALISM AND THE LIBERATION OF OPPRESSED NATIONS

Imperialism is the highest stage in the development of capitalism. In the foremost countries capital has outgrown the bounds of national states, has replaced competition by monopoly and has created all the objective conditions for the achievement of socialism. In Western Europe and in the United States, therefore, the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for the overthrow of capitalist governments and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is on the order of the day. Imperialism forces the masses into this struggle by sharpening class contradictions on a tremendous scale, by worsening the conditions of the masses both economically -- trusts, high cost of living -- and politically -- the growth of militarism, more frequent wars, more powerful reaction, the intensification and expansion of national oppression and colonial plunder. Victorious socialism must necessarily establish a full democracy and, consequently, not only introduce full equality of nations but also realise the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, i.e., the right to free political separation. Socialist

parties which did not show by all their activity, both now, during the revolution, and after its victory, that they would liberate the enslaved nations and build up relations with them on the basis of a free union -- and free union is a false phrase without the right to secede -- these parties would be betraying socialism.

Democracy, of course, is also a form of state which must disappear when the state disappears, but that will only take place in the transition from conclusively victorious and consolidated socialism to full communism.

## 2. THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

The socialist revolution is not a single act, it is not one battle on one front, but a whole epoch of acute class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of economics and politics, battles that can only end in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding, overshadowing it, etc. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practice full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.



It would be no less a mistake to remove one of the points of the democratic programme, for example, the point on the selfdetermination of nations, on the grounds of it being "impracticable" or "illusory" under imperialism. The contention that the right of nations to self-determination is impracticable within the bounds of capitalism can be understood either in the absolute, economic sense, or in the conditional, political sense.

In the first case it is radically incorrect from the standpoint of theory. First, in that sense, such things as, for example, labour money, or the abolition of crises, etc., are impracticable under capitalism. It is absolutely untrue that the self-determination of nations is equally impracticable. Secondly, even the one example of the secession of Norway from Sweden in 1905 is sufficient to refute "impracticability" in that sense. Thirdly, it would be absurd to deny that some slight change in the political and strategic relations of, say, Germany and Britain, might today or tomorrow make the formation of a new Polish, Indian and other similar state fully "practicable". Fourthly, finance capital, in its drive to expand, can "freely" buy or bribe the freest democratic or republican government and the elective officials of any, even an "independent", country. The domination of finance capital and of capital in general is not to be abolished by any reforms in the sphere of political democracy; and self-determination belongs wholly and exclusively to this sphere. This domination of finance capital, however, does not in the least nullify the significance of political democracy as a freer, wider

and clearer form of class oppression and class struggle. Therefore all arguments about the "impracticability", in the economic sense, of one of the demands of political democracy under capitalism are reduced to a theoretically incorrect definition of the general and basic relationships of capitalism and of political democracy as a whole.

In the second case the assertion is incomplete and inaccurate. This is because not only the right of nations to self-determination, but all the fundamental demands of political democracy are only partially "practicable" under imperialism, and then in a distorted form and by way of exception (for example, the secession of Norway from Sweden in 1905). The demand for the immediate liberation of the colonies that is put forward by all revolutionary Social-Democrats is also "impracticable" under capitalism without a series of revolutions. But from this it does not by any means follow that Social-Democracy should reject the immediate and most determined struggle for all these demands -- such a rejection would only play into the hands of the bourgeoisie and reaction -- but, on the contrary, it follows that these demands must be formulated and put through in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle for every fundamental democratic demand up to a direct proletarian

onslaught on the bourgeoisie, i.e., up to the socialist revolution that expropriates the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution may flare up not only through some big strike, street demonstration or hunger riot or a military insurrection or colonial revolt, but also as a result of a political crisis such as the Dreyfus case or the Zabern incident, or in connection with a referendum on the secession of an oppressed nation, etc.

Increased national oppression under imperialism does not mean that Social-Democracy should reject what the bourgeoisie call the "utopian" struggle for the freedom of nations to secede but, on the contrary, it should make greater use of the conflicts that arise in this sphere, too, as grounds for mass action and for revolutionary attacks on the bourgeoisie.

### 3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RIGHT TO SELFDETERMINATION AND ITS RELATION TO FEDERATION

The right of nations to self-determination implies exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to free political separation from the oppressor nation. Specifically, this demand for political democracy implies complete freedom to agitate for secession and for a referendum on secession by the seceding nation. This demand, therefore, is not the equivalent of a demand for separation, fragmentation and the formation of small states. It

implies only a consistent expression of struggle against all national oppression. The closer a democratic state system is to complete freedom to secede the less frequent and less ardent will the desire for separation be in practice, because big states afford indisputable advantages, both from the standpoint of economic progress and from that of the interests of the masses and, furthermore, these advantages increase with the growth of capitalism. Recognition of self-determination is not synonymous with recognition of federation as a principle. One may be a determined opponent of that principle and a champion of democratic centralism but still prefer federation to national inequality as the only way to full democratic centralism. It was from this standpoint that Marx, who was a centralist, preferred even the federation of Ireland and England to the forcible subordination of Ireland to the English.

The aim of socialism is not only to end the division of mankind into tiny states and the isolation of nations in any form, it is not only to bring the nations closer together but to integrate them. And it is precisely in order to achieve this aim that we must, on the one hand, explain to the masses the reactionary nature of Renner and Otto Bauer's idea of so-called "cultural and national autonomy" and, on the other, demand the liberation of oppressed nations in a clearly and precisely formulated political programme that takes special account of the hypocrisy and cowardice of socialists in the oppressor nations, and not in general

nebulous phrases, not in empty declamations and not by way of "relegating" the question until socialism has been achieved. In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede.

#### 4. THE PROLETARIAN-REVOLUTIONARY PRESENTATION OF THE QUESTION OF THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF NATIONS

The petty bourgeoisie had put forward not only the demand for the self-determination of nations but all the points of our democratic minimum programme long before, as far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They are still putting them all forward in a utopian manner because they fail to see the class struggle and its increased intensity under democracy, and because they believe in "peaceful" capitalism. That is the exact nature of the utopia of a peaceful union of equal nations under imperialism which deceives the people, and which is defended by Kautsky's followers. The programme of Social-Democracy, as a counter-balance to this pettybourgeois, opportunist utopia, must postulate the division of nations into oppressor and oppressed as basic, significant and inevitable under imperialism.

The proletariat of the oppressor nation's must not confine themselves to general, stereotyped phrases against annexation and in favor of the equality of nations in general, such as any pacifist bourgeois will repeat. The proletariat cannot remain silent on the question of the frontiers of a state founded on national oppression, a question so "unpleasant" for the imperialist bourgeoisie. The proletariat must struggle against the enforced retention of oppressed nations within the bounds of the given state, which means that they must fight for the right to self-determination. The proletariat must demand freedom of political separation for the colonies and nations oppressed by "their own" nation. Otherwise, the internationalism of the proletariat would be nothing but empty words; neither confidence nor class solidarity would be possible between the workers of the oppressed and the oppressor nations, the hypocrisy of the reformists and Kautskyites, who defend self-determination but remain silent about the nations oppressed by "their own" nation and kept in "their own" state by force, would remain unexposed.

On the other hand, the socialists of the oppressed nations must, in particular, defend and implement the full and unconditional unity, including organizational unity, of the workers of the oppressed nation and those of the oppressor nation. Without this it is impossible to defend the independent policy of the proletariat and their class solidarity with the proletariat of other countries in face of all manner of intrigues, treachery

and trickery on the part of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations persistently utilize the slogans of national liberation to deceive the workers; in their internal policy they use these slogans for reactionary agreements with the bourgeoisie of the dominant nation (for example, the Poles in Austria and Russia who come to terms with reactionaries for the oppression of the Jews and Ukrainians); in their foreign policy they strive to come to terms with one of the rival imperialist powers for the sake of implementing their predatory plans (the policy of the small Balkan states, etc.).

The fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain conditions, be utilized by another "great" power for its own, equally imperialist, aims, is just as unlikely to make the Social Democrats refuse to recognize the right of nations to self-determination as the numerous cases of bourgeois utilization of republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial plunder (as in the Romance countries, for example) are unlikely to make the Social-Democrats reject their republicanism.\* \* It would, needless to say, be quite ridiculous to reject the right to self-determination on the grounds that it implies "defense of the fatherland". With equal right i.e., with equal lack of seriousness the social-chauvinists of 1914-16 refer to any of the demands of democracy (to its republicanism, for example) and to any formulation of the struggle against national oppression in order to justify "defense

of the fatherland". Marxism deduces the defense of the fatherland in wars, for example, in the great French Revolution or the wars of Garibaldi, in Europe, and the renunciation of defense of the fatherland in the imperialist war of 1914-16, from an analysis of the concrete historical peculiarities of each individual war and never from any "general principle", or any one point of a programme.

## 5. MARXISM AND PROUDHONISM ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

In contrast to the petty-bourgeois democrats, Marx regarded every democratic demand without exception not as an absolute, but as an historical expression of the struggle of the masses of the people, led by the bourgeoisie, against feudalism. There is not one of these demands which could not serve and has not served, under certain circumstances, as an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie for deceiving the workers. To single out, in this respect, one of the demands of political democracy, specifically, the self-determination of nations, and to oppose it to the rest, is fundamentally wrong in theory. In practice, the proletariat can retain its independence only by subordinating its struggle for all democratic demands, not excluding the demand for a republic, to its revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.



On the other hand, in contrast to the Proudhonists who "denied" the national problem "in the name of social revolution", Marx, mindful in the first place of the interests of the proletarian class struggle in the advanced countries, put the fundamental principle of internationalism and socialism in the foreground -- namely, that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations. It was from the standpoint of the interests of the German workers' revolutionary movement that Marx in 1848 demanded that victorious democracy in Germany should proclaim and grant freedom to the nations oppressed by the Germans. It was from the standpoint of the revolutionary struggle of the English workers that Marx, in 1869, demanded the separation of Ireland from England, and added: ". . . even if federation should follow upon separation." Only by putting forward this demand was Marx really educating the English workers in the spirit of internationalism. Only in this way could he counterpose the opportunists and bourgeois reformism -- which even to this day, half a century later, has not carried out the Irish "reform" -- with a revolutionary solution of the given historical task. Only in this way could Marx maintain -- in contradiction to the apologists of capital who shout that the freedom of small nations to secede is utopian and impracticable and that not only economic but also political concentration is progressive -- that this concentration is progressive when it is non-imperialist, and that nations should not be brought together by force, but by a free union of the proletarians of all countries. Only in

this way could Marx, in opposition to the merely verbal, and often hypocritical, recognition of the equality and selfdetermination of nations, advocate the revolutionary action of the masses in the settlement of national questions as well. The imperialist war of 1914-16, and the Augean stables of hypocrisy on the part of the opportunists and Kautskyites that it has exposed, have strikingly confirmed the correctness of Marx's policy, which should serve as a model for all advanced countries, for all of them are now oppressing other nations.\*

*\* Reference is often made -- e.g., recently by the German chauvinist Lensch in Die Glocke Nos. 8 and 9 -- to the fact that Marx's objection to the national movement of certain peoples, to that of the Czechs in 1848, for example, refutes the necessity of recognising the self-determination of nation from the Marxist standpoint. But this is incorrect for in 1848 there were historical and political grounds for drawing a distinction between "reactionary" and revolutionary-democratic nations. Marx was right to condemn the former and defend the latter. The right to self-determination is one of the demands of democracy which must naturally be subordinated to its general interests. In 1848 and the following years these general interests consisted primarily in combating tsarism.*

## 6. THREE TYPES OF COUNTRIES WITH RESPECT TO THE SELFDETERMINATION OF NATIONS

In this respect, countries must be divided into three main types.

First, the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and the United States. In these countries progressive bourgeois national movements came to an end long ago. Every one of these "great" nations oppresses other nations both in the colonies and at home. The tasks of the proletariat of these ruling nations are the same as those of the proletariat in England in the nineteenth century in relation to Ireland.

Secondly, Eastern Europe: Austria, the Balkans and particularly Russia. Here it was the twentieth century that particularly developed the bourgeois-democratic national movements and intensified the national struggle. The tasks of the proletariat in these countries, both in completing their bourgeois-democratic reforms, and rendering assistance to the socialist revolution in other countries, cannot be carried out without championing the right of nations to self-determination. The most difficult and most important task in this is to unite the class struggle of the workers of the oppressor nations with that of the workers of the oppressed nations.

Thirdly, the semi-colonial countries, such as China, Persia and Turkey, and all the colonies, which have a combined population of 1,000 million. In these countries the bourgeois-democratic movements either have hardly begun or have still a long way to go. Socialists must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation -- and this demand in its political expression signifies nothing else than the recognition of the right to self-determination; they must also render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their uprising -- or revolutionary war, in the event of one -- against the imperialist powers that oppress them.

*\* In some small states which have kept out of the war of 1914-16 -- Holland and Switzerland, for example -- the bourgeoisie makes extensive use of the "self-determination of nations" slogan to justify participation in the imperialist war. This is a motive inducing the Social-Democrats in such countries to repudiate self-determination. Wrong arguments are being used to defend a correct proletarian policy, the repudiation of "defense of the fatherland" in an imperialist war. This results in a distortion of Marxism in theory, and in practice leads to a peculiar small-nation narrow-mindedness, neglect of the hundreds of millions of people in nations that are enslaved by the "dominant" nations. Comrade Gorter, in his excellent pamphlet Imperialism, War and Social-Democracy wrongly rejects the principle of self-determination of nations, but correctly applies it, when he demands the*

*immediate granting of "political and national independence" to the Dutch Indies and exposes the Dutch opportunists who refuse to put forward this demand and to fight for it.*

## 7. SOCIAL-CHAUVINISM AND THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF NATIONS

The imperialist epoch and the war of 1914-16 has laid special emphasis on the struggle against chauvinism and nationalism in the leading countries. There are two main trends on the self-determination of nations among the social chauvinists, that is, among the opportunists and Kautskyites, who hide the imperialist, reactionary nature of the war by applying to it the "defense of the fatherland" concept.

On the one hand, we see quite undisguised servants of the bourgeoisie who defend annexation on the plea that imperialism and political concentration are progressive, and who deny what they call the utopian, illusory, petty-bourgeois, etc., right to self-determination. This includes Cunow, Parvus and the extreme opportunists in Germany, some of the Fabians and trade union leaders in England, and the opportunists in Russia: Semkovsky, Liebman, Yurkevich, etc.

On the other hand, we see the Kautskyites, among whom are Vandervelde, Renaudel, many pacifists in Britain and France, and others. They favour unity with the former and in practice are completely identified

with them; they defend the right to self-determination hypocritically and by words alone; they consider "excessive" ("zu viel verlangt "; Kautsky in Die Neue Zeit, May 21, 1915) the demand for free political separation, they do not defend the necessity for revolutionary tactics on the part of the socialists of the oppressor nations in particular but, on the contrary, obscure their revolutionary obligations, justify their opportunism, make easy for them their deception of the people, and avoid the very question of the frontiers of a state forcefully retaining under-privileged nations within its bounds, etc.

Both are equally opportunist, they prostitute Marxism, having lost all ability to understand the theoretical significance and practical urgency of the tactics which Marx explained with Ireland as an example.

As for annexations, the question has become particularly urgent in connection with the war. But what is annexation? It is quite easy to see that a protest against annexations either boils down to recognition of the self-determination of nations or is based on the pacifist phrase that defends the status quo and is hostile to any, even revolutionary, violence. Such a phrase is fundamentally false and incompatible with Marxism.

## 8. THE CONCRETE TASKS OF THE PROLETARIAT IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

The socialist revolution may begin in the very near future. In this case the proletariat will be faced with the immediate task of winning power, expropriating the banks and erecting other dictatorial measures. The bourgeoisie -- and especially the intellectuals of the Fabian and Kautskyite type -- will, at such a moment, strive to split and check the revolution by foisting limited, democratic aims on it. Whereas any purely democratic demands are in a certain sense liable to act as a hindrance to the revolution, provided the proletarian attack on the pillars of bourgeois power has begun, the necessity to proclaim and grant liberty to all oppressed peoples (i.e., their right to self-determination) will be as urgent in the socialist revolution as it was for the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in, say, Germany in 1848, or Russia in 1905.

It is possible, however, that five, ten or more years will elapse before the socialist revolution begins. This will be the time for the revolutionary education of the masses in a spirit that will make it impossible for socialist-chauvinists and opportunists to belong to the working-class party and gain a victory, as was the case in 1914-16. The socialists must explain to the masses that British socialists who do not demand freedom to separate for the colonies and Ireland, German socialists who do not demand freedom to separate for the

colonies, the Alsatians, Danes and Poles, and who do not extend their revolutionary propaganda and revolutionary mass activity directly to the sphere of struggle against national oppression, or who do not make use of such incidents as that at Zabern for the broadest illegal propaganda among the proletariat of the oppressor nation, for street demonstrations and revolutionary mass action -- Russian socialists who do not demand freedom to separate for Finland, Poland, the Ukraine, etc., etc. -- that such socialists act as chauvinists and lackeys of bloodstained and filthy imperialist monarchies and the imperialist bourgeoisie.

#### 9. THE ATTITUDE OF RUSSIAIN AND POLISH SOCIALDEMOCRATS AND OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL TO SELF-DETERMINATION

The differences between the revolutionary Social-Democrats of Russia and the Polish Social-Democrats on the question of selfdetermination came out into the open as early as 1903, at the Congress which adopted the Programme of the R.S.D.L. Party, and which, despite the protest by the Polish Social-Democrat delegation, inserted Clause 9, recognizing the right of nations to selfdetermination. Since then the Polish Social-Democrats have on no occasion repeated, in the name of their party, the proposal to remove Clause 9 from our Party's Programme, or to replace it by some other formula.



In Russia, where the oppressed nations account for no less than 57 per cent of the population, or over 100 million, where they occupy mostly the border regions, where some of them are more highly cultured than the Great Russians, where the political system is especially barbarous and medieval, where the bourgeois-democratic revolution has not been consummated -- there, in Russia, recognition of the right of nations oppressed by tsarism to free secession from Russia is absolutely obligatory for Social-Democrats, for the furtherance of their democratic and socialist aims. Our Party, reestablished in January 1912, adopted a resolution in 1913 reaffirming the right to self-determination and explaining it in precisely the above concrete sense. The rampage of Great-Russian chauvinism in 1914-16 both among the bourgeoisie and among the opportunist socialists (Rubanovich, Plekhanov, Nashe Dyelo, etc.) has given us even more reason to insist on this demand and to regard those who deny it as actual supporters of Great-Russian chauvinism and tsarism. Our Party declares that it most emphatically declines to accept any responsibility for such actions against the right to selfdetermination,

The latest formulation of the position of the Polish Social-Democrats on the national question (the declaration of the Polish Social Democrats at the Zimmerwald Conference) contains the following ideas:

The declaration condemns the German and other governments that regard the "Polish regions" as a pawn in the forthcoming compensation game, "depriving the Polish people of the opportunity of deciding their own fate themselves ". "Polish Social-Democrats resolutely and solemnly protest against the carving up and parceling out of a whole country ". . . . They flay the socialists who left it to the Hohenzollerns "to liberate the oppressed peoples ". They express the conviction that only participation in the approaching struggle of the international revolutionary proletariat, the struggle for socialism, "will break the fetters of national oppression and destroy all forms of foreign rule, will ensure for the Polish people the possibility of free all-round development as an equal member of a concord of nations". The declaration recognizes that "for the Poles" the war is "doubly fratricidal". (Bulletin of the International Socialist Committee No. 2, September 27, 1915, p. 15. Russian translation in the symposium *The*

*International and the War*, p. 97.)

These propositions do not differ in substance from recognition of the right of nations to self-determination, although their political formulations are even vaguer and more indeterminate than those of most programmes and resolutions of the Second International. Any attempt to express these ideas as precise political formulations and to define their applicability to the capitalist system or only to the

socialist system will show even more clearly the mistake the Polish Social-Democrats make in denying the self-determination of nations.

The decision of the London International Socialist Congress of 1896, which recognized the self-determination of nations, should be supplemented on the basis of the above theses by specifying: (1) the particular urgency of this demand under imperialism, (2) the political conventionalism and class content of all the demands of political democracy, the one under discussion included, (3) the necessity to distinguish the concrete tasks of the Social-Democrats of the oppressor nations from those of the Social-Democrats of the oppressed nations, (4) the inconsistent, purely verbal recognition of self-determination by the opportunists and the Kautskyites, which is, therefore, hypocritical in its political significance, (5) the actual identity of the chauvinists and those Social-Democrats, especially those of the Great Powers (Great Russians, Anglo-Americans, Germans, French, Italians, Japanese, etc:), who do not uphold the freedom to secede for colonies and nations oppressed by "their own" nations, (6) the necessity to subordinate the struggle for the demand under discussion and for all the basic demands of political democracy directly to the revolutionary mass struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeois governments and for the achievement of socialism.

The introduction into the International of the viewpoint of certain small nations, especially that of

the Polish Social-Democrats, who have been led by their struggle against the Polish bourgeoisie, which deceives the people with its nationalist slogans, to the incorrect denial of self-determination, would be a theoretical mistake, a substitution of Proudhonism for Marxism implying in practice involuntary support for the most dangerous chauvinism and opportunism of the Great-Power nations.

Editorial Board of Sotsial-Demokrat, Central Organ of R.S.D.L.P.

Postscript. In Die Neue Zeit for March 3, 1916, which has just appeared, Kautsky openly holds out the hand of Christian reconciliation to Austerlitz, a representative of the foulest German chauvinism, rejecting freedom of separation for the oppressed nations of Hapsburg Austria but recognizing it for Russian Poland, as a menial service to Hindenburg and Wilhelm II. One could not have wished for a better self-exposure of Kautskyism!

## Theses on the National Question

Lenin

June 1913

Lenin Collected Works, Volume 19,

1. The article of our programme (on the self-determination of nations) cannot be interpreted to mean anything but political selfdetermination, i.e., the right to secede and form a separate state.
2. This article in the Social-Democratic programme is absolutely essential to the Social-Democrats of Russia
  - a) for the sake of the basic principles of democracy in general;
  - b) also because there are, within the frontiers of Russia and, what is more, in her frontier areas, a number of nations with sharply distinctive economic, social and other conditions; furthermore, these nations (like all the nations of Russia except the Great Russians) are unbelievably oppressed by the tsarist monarchy;
  - c) lastly, also in view of the fact that throughout Eastern Europe (Austria and the Balkans) and in Asia—i.e., in countries bordering on Russia—the bourgeois-democratic reform of the state that has everywhere else in the world led, in varying degree, to the creation of independent national states or

states with the closest, interrelated national composition, has either not been consummated or has only just begun;

at the present moment Russia is a country whose state system is more backward and reactionary than that of any of the contiguous countries, beginning—in the West—with Austria where the fundamentals of political liberty and a constitutional regime were consolidated in 1867, and where universal franchise has now been introduced, and ending—in the East—with republican China. In all their propaganda, therefore, the Social-Democrats of Russia must insist on the right of all nationalities to form separate states or to choose freely the state of which they wish to form part.

3. The Social-Democratic Party's recognition of the right of all nationalities to self-determination requires of Social-Democrats that they should.

- a) be unconditionally hostile to the use of force in any form whatsoever by the dominant nation (or the nation which constitutes the majority of the population) in respect of a nation that wishes to secede politically;
- b) demand the settlement of the question of such secession only on the basis of a universal, direct and equal vote of the population of the given territory by secret ballot;

c) conduct an implacable struggle against both the Black HundredOctobrist and the liberal-bourgeois (Progressist, Cadet, etc.) parties on every occasion when they defend or sanction national oppression in general or the denial of the right of nations to self-determination in particular.

4. The Social-Democratic Party's recognition of the right of all nationalities to self-determination most certainly does not mean that Social-Democrats reject an independent appraisal of the advisability of the state secession of any nation in each separate case. Social Democracy should, on the contrary, give its independent appraisal, taking into consideration the conditions of capitalist development and the oppression of the proletarians of various nations by the united bourgeoisie of all nationalities, as well as the general tasks of democracy, first of all and most of all the interests of the proletarian class struggle for socialism.

From this point of view the following circumstance must be given special attention. There are two nations in Russia that are more civilized and more isolated by virtue of a number of historical and social conditions and that could most easily and most "naturally" put into effect their right to secession. They are the peoples of Finland and Poland. The experience of the Revolution of 1905 has shown that even in these two nations the ruling classes, the landowners and bourgeoisie, reject the revolutionary struggle for

liberty and seek a rapprochement with the ruling classes of Russia and with the tsarist monarchy because of their fear of the revolutionary proletariat of Finland and Poland.

Social-Democracy, therefore, must give most emphatic warning to the proletariat and other working people of all nationalities against direct deception by the nationalistic slogans of "their own" bourgeoisie, who with their saccharine or fiery speeches about "our native land" try to divide the proletariat and divert its attention from their bourgeois intrigues while they enter into an economic and political alliance with the bourgeoisie of other nations and with the tsarist monarchy.

The proletariat cannot pursue its struggle for socialism and defend its everyday economic interests without the closest and fullest alliance of the workers of all nations in all working-class organizations without exception.

The proletariat cannot achieve freedom other than by revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy and its replacement by a democratic republic. The tsarist monarchy precludes liberty and equal rights for nationalities, and is, furthermore, the bulwark of barbarity, brutality and reaction in both Europe and Asia. This monarchy can be overthrown only by the united proletariat of all the nations of Russia, which is giving the lead to consistently



democratic elements capable of revolutionary struggle from among the working masses of all nations.

It follows, therefore, that workers who place political unity with “their own” bourgeoisie above complete unity with the proletariat of all nations, are acting against their own interests, against the interests of socialism and against the interests of democracy.

5. Social-Democrats, in upholding a consistently democratic state system, demand unconditional equality for all nationalities and struggle against absolutely all privileges for one or several nationalities.

In particular, Social-Democrats reject a “state” language. It is particularly superfluous in Russia because more than seven-tenths of the population of Russia belong to related Slav nationalities who, given a free school and a free state, could easily achieve intercourse by virtue of the demands of the economic turnover without any “state” privileges for any one language.

Social-Democrats demand the abolition of the old administrative divisions of Russia established by the feudal landowners and the civil servants of the autocratic feudal state and their replacement by divisions based on the requirements of present-day economic life and in accordance, as far as possible, with the national composition of the population.

All areas of the state that are distinguished by social peculiarities or by the national composition of the population, must enjoy wide selfgovernment and autonomy, with institutions organized on the basis of universal, equal and secret voting.

6. Social-Democrats demand the promulgation of a law, operative throughout the state, protecting the rights of every national minority in no matter what part of the state. This law should declare inoperative any measure by means of which the national majority might attempt to establish privileges for itself or restrict the rights of a national minority (in the sphere of education, in the use of any specific language, in budget affairs, etc.), and forbid the implementation of any such measure by making it a punishable offence.

7. The Social-Democratic attitude to the slogan of "cultural-national" (or simply "national") "autonomy" or to plans for its implementation is a negative one, since this slogan (1) undoubtedly contradicts the internationalism of the class struggle of the proletariat, (2) makes it easier for the proletariat and the masses of working people to be drawn into the sphere of influence of bourgeois nationalism, and (3) is capable of distracting attention from the task of the consistent democratic transformation of the state as a whole, which transformation alone can ensure (to the extent that this can, in general, be ensured under capitalism) peace between nationalities.

In view of the special acuteness of the question of cultural-national autonomy among Social-Democrats, we give some explanation of the situation.

a) It is impermissible, from the standpoint of Social-Democracy, to issue the slogan of national culture either directly or indirectly. The slogan is incorrect because already under capitalism, all economic, political and spiritual life is becoming more and more international. Socialism will make it completely international. International culture, which is now already being systematically created by the proletariat of all countries, does not absorb "national culture" (no matter of what national group) as a whole, but accepts from each national culture exclusively those of its elements that are consistently democratic and socialist.

b) Probably the one example of an approximation, even though it is a timid one, to the slogan of national culture in Social-Democratic programmes is Article 3 of the Bruunn Programme of the Austrian Social-Democrats. This Article 3 reads: "All self-governing regions of one and the same nation form a single-national alliance that has complete autonomy in deciding its national affairs."

This is a compromise slogan since it does not contain a shadow of extra-territorial (personal) national autonomy. But this slogan, too, is erroneous and harmful, for it is no business of the Social-Democrats of Russia to unite into one nation the Germans in Lodz,

Riga, St. Petersburg and Saratov. Our business is to struggle for full democracy and the annulment of all national privileges and, to unite the German workers in Russia with the workers of all other nations in upholding and developing the international culture of socialism.

Still more erroneous is the slogan of extra-territorial (personal) national autonomy with the setting up (according to a plan drawn up by the consistent supporters of this slogan) of national parliaments and national state secretaries (Otto Bauer and Karl Renner). Such institutions contradict the economic conditions of the capitalist countries, they have not been tested in any of the world's democratic states and are the opportunist dream of people who despair of setting up consistent democratic institutions and are seeking salvation from the national squabbles of the bourgeoisie in the artificial isolation of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie of each nation on a number of ("cultural") questions.

Circumstances occasionally compel Social-Democrats to submit for a time to some sort of compromise decisions, but from other countries we must borrow not compromise decisions, but consistently SocialDemocratic decisions. It would be particularly unwise to adopt the unhappy Austrian compromise decision today, when it has been a complete failure in Austria and has led to the separatism and secession of the Czech Social-Democrats.

c) The history of the “cultural-national autonomy” slogan in Russia shows that it has been adopted by all Jewish bourgeois parties and only by Jewish bourgeois parties; and that they have been uncritically followed by the Bund, which has inconsistently rejected the national Jewish parliament (sejm) and national-Jewish state secretaries. Incidentally, even those European Social-Democrats who accede to or defend the compromise slogan of cultural-national autonomy, admit that the slogan is quite unrealizable for the Jews (Otto Bauer and Karl Kautsky). “The Jews in Galicia and Russia are more of a caste than a nation and attempts to constitute Jewry as a nation are attempts at preserving a caste” (Karl Kautsky).

In civilized countries we observe a fairly full (relatively) approximation to national peace under capitalism only in conditions of the maximum implementation of democracy throughout the state system and administration (Switzerland). The slogans of consistent democracy (the republic, a militia, civil servants elected by the people, etc.) unite the proletariat and the working people, and, in general, all progressive elements in each nation in the name of the struggle for conditions that preclude even the slightest national privilege—while the slogan of “cultural-national autonomy” preaches the isolation of nations in educational affairs (or “cultural” affairs, in general), an isolation that is quite compatible with the retention of the grounds for all (including national) privileges.

The slogans of consistent democracy unite in a single whole the proletariat and the advanced democrats of all nations (elements that demand not isolation but the uniting of democratic elements of the nations in all matters, including educational affairs), while the slogan of cultural-national autonomy divides the proletariat of the different nations and links it up with the reactionary and bourgeois elements of the separate nations.

The slogans of consistent democracy are implacably hostile to the reactionaries and to the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie of all nations, while the slogan of cultural-national autonomy is quite acceptable to the reactionaries and counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie of some nations.

The sum-total of economic and political conditions in Russia therefore demands that Social-Democracy should unite unconditionally workers of all nationalities in all proletarian organizations without exception (political, trade union, co-operative, educational, etc., etc.). The Party should not be federative in structure and should not form national Social-Democratic groups but should unite the proletarians of all nations in the given locality, conduct propaganda and agitation in all the languages of the local proletariat, promote the common struggle of the workers of all nations against every kind of national privilege and should recognize the autonomy of local and regional Party organizations.

8. More than ten years' experience gained by the R.S.D.L.P. confirms the correctness of the above thesis. The Party was founded in 1898 as a party of all Russia, that is, a party of the proletariat of all the nationalities of Russia. The Party remained "Russian" when the Bund seceded in 1903, after the Party Congress had rejected the demand to consider the Bund the only representative of the Jewish proletariat. In 1906 and 1907 events showed convincingly that there were no grounds for this demand, a large number of Jewish proletarians continued to co-operate in the common Social-Democratic work in many local organizations, and the Bund re-entered the Party. The Stockholm Congress (1906) brought into the Party the Polish and Latvian Social-Democrats, who favored territorial autonomy, and the Congress, furthermore, did not accept the principle of federation and demanded unity of Social-Democrats of all nationalities in each locality. This principle has been in operation in the Caucasus for many years, it is in operation in Warsaw (Polish workers and Russian soldiers), in Vilna (Polish, Lettish, Jewish and Lithuanian workers) and in Riga, and in the three last-named places it has been implemented against the separatist Bund. In December 1908, the R.S.D.L.P., through its conference, adopted a special resolution confirming the demand for the unity of workers of all nationalities, on a principle other than federation. The splitting activities of the Bund separatists in not fulfilling the Party decision led to the collapse of all that "federation of the worst type" and brought about the rapprochement of the Bund and the

Czech separatists and vice versa (see Kosovsky in *Nasha Zarya* and the organ of the Czech separatists, *Der &chat;echoslavische Sozialdemokrat* No. 3, 1913, on Kosovsky), and, lastly, at the August (1912) Conference of the liquidators it led to an undercover attempt by the Bund separatists and liquidators and some of the Caucasian liquidators to insert “cultural-national autonomy” into the Party programme without any defense of its substance!

Revolutionary worker Social-Democrats in Poland, in the Latvian Area and in the Caucasus still stand for territorial autonomy and the unity of worker Social-Democrats of all nations. The Bund-liquidator secession and the alliance of the Bund with non-Social-Democrats in Warsaw place the entire national question, both in its theoretical aspect and in the matter of Party structure, on the order of the day for all Social-Democrats.

Compromise decisions have been broken by the very people who introduced them against the will of the Party, and the demand for the unity of worker Social-Democrats of all nationalities is being made more loudly than ever.

9. The crudely militant and Black-Hundred-type nationalism of the tsarist monarchy, and also the revival of bourgeois nationalism— Great-Russian (Mr. Struve, *Russkaya Molva*, the Progressists, etc.), the Ukrainian, and Polish (the anti-Semitism of *Narodowa*



“Demokracja”), and Georgian and Armenian, etc.—all this makes it particularly urgent for Social-Democratic organisations in all parts of Russia to devote greater attention than before to the national question and to work out consistently Marxist decisions on this subject in the spirit of consistent internationalism and unity of proletarians of all nations.

α) The slogan of national culture is incorrect and expresses only the limited bourgeois understanding of the national question.

International culture.

β) The perpetuating of national divisions and the promoting of refined nationalism—unification, rapprochement, the mingling of nations and the expression of the principles of a different, international culture.

γ) The despair of the petty bourgeois (hopeless struggle against national bickering) and the fear of radical-democratic reforms and the socialist movement—only radical-democratic reforms can establish national peace in capitalist states and only socialism is able to terminate national bickering.

δ) National curias in educational affairs.

ε) The Jews.

# **The Attitude of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party Towards the War**

Lenin

Socialism and War

Chapter I

The Principles of Socialism and the War of 1914–1915

The Attitude of Socialists Towards Wars

Socialists have always condemned war between nations as barbarous and brutal. But our attitude towards war is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeois pacifists (supporters and advocates of peace) and of the Anarchists. We differ from the former in that we understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle within the country; we understand that war cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and Socialism is created; and we also differ in that we fully regard civil wars, i.e., wars waged by the oppressed class against the oppressing class, slaves against slaveowners, serfs against land-owners, and wage-workers against the bourgeoisie, as legitimate, progressive and necessary. We Marxists differ from both the pacifists and the Anarchists in that we deem it necessary historically (from the standpoint of Marx's dialectical materialism) to study each war separately. In history there have

been numerous wars which, in spite of all the horrors, atrocities, distress and suffering that inevitably accompany all wars, were progressive, i.e., benefited the development of mankind by helping to destroy the exceptionally harmful and reactionary institutions (for example, autocracy or serfdom), the most barbarous despotisms in Europe (Turkish and Russian). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the historically specific features of precisely the present war.

### Historical Types of Wars in Modern Times

The Great French Revolution ushered in a new epoch in the history of mankind. From that time to the Paris Commune, from 1789 to 1871, one of the types of wars were wars of a bourgeois-progressive, national-liberating character. In other words, the chief content and historical significance of these wars were the overthrow of absolutism and feudalism, the undermining of these institutions, the overthrow of alien oppression. Therefore, those were progressive wars, and during such wars, all honest, revolutionary democrats, and also all Socialists, always sympathized with the success of that country (i.e., with that bourgeoisie), which had helped to overthrow, or sap, the most dangerous foundation of feudalism, absolutism and the oppression of other nations. For example, the revolutionary wars waged by France contained an element of plunder and conquest of alien territory by the French, but this does not in the least alter the fundamental historical significance of these

wars, which destroyed and shattered feudalism and absolutism in the whole of old, serfridden Europe. In the Franco-Prussian war, Germany plundered France, but this does not alter the fundamental historical significance of this war, which liberated tens of millions of German people from feudal disintegration and from the oppression of two despots, the Russian tsar and Napoleon III.

### The Difference Between Aggressive and Defensive War

The epoch of 1789-1871 left deep tracts and revolutionary memories. Before feudalism, absolutism and alien oppression were overthrown, the development of the proletarian struggle for Socialism was out of the question. When speaking of the legitimacy of "defensive" war in relation to the wars of such an epoch, Socialists always had in mind precisely these objects, which amounted to revolution against medievalism and serfdom. By "defensive" war Socialists always meant a "just" war in this sense (W. Liebknecht once expressed himself precisely in this way). Only in this sense have Socialists regarded, and now regard, wars "for the defense of the fatherland", or "defensive" wars, as legitimate, progressive and just. For example, if tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, India on England, Persia or China on Russia, and so forth, those would be "just", "defensive" wars, irrespective of who attacked first; and every Socialist would sympathize with the victory

of the oppressed, dependent, unequal states against the oppressing, slave owning, predatory “great” powers.

But picture to yourselves a slave-owner who owned 100 slaves warring against a slave-owner who owned 200 slaves for a more “just” distribution of slaves. Clearly, the application of the term “defensive” war, or war “for the defense of the fatherland” in such a case would be historically false, and in practice would be sheer deception of the common people, of philistines, of ignorant people, by the astute slave-owners. Precisely in this way are the present-day imperialist bourgeoisie deceiving the peoples by means of “national ideology and the term “defense of the fatherland in the present war between slave-owners for fortifying and strengthening slavery.

### The Present War is An Imperialist War

Nearly everybody admits that the present war is an imperialist war, but in most cases this term is distorted or applied to one side, or a loophole is left for the assertion that this war may, after all, have a bourgeois-progressive, national-liberating significance. Imperialism is the highest stage in the development of capitalism, reached only in the twentieth century. Capitalism now finds the old national states, without the formation of which it could not have overthrown feudalism, too tight for it. Capitalism has developed concentration to such a degree that whole branches of

industry have been seized by syndicates, trusts and associations of capitalist billionaires, and almost the entire globe has been divided up among the “lords of capital, either in the form of colonies, or by enmeshing other countries in thousands of threads of financial exploitation. Free trade and competition have been superseded by the striving for monopoly, for the seizure of territory for the investment of capital, for the export of raw materials from them, and so forth. From the liberator of nations that capitalism was in the struggle against feudalism, imperialist capitalism has become the greatest oppressor of nations. Formerly progressive, capitalism has become reactionary; it has developed the forces of production to such a degree that mankind is faced with the alternative of going over to Socialism or of suffering years and even decades of armed struggle between the “great powers for the artificial preservation of capitalism by means of colonies, monopolies, privileges and national oppression of every kind.

### War Between the Biggest Slave-Owners for Preserving and Fortifying Slavery

To explain the significance of imperialism, we will quote exact figures showing the division of the world among the so-called “great” (i.e., successful in great plunder) powers:

### Division of the World Among the “Great” Slave-owning Powers

### Division of the World Among the “Great” Slave-owning Powers

“Great” Powers	Colonies		Metropolises				Total	
	1876		1914		1914			
	Square kilo- metres	Inhab- itants	Square kilo- metres	Inhab- itants	Square kilo- metres	Inhab- itants	Square kilo- metres	Inhab- itants
	millions		millions		millions		millions	
England	22.5	251.9	33.5	393.5	0.3	46.5	33.8	440.0
Russia	17.0	15.9	17.4	33.2	5.4	136.2	22.8	169.4
France	0.9	6.0	10.6	55.5	0.5	39.6	11.1	95.1
Germany	–	–	2.9	12.3	0.5	64.9	3.4	77.2
Japan	–	–	0.3	19.2	0.4	53.0	0.7	72.2
United States of America	–	–	0.3	9.7	9.4	97.0	9.7	106.7
Six “great” powers	40.4	273.8	65.0	523.4	16.5	437.2	81.5	960.6
Colonies belonging <i>not</i> to great powers (but to Belgium, Holland and other states)			9.9	45.3			9.9	45.3
Three “semi-colonial” countries (Turkey, China and Persia)							14.5	361.2
<b>Total</b>							105.9	1,367.1
Other states and countries							28.0	289.9
Entire globe (without Polar regions)							133.9	1,657.0

From this it is seen how most of the nations which fought at the head of others for freedom in 1798-1871, have now, after 1876 on the basis of highly developed and “overripe” capitalism, become the oppressors and enslavers of the majority of the populations and nations of the globe. From 1876 to 1914, six “great” powers grabbed 25 million sq. kilometres, i.e., an area

two and a half times that of Europe! Six powers are enslaving over half a billion (521 million) inhabitants of colonies. For every four inhabitants of the "great" powers there are five inhabitants of "their" colonies. And everybody knows that colonies are conquered by fire and sword, that the populations of colonies are brutally treated, that they are exploited in a thousand ways (by exporting capital, concessions, etc., cheating when selling them goods, subordination to the authorities of the "ruling" nation, and so on and so forth). The Anglo-French bourgeoisie are deceiving the people when they say that they are waging war for the freedom of nations and for Belgium; actually, they are waging war for the purpose of retaining the colonies they have inordinately grabbed. The German imperialists would free Belgium, etc., at once if the British and French would agree "fairly" to share their colonies with them. The peculiarity of the situation lies in that in this war the fate of the colonies is being decided by war on the Continent. From the standpoint of bourgeois justice and national freedom (or the right of nations to existence), Germany would be absolutely right as against England and France, for she has been "done out" of colonies, her enemies are oppressing an immeasurably far larger number of nations than she is, and the Slavs who are oppressed by her ally Austria undoubtedly enjoy far more freedom than those in tsarist Russia, that real "prison of nations". But Germany is fighting not for the liberation, but for the oppression of nations. It is not the business of Socialists to help the younger and stronger robber (Germany) to



rob the older and over gorged robbers. Socialists must take advantage of the struggle between the robbers to overthrow them all. To be able to do this, the Socialists must first of all tell the people the truth, namely, that this war is in a treble sense a war between slaveowners to fortify slavery. This is a war firstly, to fortify the enslavement of the colonies by means of a "fairer" distribution and subsequent more "concerted exploitation of them; secondly, to fortify the oppression of other nations within the "great" powers, for both Austria and Russia (Russia more and much worse than Austria) maintain their rule only by such oppression, intensifying it by means of war; and thirdly, to fortify and prolong wage slavery, for the proletariat is split up and suppressed, while the capitalists gain, making fortunes out of the war, aggravating national prejudices and intensifying reaction, which has raised its head in all countries, even in the freest and most republican.

"War is the Continuation of Politics by Other" (i.e., Violent) "Means"

This famous aphorism was uttered by one of the profoundest writers on the problems of war, Clausewitz. Marxists have always rightly regarded this thesis as the theoretical basis of views concerning the significance of every given war. It was precisely from this viewpoint that Marx and Engels always regarded different wars.

Apply this view to the present war. You will see that for decades, for almost half a century, the governments and the ruling classes of England, and France, and Germany, and Italy, and Austria, and Russia, pursued a policy of, plundering colonies, of oppressing other nations, of suppressing the working-class movement. It is this, and only this policy that is being continued in the present war. In particular, the policy of both Austria and Russia peace-time as well as in war, is a policy of enslaving and not of liberating nations. In China, Persia. India and other dependent countries, on the contrary, we have seen during the past decades a policy of rousing tens and hundreds of millions of people to national life, of liberating them from the oppression of the reactionary “great” powers. A war on such a historical ground can even today be a bourgeois-progressive, national-liberation war.

It is sufficient to glance at the present war from the viewpoint that it is a continuation of the politics of the great powers, and of the principal classes within them, to see at once the howling antihistoricalness, falsity and hypocrisy of the view that the “defense of the fatherland” idea can be justified in the present war.

### The Example of Belgium

The favorite plea of the social-chauvinist triple (now quadruple) entente (in Russia. Plekhanov and Co.), is the example of Belgium. But this example goes against them. The German imperialists shamelessly violated

the neutrality of Belgium, as belligerent states have done always and everywhere, trampling upon all treaties and obligations if necessary. Let us suppose that all the states interested in the observation of international treaties declared war on Germany with the demand for the liberation and indemnification of Belgium. In such a case, the sympathies of Socialists would, of course, be on the side of Germany's enemies. But the whole point is that the "triple

(and quadruple) entente" is waging war not over Belgium this is perfectly well known, and only hypocrites conceal this. England is grabbing Germany's colonies and Turkey; Russia is grabbing Galicia and Turkey, France wants Alsace-Lorraine and even the left bank of the Rhine; a treaty has been concluded with Italy for the division of the spoils (Albania, Asia Minor); bargaining is going on with Bulgaria and Rumania, also for the division of the spoils. In the present war waged by the present governments it is impossible to help Belgium without helping to strangle Austria or Turkey, etc.! How does "defense of the fatherland" come in here? Herein, precisely, lies the specific feature of imperialist war, war between reactionary bourgeois, historically obsolete governments, waged for the purpose of oppressing other nations. Whoever justifies participation in the present war perpetuates imperialist oppression of nations. Whoever advocates taking advantage of the present embarrassments of the governments to fight for the social revolution

champions the real freedom of really all nations, which is possible only under Socialism?

What is Russia Fighting For?

In Russia, capitalist imperialism of the latest type has fully revealed itself in the policy of tsarism towards Persia, Manchuria and Mongolia; but, in general, military and feudal imperialism predominates in Russia. In no country in the world is the majority of the population oppressed so much as it is in Russia; Great Russians constitute only 43 per cent of the population, the less than half; all the rest are denied rights as aliens, Of the 170 million inhabitants of Russia, about 100 million are oppressed and denied rights. Tsarism is waging war to seize Galicia and finally to crush the liberties of the Ukrainians, to seize Armenia, Constantinople, etc. Tsarism regards the war as a means of diverting attention from the growth of discontent within the country and of suppressing the growing revolutionary movement. At the present time, for every two Great Russians in Russia there are from two to three rightless "aliens": tsarism is striving by means of the war to increase the number of nations oppressed by Russia, to perpetuate this oppression and thereby undermine the struggle for freedom which the Great Russians themselves are waging. The possibility of oppressing and robbing other nations perpetuates economic stagnation, because, often, the source of income is not the development of productive forces, but the semi-feudal exploitation of "aliens". Thus, on

the part of Russia, the war is distinguished for its profoundly reactionary and anti-liberating character.

What is Social-Chauvinism?

Social-chauvinism is advocacy of the idea of “defense of the fatherland” in the present war. Further, this idea logically leads to the abandonment of the class struggle during the war, to voting war credits, etc. Actually, the social-chauvinists are pursuing an antiproletarian, bourgeois policy; for actually, they are championing not “defense of the fatherland” in the sense of fighting foreign oppression, but the “right” of one or other of the “great” powers to plunder colonies and to oppress other nations. The social-chauvinists repeat the bourgeois deception of the people that the war is being waged to protect the freedom and existence of nations, and thereby they go over to the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. In the category of social-chauvinists are those who justify and embellish the governments and bourgeoisie of one of the belligerent groups of powers, as well as those who, like Kautsky, argue that the Socialists of all the belligerent powers have an equal right to “defend the fatherland”. Social-chauvinism, being actually defense of the privileges, advantages, robbery and violence of one’s “own” (or every) imperialist bourgeoisie, is the utter betrayal of all socialist convictions and of the decision of the Basle International Socialist Congress.

The Basle Manifesto.

The manifesto on war that was unanimously adopted in Basle in 1911 had in view the very war between England and Germany and their present allies that broke out in 1914. The manifesto openly declares that no plea of the interests of the people can justify such a war, waged “for the sake of the profits of the capitalists” and “the ambitions of dynasties” on the basis of the imperialist, predatory policy of the great powers. The manifesto openly declares that war is dangerous “for the governments” (all without exception), notes their fear of “a proletarian revolution”, and very definitely points to the example of the Commune of 1871, and of October-December 1905, i.e., to the examples of revolution and civil war. Thus, the Basle Manifesto lays down, precisely for the present war, the tactics of revolutionary struggle by the workers on an international scale against their governments, the tactics of proletarian revolution. The Basle Manifesto repeats the statement in the Stuttgart resolution that, in the event of war breaking out, Socialists must take advantage of the “economic and political crisis” it will cause, to “hasten the downfall of capitalism”, i.e., to take advantage of the governments’ embarrassments and the anger of the masses, caused by the war, for the socialist revolution.

The policy of the social-chauvinists, their justification of the war from the bourgeois-liberation standpoint, their sanctioning of “defense of the fatherland”, voting credits, entering cabinets, and so on and so forth, is downright treachery to Socialism, which can be

explained only, as we will see lower down, by the victory of opportunism and of the national-liberal Labour policy in the majority of European parties.

### **False References to Marx and Engels**

The Russian social-chauvinists (headed by Plekhanov), refer to Marx's tactics in the war of 1870; the German (of the type of Lensch, David and Co.) to Engels' statement in 1891 that in the event of war against Russia and France together, it would be the duty of the German Socialists to defend their fatherland; and lastly, the socialchauvinists of the Kautsky type, who want to reconcile and legitimize international chauvinism, refer to the fact that Marx and Engels, while condemning war, nevertheless, constantly, from 1870-1871 and 1876-1877, took the side of one or another belligerent state once war had broken out

All these references are outrageous distortions of the views of Marx and Engels in the interest of the bourgeoisie and the opportunists, in just the same way as the writings of the Anarchists Guillaume and Co. distort the views of Marx and Engels in justification of anarchism. The war of 1870-1871 was a historically progressive war on the part of Germany until Napoleon III was defeated; for the latter, together with the tsar, had oppressed Germany for many years, keeping her in a state of feudal disintegration. But as soon as the war developed into the plunder of France (the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine), Marx and

Engels emphatically condemned the Germans. And even at the beginning of that war Marx and Engels approved of the refusal of Bebel and Liebknecht to vote for credits and advised the Social Democrats not to merge with the bourgeoisie, but to uphold the independent class interests of the proletariat. To apply the appraisal of this bourgeois-progressive and national-liberating war to the present imperialist war means mocking at truth. The same applies with still greater force to the war of 1854-1855, and to all the wars of the nineteenth century, when there was no modern imperialism, no ripe objective conditions for Socialism, and no mass Socialist parties in any of the belligerent countries, i.e., none of the conditions from which the Basle Manifesto deduced the tactics of "proletarian revolution" in connection with a war between the great powers.

Whoever refers today to Marx's attitude towards the wars of the epoch of the progressive bourgeoisie and forgets Marx's statement that "the workers have no fatherland", a statement that applies precisely to the epoch of the reactionary, obsolete bourgeoisie, to the epoch of the socialist revolution. Shamelessly distorts Marx and substitute, the bourgeois for the socialist point of view.

### The Collapse of the Second International

The Socialists of all the world solemnly declared in Basle, in 1912, that they regarded the impending war



in Europe as the “criminal” and most reactionary affair of all the governments, which must hasten the downfall of capitalism by inevitably calling forth a revolution against it. The war came, the crisis came. Instead of revolutionary tactics, the majority of the Social-Democratic parties conducted reactionary tactics, went over to the side of their respective governments and bourgeoisie. This betrayal of Socialism signifies the collapse of the Second (1889-1914) International, and we must understand what caused this collapse, what brought social-chauvinism into being what gave it strength.

### **Social-Chauvinism is Consummated Opportunism**

During the whole epoch of the Second International, a struggle raged everywhere in the Social-Democratic parties between the revolutionary and the opportunist wings. In a number of countries a split has taken place along this line (England, Italy, Holland, Bulgaria). Not a single Marxist has any doubt that opportunism expresses bourgeois policy within the working-class movement, expresses the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and the alliance of a tiny section of bourgeoisified workers with “their” bourgeoisie against the interests of the proletarian masses, the oppressed masses.

The objective conditions of the end of the nineteenth century exceptionally intensified opportunism, converted the utilization of bourgeois legality into

subservience to it, created a tiny stratum of bureaucrats and aristocrats within the working class, and drew into the ranks of the Social-Democratic parties numerous petty-bourgeois "fellow travelers".

The war accelerated this development and transformed opportunism into social-chauvinism, transformed the secret alliance between the opportunists and the bourgeoisie into an open one. Simultaneously, the military authorities everywhere have introduced martial law and have muzzled the mass of the workers, whose old leaders have nearly all gone over to the bourgeoisie.

Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the same economic basis: the interests of a tiny stratum of privileged workers and of the petty bourgeoisie who are defending their privileged position, their "right" to crumbs of the profits "their" national bourgeoisie obtain from robbing other nations, from the advantages of their position as the ruling nation, etc.

Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the same ideologicalpolitical content: collaboration of classes instead of class struggle, renunciation of revolutionary methods of struggle, helping one's "own" government in its embarrassed situation instead of taking advantage of these embarrassments for revolution. If we take all the European countries as a whole, if we pay attention not to individuals (even the most authoritative), we will find that it is the opportunist

trend that has become the chief bulwark of social-chauvinism, whereas from the camp of the revolutionaries, more or less consistent protests against it are heard nearly everywhere. And if we take, for example, the grouping of trends at the Stuttgart International Socialist Congress in 1907, we will find that international Marxism was opposed to imperialism, while international opportunism was in favor of it already at that time.

### Unity with the Opportunists Means Alliance Between the Workers and "Their" National Bourgeoisie and Splitting the International Revolutionary Working Class

In the past epoch, before the war, although opportunism was often regarded as a "deviationist", "extremist" part of the SocialDemocratic Party, it was nevertheless regarded as a legitimate part. The war has shown that this cannot be so in future. Opportunism has "matured", is now playing to the full its role as emissary of the bourgeois in the working-class movement. Unity with the opportunists has become sheer hypocrisy, an example of which we see in the German Social-Democratic Party. On all important occasions (for example, the voting on August 4), the opportunists come forward with an ultimatum, which they carry out with the aid of their numerous connections with the bourgeoisie, of their majority on the executives of the trade unions, etc. Unity with the opportunists actually means today, subordinating the

working class to “its” national bourgeoisie, alliance with it for the purpose of oppressing other nations and of fighting for great-power privileges, it means splitting the revolutionary proletariat in all countries.

Hard as the struggle may be, in individual cases, against the opportunists who predominate in many organizations, peculiar as the process of purging the workers’ parties of opportunists may be in individual countries, this process is inevitable and fruitful. Reformist Socialism is dying; regenerated Socialism “will be revolutionary, uncompromising and insurrectionary”, to use the apt expression of the French Socialist Paul Golay.

#### “Kautskyism”

Kautsky, the biggest authority in the Second International, gives us a highly typical and glaring example of how the verbal recognition of Marxism has led actually to its conversion into “Struveism”, or into “Brentanoism”. We see this also from the example of Plekhanov. By means of obvious sophistry they rob Marxism of its revolutionary living spirit; they recognize everything in Marxism except revolutionary methods of struggle, the preaching of and preparation for such methods, and the training of the masses precisely in this direction. Kautsky, in an unprincipled fashion, “reconciles” the fundamental idea of social-chauvinism, recognition of defense of the fatherland in the present war, with a diplomatic, sham concession to

the Lefts it, the shape of abstaining from voting credits, the verbal claim of being in the opposition, etc. Kautsky, who in 1909 wrote a whole book on the approaching epoch of revolutions and on the connection between war and revolutions, Kautsky, who in 1912 signed the Basle Manifesto on taking revolutionary advantage of the impending war, is now, in every way, justifying and embellishing social-chauvinism and, like Plekhanov, joins the bourgeoisie iii ridiculing all thought of revolution, all steps towards direct revolutionary struggle.

The working class cannot play its world-revolutionary role unless it wages a ruthless struggle against this renege, spinelessness, subservience to opportunism and unexampled vulgarization of the theories of Marxism. Kautskyism is not fortuity, but a social product of the contradictions within the Second International, a combination of loyalty to Marxism in words and subordination to opportunism in deeds.

This fundamental falseness of "Kautskyism" manifests itself in different ways in different countries. In Holland, Roland-HoIst while rejecting the idea of defending the fatherland, defends unity with the opportunists' party. In Russia Trotsky, while also rejecting this idea, also defends unity with the opportunist and chauvinist Nasha Zarya group. In Rumania, Rakovsky, while declaring war on opportunism as being responsible for the collapse of the International, is at the same time ready to recognise

the legitimacy of the idea of defending the fatherland. All this is a manifestation of the evil which the Dutch Marxists (Gorter and Pannekoek) have called "passive radicalism", and which amounts to substituting for Marxism eclecticism in theory and servility to, or impotence in the face of, opportunism in practice.

The Marxists' Slogan is the Slogan of Revolutionary SocialDemocracy

The war has undoubtedly created a most acute crisis and has increased the distress of the masses to an incredible degree. The reactionary character of this war, and the shameless lies told by the bourgeoisie of all countries in covering up their predatory aims with "national" ideology, are inevitably creating, on the basis of an objectively revolutionary situation, revolutionary moods among the masses. It is our duty to help the masses to become conscious of these moods, to deepen and formulate them. This task is correctly expressed only by the slogan: convert the imperialist war into civil war; and all consistently waged class struggles during the war, all seriously conducted "mass action" tactics inevitably lead to this. It is impossible to foretell whether a powerful revolutionary movement will flare up during the first or the second war of the great powers, whether during or after it; in any case, our bounden duty is systematically and undeviatingly to work precisely in this direction.

The Basle Manifesto refers directly to the example set by the Paris Commune, i.e., to the conversion of a war between governments into civil war. Half a century ago, the proletariat was too weak; the objective conditions for Socialism had not yet ripened; there could be no coordination and cooperation between the revolutionary movements in all the belligerent countries; the "national ideology" (the traditions of 1792), with which a section of the Parisian workers were imbued, was their petty-bourgeois weakness, which Marx noted at the time, and was one of the causes of the fall of the Commune. Half a century after it, the conditions that weakened the revolution at that time have passed away, and it is unpardonable for a Socialist at the present time to resign himself to the abandonment of activities precisely in the spirit of the Paris Communards.

#### The Example Shown by the Fraternisation in the Trenches

The bourgeois newspapers of all the belligerent countries have reported cases of fraternization between the soldiers of the belligerent nations even in the trenches. And the issue by the military authorities (of Germany, England) of draconic orders against such fraternization proved that the governments and the bourgeoisie attached grave importance to it. The fact that such cases of fraternization have been possible even when opportunism reigns supreme in the top ranks of the Social-Democratic parties of Western

Europe, and when social-chauvinism is supported by the entire Social-Democratic press and by all the authorities of the Second International, shows us how possible it would be to shorten the present criminal, reactionary and slave-owners' war and to organize a revolutionary international movement if systematic work were conducted in this direction, if only by the Left-wing Socialists in all the belligerent countries.

### **The Importance of an Underground Organization**

The most prominent Anarchists all over the world, no less than the opportunists, have disgraced themselves with social-chauvinism (in the spirit of Plekhanov and Kautsky) in this war. One of the useful results of this war will undoubtedly be that it will kill both anarchism and opportunism.

While under no circumstances or conditions refraining from utilizing all legal possibilities, however small, for the purpose of organizing the masses and of preaching Socialism, the Social-Democratic parties must break with subservience to legality. "You shoot first, Messieurs the Bourgeoisie," wrote Engels, hinting precisely at civil war and at the necessity of our violating legality after the bourgeoisie had violated it. The crisis has shown that the bourgeoisie violate it in all countries, even the freest, and that it is impossible to lead the masses to revolution unless an underground organization is set up for the purpose of advocating, discussing, appraising and preparing



revolutionary methods of struggle. In Germany, for example, all the honest things that Socialists are doing, are being done in spite of despicable opportunism and hypocritical "Kautskyism", and are being done secretly. In England, people are sent to penal servitude for printing appeals against joining the army.

To regard the repudiation of underground methods of propaganda, and ridiculing the latter in the legally published press, as being compatible with membership of the Social-Democratic Party is treachery to Socialism.

### **Concerning Defeat of "One's Own" Government in the Imperialist War**

Both the advocates of victory for their governments in the present war and the advocates of the slogan "neither victory nor defeat", equally take the standpoint of social-chauvinism. A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, cannot fail to see that its military reverses facilitate its overthrow. Only a bourgeois who believes that a war started by the governments must necessarily end as a war between governments and wants it to end as such, can regard as "ridiculous" and "absurd" the idea that the Socialists of all the belligerent countries should wish for the defeat of all "their" governments and express this wish. On the contrary, it is precisely a statement of this kind that would conform to the cherished thoughts of every

class-conscious worker, and would be in line with our activities towards converting the imperialist war into civil war.

Undoubtedly, the serious anti-war agitation that is being conducted by a section of the British, German and Russian Socialists has “weakened the military power” of the respective governments, but such agitation stands to the credit of the Socialists. Socialists must explain to the masses that they have no other road of salvation except the revolutionary overthrow of “their” governments, and that advantage must be taken of these governments’ embarrassments in the present war precisely for this purpose.

### **Pacifism and the Peace Slogan**

The sentiments of the masses in favor of peace often express incipient protest, anger and consciousness of the reactionary character of the war. It is the duty of all Social-Democrats to utilize these sentiments. They will take a most ardent part in every movement and in every demonstration on this ground; but they will not deceive the people by conceding the idea that peace without annexations, without the oppression of nations, without plunder, without the germs of new wars among the present governments and ruling classes is possible in the absence of a revolutionary movement. Such a deception of the people would merely play into the hands of the secret diplomacy of the belligerent governments and

facilitate their counterrevolutionary plans. Whoever wants a lasting and democratic peace must be in favor of civil war against the governments and the bourgeoisie.

### **The Right of Nations to Self-Determination**

The most widespread deception of the people perpetrated by the bourgeoisie is, the present war is the concealment of its predatory aims with “national-liberation” ideology. The English promise the liberation of Belgium, the Germans of Poland, etc. Actually, as we have seen, this is a war waged by the oppressors of the majority of the nations of the world for the purpose of fortifying and expanding such oppression.

Socialists cannot achieve their great aim without fighting against all oppression of nations. Therefore, they must without fail demand that the Social-Democratic parties of oppressing countries (especially of the so-called “great” powers) should recognize and champion the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, precisely in the political sense of the term, i.e., the right to political secession. The Socialist of a ruling or colony-owning nation who fails to champion this right is a chauvinist.

The championing of this right, far from encouraging the formation of small states, leads, on the contrary, to the freer, fearless and therefore wider and more

widespread formation of very big states and federations of states, which are more beneficial for the masses and more fully in keeping with economic development.

The Socialists of oppressed nations must, in their turn, unfailingly fight for the complete (including organizational) unity of the workers of the oppressed and oppressing nationalities. The idea of the juridical separation of one nation from another (so-called “culturalnational autonomy” advocated by Bauer and Renner) is reactionary. Imperialism is the epoch of the constantly increasing oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of “great” powers and, therefore, it is impossible to fight for the socialist international revolution against imperialism unless the right of nations to selfdetermination is recognized. “No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations” (Marx and Engels). A proletariat that tolerates the slightest violence by “its” nation against other nations cannot be a socialist proletariat.

## Marxism or Proudhonism?

Lenin

The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up

### SOCIALISM AND THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF NATIONS

By way of an exception, our Polish comrades parry our reference to Marx's attitude towards the separation of Ireland directly and not indirectly. What is their objection? References to Marx's position from 1848 to 1871, they say, are "not of the slightest value". The argument advanced in support of this unusually irate and peremptory assertion is that "at one and the same time" Marx opposed the strivings for independence of the "Czechs, South Slavs, etc."

The argument is so very irate because it is so very unsound. According to the Polish Marxists, Marx was simply a muddle head who "in one breath" said contradictory things! This is altogether untrue, and it is certainly not Marxism. It is precisely the demand for "concrete" analysis, which our Polish comrades insist on, but do not themselves apply, that makes it necessary for us to investigate whether Marx's different attitudes towards different concrete "national" movements did not spring from one and the same socialist outlook.

Marx is known to have favored Polish independence in the interests of European democracy in its struggle against the power and influence—or, it might be said, against the omnipotence and predominating reactionary influence—of tsarism. That this attitude was correct was most clearly and practically demonstrated in 1849, when the Russian serf army crushed the national liberation and revolutionary-democratic rebellion in Hungary. From that time until Marx's death, and even later, until 1890, when there was a danger that tsarism, allied with France, would wage a reactionary war against a non-imperialist and nationally independent Germany, Engels stood first and foremost for a struggle against tsarism. It was for this reason, and exclusively for this reason, that Marx and Engels were opposed to the national movement of the Czechs and South Slavs. A simple reference to what Marx and Engels wrote in 1848 and 1841) will prove to anyone who is interested in Marxism in real earnest and not merely for the purpose of brushing Marxism aside, that Marx and Engels at that time drew a clear and definite distinction between "whole reactionary nations" serving as "Russian outposts" in Europe, and "revolutionary nations" namely, the Germans, Poles and Magyars. This is a fact. And it was indicated at the time with incontrovertible truth: in 1848 revolutionary nations fought for liberty, whose principal enemy was tsarism, whereas the Czechs, etc., were in fact reactionary nations, and outposts of tsarism.

What is the lesson to be drawn from this concrete example which must be analyzed concretely if there is any desire to be true to Marxism? Only this: (1) that the interests of the liberation of a number of big and very big nations in Europe rate higher than the interests of the movement for liberation of small nations; (2) that the demand for democracy must not be considered in isolation but on a European— today we should say a world—scale.

That is all there is to it. There is no hint of any repudiation of that elementary socialist principle which the Poles forget but to which Marx was always faithful—that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations. If the concrete situation which confronted Marx when tsarism dominated international politics were to repeat itself, for instance, in the form of a few nations starting a socialist revolution (as a bourgeois-democratic revolution was started in Europe in 1848), and other nations serving as the chief bulwarks of bourgeois reaction—then we too would have to be in favor of a revolutionary war against the latter, in favor of “crushing” them, in favor of destroying all their outposts, no matter what small-nation movements arose in them. Consequently, instead of rejecting any examples of Marx’s tactics—this would mean professing Marxism while abandoning it in practice—we must analyze them concretely and draw invaluable lessons for the future. The several demands of

democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a small part of the general-democratic (now: general-socialist) world movement. In individual concrete casts, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected. It is possible that the republican movement in one country may be merely an instrument of the clerical or financial-monarchist intrigues of other countries; if so, we must not support this particular, concrete movement, but it would be ridiculous to delete the demand for a republic from the programme of international Social-Democracy on these grounds.

In what way has the concrete situation changed between the periods of 1848–71 and 1898–1916 (I take the most important landmarks of imperialism as a period: from the Spanish-American imperialist war to the European imperialist war)? Tsarism has manifestly and indisputably ceased to be the chief mainstay of reaction, first, because it is supported by international finance capital, particularly French, and, secondly, because of 1905. At that time the system of big national states—the democracies of Europe—was bringing democracy and socialism to the world in spite of tsarism. Marx and Engels did not live to see the period of imperialism. The system now is a handful of imperialist “Great” Powers (five or six in number), each oppressing other nations: and this oppression is a source for artificially retarding the collapse of capitalism, and artificially supporting opportunism and social-chauvinism in the imperialist nations which



dominate the world. At that time, West-European democracy, liberating the big nations, was opposed to tsarism, which used certain small-nation movements for reactionary ends. Today, the socialist proletariat, split into chauvinists, "social-imperialists", on the one hand, and revolutionaries, on the other, is confronted by an alliance of tsarist imperialism and advanced capitalist, European, imperialism, which is based on their common oppression of a number of nations.

Such are the concrete changes that have taken place in the situation, and it is just these that; the Polish Social-Democrats ignore, in spite of their promise to the concrete! Hence the concrete change in the application of the same socialist principles: formerly the main thing was to fight "against tsarism" (and against certain small-nation movements that it was using for undemocratic ends), and for the greater revolutionary peoples of the West; the main thing today is to stand against the united, aligned front of the imperialist powers, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the social-imperialists, and for the utilization of all national movements against imperialism for the purposes of the socialist revolution. The more purely proletarian the struggle against the general imperialist front now is, the more vital, obviously, is the internationalist principle: "No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations".

In the name of their doctrinaire concept of social revolution, the Proudhonists ignored the international

role of Poland and brushed aside the national movements. Equally doctrinaire is the attitude of the Polish Social-Democrats, who break up the international front of struggle against the social-imperialists, and (objectively) help the latter by their vacillations on the question of annexations. For it is precisely the international front of proletarian struggle that has changed in relation to the concrete position of the small nations: at that time (1848–71) the small nations were important as the potential allies either of “Western democracy” and the revolutionary nations, or of tsarism; now (1898–1914) that is no longer so; today they are important as one of the nutritive media of the parasitism and, consequently, the social-imperialism of the “dominant nations”. The important thing is not whether one-fiftieth or one-hundredth of the small nations are liberated before the socialist revolution, but the fact that in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into two international camps, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant-nation bourgeoisie—obtained, among other things, from the double or triple exploitation of small nations—while the other cannot liberate itself without liberating the small nations, without educating the masses in an anti-chauvinist, i.e., anti-annexationist, i.e., “self-determinationist”, spirit.

This, the most important aspect of the question, is ignored by our Polish comrades, who do not view

things from the key position in the epoch of imperialism, the standpoint of the division of the international proletariat into two camps.

Here are some other concrete examples of their Proudhonism: (1) their attitude to the Irish rebellion of 1916, of which later: (2) the declaration in the theses (11, 3, end of S. 3) that the slogan of socialist revolution “must not be overshadowed by anything”. The idea that the slogan of socialist revolution can be “overshadowed” by linking it up with a consistently revolutionary position on all questions, including the national question, is certainly profoundly anti-Marxist.

The Polish Social-Democrats consider our programme “national reformist”. Compare these two practical proposals: (1) for autonomy (Polish theses, III, 4), and (2) for freedom to secede. It is in this, and in this alone, that our programmes differ! And is it not clear that it is precisely the first programme that is reformist and not the second? A reformist change is one which leaves intact the foundations of the power of the ruling class and is merely a concession leaving its power unimpaired. A revolutionary change undermines the foundations of power. A reformist national programme does not abolish all the privileges of the ruling nation; it does not establish complete equality; it does not abolish national oppression in all its forms. An “autonomous” nation does not enjoy rights equal to those of the “ruling” nation; our Polish comrades could not have failed to notice this had they not (like

our old Economists) obstinately avoided making an analysis of political concepts and categories. Until 1905 autonomous Norway, as a part of Sweden, enjoyed the widest autonomy, but she was not Sweden's equal. Only by her free secession was her equality manifested in practice and proved (and let us add in parenthesis that: it was this free secession that created the basis for a more intimate and more democratic association, founded on equality of rights). As long as Norway was merely autonomous, the Swedish aristocracy had one additional privilege; and secession did not "mitigate" this privilege (the essence of reformism lies in mitigating an evil and not in destroying it), but eliminated it altogether (the principal criterion of the revolutionary character of a programme).

Incidentally, autonomy, as a reform, differs in principle from freedom to Recede, as a revolutionary measure. This is unquestionable. But as everyone knows, in practice a reform is often merely a step towards revolution. It is autonomy that enables a nation forcibly retained within the boundaries of a given state to crystallize into a nation, to gather, assess and organize its forces, and to select the most opportune moment for a declaration ... in the "Norwegian" spirit: We, the autonomous diet of such-and-such a nation, or of such-and-such a territory, declare that the Emperor of all the Russias has ceased to be King of Poland, etc. The usual "objection" to this is that such questions are decided by wars and not by declarations. True: in the vast majority of cases they are

decided by wars (just as questions of the form of government of big states are decided, in the vast majority of cases, only by wars and revolutions). However, it would do no harm to reflect whether such an "objection" to the political programme of a revolutionary party is logical. Are we opposed to wars and revolutions for what is just and beneficial to the proletariat, for democracy and socialism?

"But we cannot be in favor of a war between great nations, in favor of the slaughter of twenty million people for the sake of the problematical liberation of a small nation with a population of perhaps ten or twenty millions!" Of course not! And it does not mean that we throw complete national equality out of our Programme; it means that the democratic interests of one country must be subordinated to the democratic interests of several and all countries. Let us assume that between two great monarchies there is a little monarchy whose kinglet is "hound" by blood and other ties to the monarchs of both neighboring countries. Let us further assume that the declaration of a republic in the little country and the expulsion of its monarch would in practice lead to a war between the two neighboring big countries for the restoration of that or another monarch in the little country. There is no doubt that all international Social-Democracy, as well as the really internationalist section of Social-Democracy in the little country, would be against substituting a republic for the monarchy in this case. The substitution of a republic for a monarchy is not an

absolute, but one of the democratic demands, subordinate to the interests of democracy (and still more, of course, to those of the socialist proletariat) as a whole. A case like this would in all probability not give rise to the slightest disagreement among Social-Democrats in any country. But if any Social-Democrat were to propose on these grounds that the demand for a republic be deleted altogether from the programme of international Social-Democracy, he would certainly be regarded as quite mad. He would be told that after all one must not forget the elementary logical difference between the general and the particular.

This example brings us, from a somewhat different angle, to the question of the internationalist education of the working class. Can such education—on the necessity and urgent importance of which differences of opinion among the Zimmerwald Left are inconceivable—be concretely identical in great, oppressor nations and in small, oppressed nations, in annexing nations and in annexed nations?

Obviously not. The way to the common goal—complete equality, the closest association and the eventual amalgamation of all nations—obviously runs along different routes in each concrete case, as, let us say, the way to a point in the centre of this page runs left from one edge and right, from the opposite edge. If a Social-Democrat from a great, oppressing, annexing nation, while advocating the amalgamation of nations in general, were for one moment to forget that “his”

Nicholas II, "his" Wilhelm, George, Poincare, etc., also stand for amalgamation with small nations (by means of annexations)—Nicholas II for "amalgamation" with Galicia, Wilhelm II for "amalgamation" with Belgium, etc.—such a Social-Democrat would be a ridiculous doctrinaire in theory and an abettor of imperialism in practice.

In the internationalist education of the workers of the oppressor countries, emphasis must necessarily be laid on their advocating freedom for the oppressed countries to secede and their fighting for it. Without this there can be no internationalism. It is our right and duty to treat every Social-Democrat of an oppressor nation who fails to conduct such propaganda as a scoundrel and an imperialist. This is an absolute demand, even where the chance of secession being possible and "practicable" before the introduction of socialism is only one in a thousand.

It is our duty to teach the workers to be "indifferent" to national distinctions. There is no doubt about that. But it must not be the indifference of the annexationists. A member of an oppressor nation must be "indifferent" to whether small nations belong to his state or to a neighboring state, or to themselves, according to where their sympathies lie: without such "indifference" he is not a Social Democrat. To be an internationalist Social-Democrat one must not think only of one's own nation, but place above it the interests of all nations, their common liberty and

equality. Everyone accepts this in "theory" but displays an annexationist indifference in practice. There is the root of the evil.

On the other hand, a Social-Democrat from a small nation must emphasize in his agitation the second word of our general formula: "voluntary integration" of nations. He may, without failing in his duties as an internationalist, be in favor of both the political independence of his nation and its integration with the neighboring state of X, Y, Z, etc. But in all cases, he must fight against small-nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation, consider the whole and the general, subordinate the particular to the general interest.

People who have not gone into the question thoroughly think that it is "contradictory" for the Social-Democrats of oppressor nations to insist on the "freedom to secede", while Social-Democrats of oppressed nations insist on the "freedom to integrate". However, a little reflection will show that there is not, and cannot be, any other road to internationalism and the amalgamation of nations, any other road from the given situation to this goal.

And now we come to the specific position of Dutch and Polish Social Democrats.

#### 8. The Specific and the General in the Position of the Dutch and Polish Social-Democrat Internationalists



There is not the slightest doubt that the Dutch and Polish Marxists who oppose self-determination are among the best revolutionary and internationalist elements in international Social-Democracy. How can it be then that their theoretical arguments as we have seen, are a mass of errors? There is not a single correct general argument, nothing but imperialist Economism!

It is not at all due to the especially bad subjective qualities of the Dutch and Polish comrades but to the specific objective conditions in their countries. Both countries are: (1) small and helpless in the present-day "system" of great powers; (2) both are geographically situated between tremendously powerful imperialist plunderers engaged in the most bitter rivalry with each other (Britain and Germany; Germany and Russia); (3) in both there are terribly strong memories and traditions of the times when they themselves were great powers: Holland was once a colonial power greater than England, Poland was more cultured and was a stronger great power than Russia and Prussia; (4) to this day both retain their privileges consisting in the oppression of other peoples: the Dutch bourgeois owns the very wealthy Dutch East Indies; the Polish landed proprietor oppresses the Ukrainian and Byelorussian peasant; the Polish bourgeois, the Jew, etc.

The particularity comprised in the combination of these four points is not to be found in Ireland, Portugal (she was at one time annexed to Spain), Alsace,

Norway, Finland, the Ukraine, the Lettish and Byelorussian territories or many others. And it is this very peculiarity that is the real essence of the matter! When the Dutch and Polish Social-Democrats reason against self-determination, using general arguments, i.e., those that concern imperialism in general, socialism in general, democracy in general, national oppression in general, we may truly say that they wallow in mistakes. But one has only to discard this obviously erroneous shell of general arguments and examine the essence of the question from the standpoint of the specific conditions obtaining in Holland and Poland for their particular position to become comprehensible and quite legitimate. It may be said, without any fear of sounding paradoxical, that when the Dutch and Polish Marxists battle against self-determination they do not say quite what they mean, or, to put it another way, mean quite what they say.

We have already quoted one example in our theses. Gorter is against the self-determination of his own country but in favor of self-determination for the Dutch East Indies, oppressed as they are by "his" nation! Is it any wonder that we see in him a sincerer internationalist and a fellow-thinker who is closer to us than those who recognize self-determination as verbally and hypocritically as Kautsky in Germany, and Trotsky and Martov in Russia? The general and fundamental principles of Marxism undoubtedly imply the duty to struggle for the freedom to secede for nations that are oppressed by "one's own" nation, but

they certainly do not require the independence specifically of Holland to be made a matter of paramount importance—Holland, which suffers most from her narrow, callous, selfish and stultifying seclusion: let the whole world burn, we stand aside from it all, “we” are satisfied with our old spoils and the rich “left-overs”, the Indies, “we” are not concerned with anything else!

Here is another example. Karl Radek, a Polish Social-Democrat, who has done particularly great service by his determined struggle for internationalism in German Social-Democracy since the outbreak of war, made a Furious attack on self-determination in an article entitled “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination” (*Lichtstrahlen*—Left Radical monthly prohibited by the Prussian censor, edited by J. Borchardt—1915, December 5, Third Year of Publication, No. 3). He quotes, incidentally, only Dutch and Polish authorities in his support and propounds, amongst others, the argument that self-determination fosters the idea that “it is allegedly the duty of Social-Democrats to support any struggle for independence”.

From the standpoint of general theory this argument is outrageous, because it is clearly illogical: first, no democratic demand can fail to give rise to abuses, unless the specific is subordinated to the general; we are not obliged to support either “any” struggle for independence or “any” republican or anti-clerical

movement. Secondly, no formula for the struggle against national oppression can fail to suffer from the same "shortcoming". Radek himself in *Berner Tagwacht* used the formula (1915, Issue 253): "Against old and new annexations." Any Polish nationalist will legitimately "deduce" from this formula: "Poland is an annexment, I am against annexations, i.e., I am for the independence of Poland." Or I recall Rosa Luxemburg saying in an article written in 1908, that the formula: "against national oppression" was quite adequate. But any Polish nationalist would say—and quite justly—that annexation is one of the forms of national oppression, consequently, etc.

However, take Poland's specific conditions in place of these general arguments: her independence today is "impracticable" without wars or revolutions. To be in favor of an all-European war merely for the sake of restoring Poland is to be a nationalist of the worst sort, and to place the interests of a small number of Poles above those of the hundreds of millions of people who suffer from war. Such, indeed, are the "Fracy" (the Right wing of the P.S.P.) who are socialists only in word and compared with whom the Polish Social-Democrats are a thousand times right. To raise the question of Poland's independence today, with the existing alignment of the neighboring imperialist powers, is really to run after a will-o'-the-wisp, plunge into narrowminded nationalism and forget the necessary premise of an all-European or at least a Russian and a German revolution. To have put

forward in 1908–14 freedom of coalition in Russia as an independent slogan would also have meant running after a will-o'-the-wisp, and would, objectively, have helped the Stolypin Labour party (now the Potresov-Gvozdyov party, which, incidentally, is the same thing). But it would be madness to remove freedom of coalition in general from the programme of Social-Democracy!

A third and, perhaps, the most important example. We read in the Polish theses (III, end of 82) that the idea of an independent Polish buffer state is opposed on the grounds that it is an “inane utopia of small impotent groups. Put into effect, it would mean the creation of a tiny fragment of a Polish state that would be a military colony of one or another group of Great Powers, a plaything of their military or economic interests, an area exploited by foreign capital, and a battlefield in future war”. This is all very true when used as an argument against the slogan of Polish independence today, because even a revolution in Poland alone would change nothing and would only divert the attention of the masses in Poland from the main thing—the connection between their struggle and that of the Russian and German proletariat. It is not a paradox but a fact that today the Polish proletariat as such can help the cause of socialism and freedom, including the freedom of Poland, only by joint struggle with the proletariat of the neighboring countries, against the narrow Polish nationalists. The great historical service rendered by the Polish Social-

Democrats in the struggle against the nationalists cannot possibly be denied.

But these same arguments, which are true from the standpoint of Poland's specific conditions in the present epoch, are manifestly untrue in the general form in which they are presented. So long as there are wars, Poland will always remain a battlefield in wars between Germany and Russia, but this is no argument against greater political liberty (and, therefore, against political independence) in the periods between wars. The same applies to the arguments about exploitation by foreign capital and Poland's role as a plaything of foreign interests. The Polish Social-Democrats cannot, at the moment, raise the slogan of Poland's independence, for the Poles, as proletarian internationalists, can do nothing about it without stooping, like the "Fracy", to humble servitude to one of the imperialist monarchies. But it is not indifferent to the Russian and German workers whether Poland is independent, they take part in annexing her (and that would mean educating the Russian and German workers and peasants in the basest turpitude and their consent to play the part of executioner of other peoples).

The situation is, indeed, bewildering, but there is a way out in which all participants would remain internationalists: the Russian and German Social-Democrats by demanding for Poland unconditional "freedom to secede"; the Polish Social-Democrats by

working for the unity of the proletarian struggle in both small and big countries without putting forward the slogan of Polish independence for the given epoch or the given period.

#### 8. Engels Letter to Kautsky

In his pamphlet *Socialism and Colonial Politics* (Berlin, 1907), Kautsky, who was then still a Marxist, published a letter written to him by Engels, dated September 12, 1882, which is extremely interesting in relation to the question under discussion. Here is the principal part of the letter.

“In my opinion the colonies proper, i.e., the countries occupied by a European population—Canada, the Cape, Australia—will all become independent; on the other hand, the countries inhabited by a native population, which are simply subjugated—India, Algeria, the Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish possessions—must be taken over for the time being by the proletariat and led as rapidly as possible towards independence. How this process will develop is difficult to say. India will perhaps, indeed very probably, make a revolution, and as a proletariat in process of self-emancipation cannot conduct any colonial wars, it would have to be allowed to run its course; it would not pass off without all sorts of destruction, of course, but that sort of thing is inseparable from all revolutions. The same might also take place elsewhere, e.g., in Algeria and Egypt, and would certainly be the best thing for us. We shall have

enough to do at home. Once Europe is reorganized, and North America, that will furnish such colossal power and such an example that the semi-civilized countries will of themselves follow in their wake; economic needs, if anything, will see to that. But as to what social and political phases these countries will then have to pass through before they likewise arrive at socialist organization, I think we today can advance only rather idle hypotheses. One thing alone is certain: the victorious proletariat can force no blessings of any kind upon any foreign nation without undermining its own victory by so doing. Which of course by no means excludes defensive wars of various kinds....”

Engels does not at all suppose that the “economic” alone will directly remove all difficulties. An economic revolution will be a stimulus to all peoples to strive for socialism; but at the same time revolutions— against the socialist state—and wars are possible. Politics will inevitably adapt themselves to the economy, but not immediately or smoothly, not simply, not directly. Engels mentions as “certain” only one, absolutely internationalist, principle, and this he applies to all “foreign nations”, i.e., not to colonial nations only: to force blessings upon them would mean to undermine the victory of the proletariat.

Just because the proletariat has carried out a social revolution it will not become holy and immune from errors and weaknesses. But it will be inevitably led to



realize this truth by possible errors (and selfish interest—attempts to saddle others).

We Of the Zimmerwald Left all hold the same conviction as Kautsky, for example, held before his desertion of Marxism for the defense of chauvinism in 1914, namely, that the socialist revolution is quite possible in the very near future—"any day", as Kautsky himself once put it. National antipathies will not disappear so quickly: the hatred—and perfectly legitimate hatred—of an oppressed nation for its oppressor will last for a while; it will evaporate only after the victory of socialism and after the final establishment of completely democratic relations between nations. If we are to be faithful to socialism we must even now educate the masses in the spirit of internationalism, which is impossible in oppressor nations without advocating freedom of secession for oppressed nations.

#### 10. The Irish Rebellion of 1916

Our theses were written before the outbreak of this rebellion, which must be the touchstone of our theoretical views.

The views of the opponents of self-determination lead to the conclusion that the vitality of small nations oppressed by imperialism has already been sapped, that they cannot play any role against imperialism, that support of their purely national aspirations will lead to

nothing, etc. The imperialist war of 1914–16 has provided facts which refute such conclusions.

The war proved to be an epoch of crisis for the West-European nations, and for imperialism as a whole. Every crisis discards the conventionalities, tears away the outer wrappings, sweeps away the obsolete and reveals the underlying springs and forces. What has it revealed from the standpoint of the movement of oppressed nations! In the colonies there have been a number of attempts at rebellion, which the oppressor nations, naturally did all they could to hide by means of a military censorship. Nevertheless, it is known that in Singapore the British brutally suppressed a mutiny Among their Indian troops; that there were attempts at rebellion in French Annam (see Nashe Slovo) and in the German Cameroons (see the Junius pamphlet); that in Europe, on the one hand, there was a rebellion in Ireland, which the “freedom-loving” English, who did not dare to extend conscription to Ireland, suppressed by executions, and, on the other, the Austrian Government passed the death sentence on the deputies of the Czech Diet “for treason”, and shot whole Czech regiments for the same “crime”.

This list is, of course, far from complete. Nevertheless, it proves that, owing to the crisis of imperialism, the flames of national revolt have flared up both in the colonies and in Europe, and that national sympathies and antipathies have manifested themselves in spite of the Draconian threats and measures of repression. All

this before the crisis of imperialism hit its peak; the power of the imperialist bourgeoisie was yet to be undermined (this may be brought about by a war of "attrition" but has not yet happened) and the proletarian movements in the imperialist countries were still very feeble. What will happen when the war has caused complete exhaustion, or when, in one state at least, the power of the bourgeoisie has been shaken under the blows of proletarian struggle, as that of tsarism in 1905?

On May 9, 1916, there appeared in *Berner Tagwacht* the organ of the Zimmerwald group, including some of the Leftists, an article on the Irish rebellion entitled "Their Song Is Over" and signed with the initials K. R. It described the Irish rebellion as being nothing more nor less than a "putsch", for, as the author argued, "the Irish question was an agrarian one", the peasants had been pacified by reforms, and the nationalist movement remained only a "purely urban, petty bourgeois movement, which, notwithstanding the sensation it caused, had not much social backing".

It is not surprising that this monstrously doctrinaire and pedantic assessment coincided with that of a Russian national-liberal Cadet, Mr. A. Kulisher (*Rech* No. 102, April 15, 1916), who also labeled the rebellion "the Dublin putsch".

It is to be hoped that, in accordance with the adage, "it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good", many

comrades, who were not aware of the morass they were sinking into by repudiating “self-determination” and by treating the national movements of small nations with disdain, will have their eyes opened by the “accidental” coincidence of opinion held by a Social-Democrat and a representative of the imperialist bourgeoisie!!

The term “putsch”, in its scientific sense, may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses. The centuries-old Irish national movement, having passed through various stages and combinations of class interest, manifested itself, in particular, in a mass Irish National Congress in America (Vorwärts, March 20, 1916) which called for Irish independence; it also manifested itself in street fighting conducted by a section of the urban petty bourgeoisie and a section of the workers after a long period of mass agitation, demonstrations, suppression of newspapers, etc. Whoever calls such a rebellion a “putsch” is either a hardened reactionary, or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon.

To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious

proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.-to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up in one place and says, "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a "putsch".

Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But objectively, the mass movement was breaking the back of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason the class-conscious workers led it.

The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it— without such

participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But objectively they will attack capital, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for difficult reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately “purge” itself of pettybourgeois slag.

Social-Democracy, we read in the Polish theses (I, 4), “must utilize the struggle of the young colonial bourgeoisie against European imperialism in order to sharpen the revolutionary crisis in Europe”. (Authors’ italics.)

Is it not clear that it is least of all permissible to contrast Europe to the colonies in this respect? The struggle of the oppressed nations in Europe, a struggle capable of going all the way to insurrection and street fighting, capable of breaking down the iron discipline of the army and martial law, will “sharpen the revolutionary crisis in Europe” to an infinitely greater degree than a much more developed rebellion in a remote colony. A

blow delivered against the power of the English imperialist bourgeoisie by a rebellion in Ireland is a hundred times more significant politically than a blow of equal force delivered in Asia or in Africa.

The French chauvinist press recently reported the publication in Belgium of the eightieth issue of an illegal journal, *Free Belgium*. Of course, the chauvinist press of France very often lies, but this piece of news seems to be true. Whereas chauvinist and Kautskyite German Social-Democracy has failed to establish a free press for itself during the two years of war, and has meekly borne the yoke of military censorship (only the Left Radical elements, to their credit be it said, have published pamphlets and manifestos, in spite of the censorship)—an oppressed civilized nation has reacted to a military oppression unparalleled in ferocity by establishing an organ of revolutionary protest! The dialectics of history are such that 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 anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene.

The general staffs in the current war are doing their utmost to utilize any national and revolutionary movement in the enemy camp: the Germans utilize the Irish rebellion, the French—the Czech movement, etc. They are acting quite correctly from their own point of view. A serious war would not be treated seriously if

advantage were not taken of the enemy's slightest weakness and if every opportunity that presented itself were not seized upon, the more, so since it is impossible to know beforehand at what moment, where, and with what force some powder magazine will "explode". We would be very poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of Liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilize every popular movement against every single disaster imperialism brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis. If we were, on the one hand, to repeat in a thousand keys the declaration that we are "opposed" to all national oppression and, on the other, to describe the heroic revolt of the most mobile and enlightened section of certain classes in an oppressed nation against its oppressors as a "putsch", we should be sinking to the same level of stupidity as the Kautskyites.

It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely, before the European revolt of the proletariat had had time to mature. Capitalism is not so harmoniously built that the various sources of rebellion can immediately merge of their own accord, without reverses and defeats. On the other hand, the very fact that revolts do break out at different times, in different places, and are of different kinds, guarantees wide scope and depth to the general movement; but it is only in premature, individual, sporadic and therefore unsuccessful, revolutionary movements that the masses gain experience, acquire knowledge, gather strength, and get to know their real leaders, the



socialist proletarians, and in this way prepare for the general onslaught, just as certain strikes, demonstrations, local and national, mutinies in the army, outbreaks among the peasantry, etc., prepared the way for the general onslaught in 1905.

## Critical Remarks on the National Question

Lenin

### 4. "CULTURAL-NATIONAL AUTONOMY"

The question of the "national culture" slogan is of enormous importance to Marxists, not only because it determines the ideological content of all our propaganda and agitation on the national question, as distinct from bourgeois propaganda, but also because the entire programme of the much-discussed cultural national autonomy is based on this slogan.

The main and fundamental flaw in this programme is that it aims at introducing the most refined, most absolute and most extreme nationalism. The gist of this programme is that every citizen registers as belonging to a particular nation, and every nation constitutes a legal entity with the right to impose compulsory taxation on its members, with national parliaments (Diets) and national secretaries of state (ministers).

Such an idea, applied to the national question, resembles Proudhon's idea, as applied to capitalism. Not abolishing capitalism and its basis—commodity production—but purging that basis of abuses, of excrescences, and so forth; not abolishing exchange and exchange value, but, on the contrary, making it "constitutional", universal, absolute, "fair", and free of

fluctuations, crises and abuses—such was Proudhon's idea.

Just as Proudhon was petty-bourgeois, and his theory converted exchange and commodity production into an absolute category and exalted them as the acme of perfection, so is the theory and programme of “cultural-national autonomy” petty bourgeois, for it converts bourgeois nationalism into an absolute category, exalts it as the acme of perfection, and purges it of violence, injustice, etc.

**Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the “most just”, “purest”, most refined and civilized brand.** In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity, a unity that is growing before our eyes with every mile of railway line that is built, with every international trust, and every workers' association that is formed (an association that is international in its economic activities as well as in its ideas and aims).

The principle of nationality is historically inevitable in bourgeois society and, taking this society into due account, the Marxist fully recognizes the historical legitimacy of national movements. But to prevent this recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements, in order that this recognition may not lead

to bourgeois ideology obscuring proletarian consciousness.

The awakening of the masses from feudal lethargy, and their struggle against all national oppression, for the sovereignty of the people, of the nation, are progressive. Hence, it is the Marxist's bounden duty to stand for the most resolute and consistent democratism on all aspects of the national question. This task is largely a negative one. But this is the limit the proletariat can go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the "positive" activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism.

To throw off the feudal yoke, all national oppression, and all privileges enjoyed by any particular nation or language, is the imperative duty of the proletariat as a democratic force and is certainly in the interests of the proletarian class struggle, which is obscured and retarded by bickering on the national question. But to go beyond these strictly limited and definite historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie. There is a border-line here, which is often very slight and which the Bundists and Ukrainian nationalist socialists completely lose sight of.

**Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course!** Fight for any kind of national development, for "national culture" in general?—Of course not. The economic development of capitalist society presents us with

examples of immature national movements all over the world, examples of the formation of big nations out of a number of small ones, or to the detriment of some of the small ones, and also examples of the assimilation of nations. The development of nationality in general is the principle of bourgeois nationalism; hence the exclusiveness of bourgeois nationalism, hence the endless national bickering. The proletariat, however, far from undertaking to uphold the national development of every nation, on the contrary, warns the masses against such illusions, stands for the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse and welcomes every kind of assimilation of nations, except that which is founded on force or privilege.

Consolidating nationalism within a certain “justly” delimited sphere, “constitutionalizing” nationalism, and securing the separation of all nations from one another by means of a special state institution— such is the ideological foundation and content of cultural-national autonomy. This idea is thoroughly bourgeois and thoroughly false. The proletariat cannot support any consecration of nationalism; on the contrary, it supports everything that helps to obliterate national distinctions and remove national barriers; it supports everything that makes the ties between nationalities closer and closer or tends to merge nations. To act differently means siding with reactionary nationalist philistinism.

When, at their Congress in Bruunn (in 1899), the Austrian Social Democrats discussed the plan for cultural-national autonomy, practically no attention was paid to a theoretical appraisal of that plan. It is, however, noteworthy that the following two arguments were levelled against this programme: (1) it would tend to strengthen clericalism; (2) "its result would be the perpetuation of chauvinism, its introduction into every small community, into every small group"

(p. 92 of the official report of the Bruunn Congress, in German. A Russian translation was published by the Jewish nationalist party, the J.S.L.P.).

There can be no doubt that "national culture", in the ordinary sense of the term, i. e., schools, etc., is at present under the predominant influence of the clergy and the bourgeois chauvinists in all countries in the world. When the Bundists, in advocating "cultural-national" autonomy, say that the constituting of nations will keep the class struggle within them clean of all extraneous considerations, then that is manifest and ridiculous sophistry. 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 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.

On the boards of joint-stock companies we find capitalists of different nations sitting together in complete harmony. At the factories workers of different nations work side by side. In any really serious and profound political issue sides are taken according to classes, not nations. With drawing school education and the like from state control and placing it under the control of the nations is in effect an attempt to separate from economics, which unites the nations, the most highly, so to speak, ideological sphere of social life, the sphere in which “pure” national culture or the national cultivation of clericalism and chauvinism has the freest play.

**In practice, the plan for “extra-territorial” or “cultural national” autonomy could mean only one thing: the division of educational affairs according to nationality, i.e., the introduction of national curias in school affairs.** Sufficient thought to the real significance of the famous Bund plan will enable one to realise how utterly reactionary it is even from the standpoint of democracy, let alone from that of the proletarian class struggle for socialism.

A single instance and a single scheme for the “nationalisation” of the school system will make this point abundantly clear. In the United States of America the division of the States into Northern and Southern holds to this day in all departments of life; the former possess the greatest traditions of freedom and of struggle against the slave-owners; the latter possess the greatest traditions of slave ownership, survivals of persecution of the Negroes, who are economically oppressed and culturally backward (44 per cent of Negroes are illiterate, and 6 per cent of whites), and so forth. In the Northern States Negro children attend the same schools as white children do. In the South there are separate “national”, or racial, whichever you please, schools for Negro children. I think that this is the sole instance of actual “nationalisation” of schools.

In Eastern Europe there exists a country where things like the Beilis case[4] are still possible, and Jews are condemned by the Purishkeviches to a condition worse than that of the Negroes. In that country a scheme for nationalising Jewish schools was recently mooted in the Ministry. Happily, this reactionary utopia is no more likely to be realised than the utopia of the Austrian petty bourgeoisie, who have despaired of achieving consistent democracy or of putting an end to national bickering, and have invented for the nations school-education compartments to keep them from bickering over the distribution of schools ... but have “constituted” themselves for an eternal bickering of one “national culture” with another.



In Austria, the idea of cultural-national autonomy has remained largely a flight of literary fancy, which the Austrian Social-Democrats themselves have not taken seriously. In Russia, however, it has been incorporated in the programmes of all the Jewish bourgeois parties, and of several petty-bourgeois, opportunist elements in the different nations—for example, the Bundists, the liquidators in the Caucasus, and the conference of Russian national parties of the Left-Narodnik trend. (This conference, we will mention parenthetically, took place in 1907, its decision being adopted with abstention on the part of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries [5] and the P.S.P., [6] the Polish social-patriots. Abstention from voting is a method surprisingly characteristic of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and P.S.P., when they want to show their attitude towards a most important question of principle in the sphere of the national programme!)

In Austria it was Otto Bauer, the principal theoretician of “culturalnational autonomy”, who devoted a special chapter of his book to prove that such a programme cannot possibly be proposed for the Jews. In Russia, however, it is precisely among the Jews that all the bourgeois parties—and the Bund which echoes them—have adopted this programme.[1] What does this go to show? It goes to show that history, through the political practice of another state, has exposed the absurdity of Bauer’s invention, in exactly the same way as the Russian Bernsteinians (Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky, Berdayev and Co.), through their rapid

evolution from Marxism to liberalism, have exposed the real ideological content of the German Bernsteinism.[7]

Neither the Austrian nor the Russian Social-Democrats have incorporated "cultural-national" autonomy in their programme. However, the Jewish bourgeois parties in a most backward country, and a number of petty-bourgeois, so-called socialist groups have adopted it in order to spread ideas of bourgeois nationalism among the working class in a refined form. This fact speaks for itself.

Since we have had to touch upon the Austrian programme on the national question, we must reassert a truth which is often distorted by the Bundists. At the Bruunn Congress a pureprogramme of "cultural-national autonomy" was presented. This was the programme of the South-Slav Social Democrats, § 2 of which reads: "Every nation living in Austria, irrespective of the territory occupied by its members, constitutes an autonomous group which manages all its national (language and cultural) affairs quite independently." This programme was supported, not only by Kristan but by the influential Ellenbogen. But it was withdrawn; not a single vote was cast for it. A territorialist programme was adopted, i. e., one that did not create any national groups "irrespective of the territory occupied by the members of the nation".

Clause 3 of the adopted programme reads: "The self-governing regions of one and the same nation shall jointly form a nationally united association, which shall manage its national affairs on an absolutely autonomous basis" (cf. *Prosveshcheniye*, 1913, No. 4, p. 28[8]). Clearly, this compromise programme is wrong too. An example will illustrate this. The German colonists' community in Saratov Gubernia, plus the German working-class suburb of Riga or Lodz, plus the German housing estate near St. Petersburg, etc., would constitute a "nationally united association" of Germans in Russia. Obviously the Social-Democrats cannot demand such a thing or enforce such an association, although of course they do not in the least deny freedom of every kind of association, including associations of any communities of any nationality in a given state. The segregation, by a law of the state, of Germans, etc., in different localities and of different classes in Russia into a single German national association may be practised by anybody—priests, bourgeois or philistines, but not by Social-Democrats.

## **“PRACTICALITY” IN THE NATIONAL QUESTION**

Lenin

### **The Right of Nations to Self-Determination**

Rosa Luxemburg’s argument that of our Programme contains nothing “practical” has been seized upon by the opportunists. Rosa Luxemburg is so delighted with this argument that in some parts of her article this “slogan” is repeated eight times on a single page.

She writes: “gives no practical lead on the day-by-day policy of the proletariat, no practical solution of national problems”.

Let us examine this argument, which elsewhere is formulated in such a way that it makes §9 look quite meaningless, or else commits us to support all national aspirations.

What does the demand for “practicality” in the national question mean?

It means one of three things: support for all national aspirations; the answer “yes” or “no” to the question of secession by any nation; or that national demands are in general immediately “practicable”.

Let us examine all three possible meanings of the demand for “practicality”.

The bourgeoisie, which naturally assumes the leadership at the start of every national movement, says that support for all national aspirations is practical. However, the proletariat's policy in the national question (as in all others) supports the bourgeoisie only in a certain direction, but it never coincides with the bourgeoisie's policy. The working class supports the bourgeoisie only in order to secure national peace (which the bourgeoisie cannot bring about completely and which can be achieved only with complete democracy), in order to secure equal rights and to create the best conditions for the class struggle. Therefore, it is in opposition to the practicality of the bourgeoisie that the proletarians advance their principles in the national question; they always give the bourgeoisie only conditional support. What every bourgeoisie is out for in the national question is either privileges for its own nation, or exceptional advantages for it; this is called being "practical". The proletariat is opposed to all privileges, to all exclusiveness. To demand that it should be "practical" means following the lead of the bourgeoisie, falling into opportunism.

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 practice it leads to subordinating 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. Theoretically, you cannot say in advance whether the bourgeois democratic revolution will end in a given nation seceding from another nation, or in its equality with the latter; in either case, the important thing for the proletariat is to ensure the development of its class. For the bourgeoisie it is important to hamper this development by pushing the aims of its “own” nation before those of the proletariat. That is why the proletariat confines itself, so to speak, 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.

This may not be “practical”, but it is in effect the best guarantee for the achievement of the most democratic of all possible solutions. The proletariat needs only such guarantees, whereas the bourgeoisie of every nation requires guarantees for its own interest, regardless of the position of (or the possible disadvantages to) other nations.

The bourgeoisie is most of all interested in the “feasibility” of a given demand—hence the invariable 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.

This may not be “practical” as far as the opportunists are concerned, but it is the only real guarantee, the guarantee of the greater national equality and peace, despite the feudal landlords and the nationalist bourgeoisie.

The whole task of the proletarians in the national question is “unpractical” from the standpoint of the nationalist bourgeoisie of every nation, because the proletarians, opposed as they are to nationalism of every kind, demand “abstract” equality; they demand, as a matter of principle, that there should be no privileges, however slight. Failing to grasp this, Rosa Luxemburg, by her misguided eulogy of practicality, has opened the door wide for the opportunists, and especially for opportunist concessions to Great-Russian nationalism.

Why Great-Russian? Because the Great Russians in Russia are an oppressor nation, and opportunism in the national question will of course find expression among oppressed nations otherwise than among oppressor nations.

On the plea that its demands are “practical”, the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations will call upon the proletariat to support its aspirations unconditionally. The most practical procedure is to say a plain “yes” in favour of the secession of a particular nation rather than in favour of all nations having the right to secede!

The proletariat is opposed to such practicality. While recognizing equality and equal rights to a national state, it values above all and places foremost the alliance of the proletarians of all nations, and assesses any national demand, any national separation, from the angle of the workers' class struggle. This call for practicality is in fact merely a call for uncritical acceptance of bourgeois aspirations.

By supporting the right to secession, we are told, you are supporting the bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed nations. This is what Rosa Luxemburg says, and she is echoed by Semkovsky, the opportunist, who incidentally is the only representative of liquidationist ideas on this question, in the liquidationist newspaper!

Our reply to this is: No, it is to the bourgeoisie that a "practical" solution of this question is important. To the workers the important thing is to distinguish the principles of the two trends. Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, we stand against. We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation.



If, in our political agitation, we fail to advance and advocate the slogan of the right to secession, we shall play into the hands, not only of the bourgeoisie, but also of the feudal landlords and the absolutism of the oppressor nation. Kautsky long ago used this argument against Rosa Luxemburg, and the argument is indisputable. When, in her anxiety not to “assist” the nationalist bourgeoisie of Poland, Rosa Luxemburg rejects the right to secession in the programme of the Marxists in Russia, she is in fact assisting the Great-Russian Black Hundreds. She is in fact assisting opportunist tolerance of the privileges (and worse than privileges) of the Great Russians.

Carried away by the struggle against nationalism in Poland, Rosa Luxemburg has forgotten the nationalism of the Great Russians, although it is this nationalism that is the most formidable at the present time. It is a nationalism that is more feudal than bourgeois and is the principal obstacle to democracy and to the proletarian struggle. The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support, At the same time we strictly distinguish it from the tendency towards national exclusiveness; we fight against the tendency of the Polish bourgeois to oppress the Jews, etc., etc.

This is “unpractical” from the standpoint of the bourgeois and the philistine, but it is the only policy in the national question that is practical, based on principles, and really promotes democracy, liberty and proletarian unity.

The recognition of the right to secession for all; the appraisal of each concrete question of secession from the point of view of removing all inequality, all privileges, and all exclusiveness.

Let us consider the position of an oppressor nation. Can a nation be free if it oppresses other nations? It cannot. The interests of the freedom of the Great-Russian population require a struggle against such oppression. The long, centuries-old history of the suppression of the movements of the oppressed nations, and the systematic propaganda in favour of such suppression coming from the “upper” classes have created enormous obstacles to the cause of freedom of the Great-Russian people itself, in the form of prejudices, etc.

The Great-Russian Black Hundreds deliberately foster these prejudices and encourage them. The Great-Russian bourgeoisie tolerates or condones them. The Great-Russian proletariat cannot achieve its own aims or clear the road to its freedom without systematically countering these prejudices.

In Russia, the creation of an independent national state remains, for the time being, the privilege of the Great-Russian nation alone. We, the Great-Russian proletarians, who defend no privileges whatever, do not defend this privilege either. We are fighting on the ground of a definite state; we unite the workers of all nations living in this state; we cannot vouch for any particular path of national development, for we are marching to our class goal along all possible paths.

However, we cannot move towards that goal unless we combat all nationalism and uphold the equality of the various nations. Whether the Ukraine, for example, is destined to form an independent state is a matter that will be determined by a thousand unpredictable factors. Without attempting idle “guesses”, we firmly uphold something that is beyond doubt: the right of the Ukraine to form such a state. We respect this right; we do not uphold the privileges of Great Russians with regard to Ukrainians; we educate the masses in the spirit of recognition of that right, in the spirit of rejecting state privileges for any nation.

In the leaps which all nations have made in the period of bourgeois revolutions, clashes and struggles over the right to a national state are possible and probable. We proletarians declare in advance that we are opposed to Great-Russian privileges, and this is what guides our entire propaganda and agitation.

In her quest for “practicality” Rosa Luxemburg has lost sight of the principal practical task both of the Great-Russian proletariat and of the proletariat of other nationalities: that of day-by-day agitation and propaganda against all state and national privileges, and for the right, the equal right of all nations, to their national state. This (at present) is the principal task in the national question, for only in this way can we defend the interests of democracy and the alliance of all proletarians of all nations on an equal footing.

This propaganda may be “unpractical” from the point of view of the Great-Russian oppressors, as well as from the point of view of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations (both demand a definite “yes” or “no” and accuse the Social-Democrats of being “vague”). In reality it is this propaganda, and this propaganda alone, that ensures the genuinely democratic, the genuinely socialist education of the masses. This is the only propaganda to ensure the greatest chances of national peace in Russia, should she remain a multi-national state, and the most peaceful (and for the proletarian class struggle, harmless) division into separate national states, should the question of such a division arise.

To explain this policy—the only proletarian policy—in the national question more concretely, we shall examine the attitude of Great-Russian liberalism towards the “self-determination of nations”, and the example of Norway’s secession from Sweden.

## Imperialism and the Split in Socialism

Lenin

Imperialism and the Split in Socialism.

Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata No. 2, December 1916.  
Collected Works, Volume 23

Is there any connection between imperialism and the monstrous and disgusting victory opportunism (in the form of social-chauvinism) has gained over the labour movement in Europe?

This is the fundamental question of modern socialism. And having in our Party literature fully established, first, the imperialist character of our era and of the present war [1], and, second, the inseparable historical connection between social-chauvinism and opportunism, as well as the intrinsic similarity of their political ideology, we can and must proceed to analyse this fundamental question.

We have to begin with as precise and full a definition of imperialism as possible. Imperialism is a specific historical stage of capitalism. Its specific character is threefold: imperialism is monopoly capitalism; parasitic, or decaying capitalism; moribund capitalism. The supplanting of free competition by monopoly is the fundamental economic feature, the quintessence of imperialism. Monopoly manifests itself in five

principal forms: (1) cartels, syndicates and trusts—the concentration of production has reached a degree which gives rise to these monopolistic associations of capitalists; (2) the monopolistic position of the big banks—three, four or five giant banks manipulate the whole economic life of America, France, Germany; (3) seizure of the sources of raw material by the trusts and the financial oligarchy (finance capital is monopoly industrial capital merged with bank capital); (4) the (economic) partition of the world by the international cartels has begun. There are already over one hundred such international cartels, which command the entire world market and divide it “amicably” among themselves—until war redivides it. The export of capital, as distinct from the export of commodities under non-monopoly capitalism, is a highly characteristic phenomenon and is closely linked with the economic and territorial-political partition of the world; (5) the territorial partition of the world (colonies) is completed.

Imperialism, as the highest stage of capitalism in America and Europe, and later in Asia, took final shape in the period 1898–1914. The Spanish-American War (1898), the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) and the economic crisis in Europe in 1900 are the chief historical landmarks in the new era of world history.

The fact that imperialism is parasitic or decaying capitalism is manifested first of all in the tendency to

decay, which is characteristic of every monopoly under the system of private ownership of the means of production. The difference between the democratic republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie is obliterated precisely because they are both rotting alive (which by no means precludes an extraordinarily rapid development of capitalism in individual branches of industry, in individual countries, and in individual periods). Secondly, the decay of capitalism is manifested in the creation of a huge stratum of rentiers, capitalists who live by "clipping coupons". In each of the four leading imperialist countries—England, U.S.A., France and Germany—capital in securities amounts to 100,000 or 150,000 million francs, from which each country derives an annual income of no less than five to eight thousand million. Thirdly, export of capital is parasitism raised to a high pitch. Fourthly, "finance capital strives for domination, not freedom". Political reaction all along the line is a characteristic feature of imperialism. Corruption, bribery on a huge scale and all kinds of fraud. Fifthly, the exploitation of oppressed nations—which is inseparably connected with annexations—and especially the exploitation of colonies by a handful of "Great" Powers, increasingly transforms the "civilised" world into a parasite on the body of hundreds of millions in the uncivilised nations. The Roman proletarian lived at the expense of society. Modern society lives at the expense of the modern proletarian. Marx specially stressed this profound observation of Sismondi.[7] Imperialism

somewhat changes the situation. A privileged upper stratum of the proletariat in the imperialist countries lives partly at the expense of hundreds of millions in the uncivilised nations.

It is clear why imperialism is moribund capitalism, capitalism in transition to socialism: monopoly, which grows out of capitalism, is already dying capitalism, the beginning of its transition to socialism. The tremendous socialisation of labour by imperialism (what its apologists-the bourgeois economists-call "interlocking") produces the same result.

Advancing this definition of imperialism brings us into complete contradiction to K. Kautsky, who refuses to regard imperialism as a "phase of capitalism" and defines it as a policy "preferred" by finance capital, a tendency of "industrial" countries to annex "agrarian" countries. [2] Kautsky's definition is thoroughly false from the theoretical standpoint. What distinguishes imperialism is the rule not of industrial capital, but of finance capital, the striving to annex not agrarian countries, particularly, but every kind of country. Kautsky divorces imperialist politics from imperialist economics, he divorces monopoly in politics from monopoly in economics in order to pave the way for his vulgar bourgeois reformism, such as "disarmament", "ultraimperialism" and similar nonsense. The whole purpose and significance of this theoretical falsity is to obscure the most profound contradictions of imperialism and thus justify the



theory of “unity” with the apologists of imperialism, the outright social-chauvinists and opportunists.

We have dealt at sufficient length with Kautsky’s break with Marxism on this point in *Sotsial-Demokrat* and *Kommunist*. Our Russian Kautskyites, the supporters of the Organising Committee (O.C.), headed by Axelrod and Spectator, including even Martov, and to a large degree Trotsky, preferred to maintain a discreet silence on the question of Kautskyism as a trend. They did not dare defend Kautsky’s war-time writings, confining themselves simply to praising Kautsky (Axelrod in his German pamphlet, which the Organising Committee has promised to publish in Russian) or to quoting Kautsky’s private letters (Spectator), in which he says he belongs to the opposition and jesuitically tries to nullify his chauvinist declarations.

It should be noted that Kautsky’s “conception” of imperialism— which is tantamount to embellishing imperialism—is a retrogression not only compared with Hilferding’s *Finance Capital* (no matter how assiduously Hilferding now defends Kautsky and “unity” with the social-chauvinists!) but also compared with the social-liberal J. A. Hobson. This English economist, who in no way claims to be a Marxist, defines imperialism, and reveals its contradictions, much more profoundly in a book published in 1902. This is what Hobson (in whose book may be found nearly all Kautsky’s pacifist and

“conciliatory” banalities) wrote on the highly important question of the parasitic nature of imperialism:

Two sets of circumstances, in Hobson’s opinion, weakened the power of the old empires: (1) “economic parasitism”, and (2) formation of armies from dependent peoples. “There is first the habit of economic parasitism, by which the ruling state has used its provinces, colonies, and dependencies in order to enrich its ruling class and to bribe its lower classes into acquiescence.” Concerning the second circumstance, Hobson writes:

“One of the strangest symptoms of the blindness of imperialism [this song about the “blindness” of imperialists comes more appropriately from the social-liberal Hobson than from the “Marxist” Kautsky] is the reckless indifference with which Great Britain, France, and other imperial nations are embarking on this perilous dependence. Great Britain has gone farthest. Most of the fighting by which we have won our Indian Empire has been done by natives; in India, as more recently in Egypt, great standing armies are placed under British commanders; almost all the fighting associated with our African dominions, except in the southern part, has been done for us by natives.”

The prospect of partitioning China elicited from Hobson the following economic appraisal: “The greater part of Western Europe might then assume the

appearance and character already exhibited by tracts of country in the South of England, in the Riviera, and in the tourist-ridden or residential parts of Italy and Switzerland, little clusters of wealthy aristocrats drawing dividends and pensions from the Far East, with a somewhat larger group of professional retainers and tradesmen and a larger body of personal servants and workers in the transport trade and in the final stages of production of the more perishable goods: all the main arterial industries would have disappeared, the staple foods and semi-manufactures flowing in as tribute from Asia and Africa.... We have foreshadowed the possibility of even a larger alliance of Western states, a European federation of Great Powers which, so far from forwarding the cause of world civilisation, might introduce the gigantic peril of a Western parasitism, a group of advanced industrial nations, whose upper classes drew vast tribute from Asia and Africa, with which they supported great tame masses of retainers, no longer engaged in the staple industries of agriculture and manufacture, but kept in the performance of personal or minor industrial services under the control of a new financial aristocracy. Let those who would scout such a theory [he should have said: prospect] as undeserving of consideration examine the economic and social condition of districts in Southern England today which are already reduced to this condition, and reflect upon the vast extension of such a system which might be rendered feasible by the subjection of China to the economic control of similar groups of financiers, investors [rentiers] and political

and business officials, draining the greatest potential reservoir of profit the world has ever known, in order to consume it in Europe. The situation is far too complex, the play of world forces far too incalculable, to render this or any other single interpretation of the future very probable; but the influences which govern the imperialism of Western Europe today are moving in this direction, and, unless counteracted or diverted, make towards such a consummation."

Hobson, the social-liberal, fails to see that this "counteraction" can be offered only by the revolutionary proletariat and only in the form of a social revolution. But then he is a social-liberal! Nevertheless, as early as 1902 he had an excellent insight into the meaning and significance of a "United States of Europe" (be it said for the benefit of Trotsky the Kautskyite!) and of all that is now being glossed over by the hypocritical Kautskyites of various countries, namely, that the opportunists (social-chauvinists) are working hand in glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie precisely towards creating an imperialist Europe on the backs of Asia and Africa, and that objectively the opportunists are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of a certain strata of the working class who have been bribed out of imperialist super profits and converted to watchdogs of capitalism and corruptors of the labour movement.

Both in articles and in the resolutions of our Party, we have repeatedly pointed to this most profound

connection, the economic connection, between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the opportunism which has triumphed (for long?) in the labour movement. And from this, incidentally, we concluded that a split with the social-chauvinists was inevitable. Our Kautskyites preferred to evade the question! Martov, for instance, uttered in his lectures a sophistry which in the Bulletin of the Organising Committee, Secretariat Abroad [9] (No. 4, April 10, 1916) is expressed as follows:

“...The cause of revolutionary Social-Democracy would be in a sad, indeed hopeless, plight if those groups of workers who in mental development approach most closely to the ‘intelligentsia’ and who are the most highly skilled fatally drifted away from it towards opportunism....”

By means of the silly word “fatally” and a certain sleight-of-hand, the fact is evaded that certain groups of workers have already drifted away to opportunism and to the imperialist bourgeoisie! And that is the very fact the sophists of the O.C. want to evade! They confine themselves to the “official optimism” the Kautskyite Hilferding and many others now flaunt: objective conditions guarantee the unity of the proletariat and the victory of the revolutionary trend! We, forsooth, are “optimists” with regard to the proletariat!

But in reality, all these Kautskyites—Hilferding, the O.C. supporters, Martov and Co.—are optimists... with regard to opportunism. That is the whole point!

The proletariat is the child of capitalism—of world capitalism, and not only of European capitalism, or of imperialist capitalism. On a world scale, fifty years sooner or fifty years later—measured on a world scale, this is a minor point—the “proletariat” of course “will be” united, and revolutionary Social-Democracy will “inevitably” be victorious within it. But that is not the point, Messrs. Kautskyites. The point is that at the present time, in the imperialist countries of Europe, you are fawning on the opportunists, who are alien to the proletariat as a class, who are the servants, the agents of the bourgeoisie and the vehicles of its influence, and unless the labour movement rids itself of them, it will remain a bourgeois labour movement. By advocating “unity” with the opportunists, with the Legiens and Davids, the Plekhanovs, the Chkhenkelis and Potresovs, etc., you are, objectively, defending the enslavement of the workers by the imperialist bourgeoisie with the aid of its best agents in the labour movement. The victory of revolutionary Social-Democracy on a world scale is absolutely inevitable, only it is moving and will move, is proceeding and will proceed, against you, it will be a victory over you.

These two trends, one might even say two parties, in the present-day labour movement, which in 1914–16 so obviously parted ways all over the world, were traced

by Engels and Marx in England throughout the course of decades, roughly from 1858 to 1892.

Neither Marx nor Engels lived to see the imperialist epoch of world capitalism, which began not earlier than 1898–1900. But it has been a peculiar feature of England that even in the middle of the nineteenth century she already revealed at least two major distinguishing features of imperialism: (1) vast colonies, and (2) monopoly profit (due to her monopoly position in the world market). In both respects England at that time was an exception among capitalist countries, and Engels and Marx, analyzing this exception, quite clearly and definitely indicated its connection with the (temporary) victory of opportunism in the English labour movement.

In a letter to Marx, dated October 7, 1858, Engels wrote: "...The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie. For a nation which exploits the whole world this is of course to a certain extent justifiable." In a letter to Sorge, dated September 21, 1872, Engels informs him that Hales kicked up a big row in the Federal Council of the International and secured a vote of censure on Marx for saying that "the English labour leaders had sold themselves". Marx wrote to Sorge on August 4, 1874: "As to the urban workers here [in England], it is a pity

that the whole pack of leaders did not get into Parliament. This would be the surest way of getting rid of the whole lot." In a letter to Marx, dated August 11, 1881, Engels speaks about "those very worst English trade unions which allow themselves to be led by men sold to, or at least paid by, the bourgeoisie." In a letter to Kautsky, dated September 12, 1882, Engels wrote: "You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general. There is no workers' party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies."

On December 7, 1889, Engels wrote to Sorge: "The most repulsive thing here [in England] is the bourgeois 'respectability', which has grown deep into the bones of the workers.... Even Tom Mann, whom I regard as the best of the lot, is fond of mentioning that he will be lunching with the Lord Mayor. If one compares this with the French, one realises, what a revolution is good for, after all." [10] In a letter, dated April 19, 1890: "But under the surface the movement [of the working class in England] is going on, is embracing ever wider sections and mostly just among the hitherto stagnant lowest [Engels's italics] strata. The day is no longer far off when this mass will suddenly find itself, when it will dawn upon it that it itself is this colossal mass in motion." On March 4, 1891: "The failure of the collapsed Dockers' Union; the 'old' conservative trade



unions, rich and therefore cowardly, remain lone on the field....” September 14, 1891: at the Newcastle Trade Union Congress the old unionists, opponents of the eight-hour day, were defeated “and the bourgeois papers recognise the defeat of the bourgeois labour party” (Engels’s italics throughout)...

That these ideas, which were repeated by Engels over the course of decades, were so expressed by him publicly, in the press, is proved by his preface to the second edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1892. Here he speaks of an “aristocracy among the working class”, of a “privileged minority of the workers”, in contradistinction to the “great mass of working people”. “A small, privileged, protected minority” of the working class alone was “permanently benefited” by the privileged position of England in 1848–68, whereas “the great bulk of them experienced at best but a temporary improvement”.... “With the break-down of that [England’s industrial] monopoly, the English working class will lose that privileged position...” The members of the “new” unions, the unions of the unskilled workers, “had this immense advantage, that their minds were virgin soil, entirely free from the inherited ‘respectable’ bourgeois prejudices which hampered the brains of the better situated ‘old unionists’” .... “The so-called workers’ representatives” in England are people “who are forgiven their being members of the working class because they themselves would like to drown their

quality of being workers in the ocean of their liberalism..."

We have deliberately quoted the direct statements of Marx and Engels at rather great length in order that the reader may study them as a whole. And they should be studied, they are worth carefully pondering over. For they are the pivot of the tactics in the labour movement that are dictated by the objective conditions of the imperialist era.

Here, too, Kautsky has tried to "befog the issue" and substitute for Marxism sentimental conciliation with the opportunists. Arguing against the avowed and naive social-imperialists (men like Lensch) who justify Germany's participation in the war as a means of destroying England's monopoly, Kautsky "corrects" this obvious falsehood by another equally obvious falsehood. Instead of a cynical falsehood he employs a suave falsehood! The industrial monopoly of England, he says, has long ago been broken, has long ago been destroyed, and there is nothing left to destroy.

Why is this argument false?

Because, firstly, it overlooks England's colonial monopoly. Yet Engels, as we have seen, pointed to this very clearly as early as 1882, thirty-four years ago! Although England's industrial monopoly may have been destroyed, her colonial monopoly not only remains, but has become extremely accentuated, for

the whole world is already divided up! By means of this suave lie Kautsky smuggles in the bourgeois-pacifist and opportunist-philistine idea that “there is nothing to fight about”. On the contrary, not only have the capitalists something to fight about now, but they cannot help fighting if they want to preserve capitalism, for without a forcible redivision of colonies the new imperialist countries cannot obtain the privileges enjoyed by the older (and weaker) imperialist powers.

Secondly, why does England’s monopoly explain the (temporary) victory of opportunism in England? Because monopoly yields superprofits, i.e., a surplus of profits over and above the capitalist profits that are normal and customary all over the world. The capitalists can devote a part (and not a small one, at that!) of these superprofits to bribe their own workers, to create something like an alliance (recall the celebrated “alliances” described by the Webbs of English trade unions and employers) between the workers of the given nation and their capitalists against the other countries.

England’s industrial monopoly was already destroyed by the end of the nineteenth century. That is beyond dispute. But how did this destruction take place? Did all monopoly disappear?

If that were so, Kautsky’s “theory” of conciliation (with the opportunists) would to a certain extent be justified.

But it is not so, and that is just the point. Imperialism is monopoly capitalism. Every cartel, trust, syndicate, every giant bank is a monopoly. Superprofits have not disappeared; they still remain. The exploitation of all other countries by one privileged, financially wealthy country remains and has become more intense. A handful of wealthy countries—there are only four of them, if we mean independent, really gigantic, “modern” wealth: England, France, the United States and Germany—have developed monopoly to vast proportions, they obtain superprofits running into hundreds, if not thousands, of millions, they “ride on the backs” of hundreds and hundreds of millions of people in other countries and fight among themselves for the division of the particularly rich, particularly fat and particularly easy spoils.

This, in fact, is the economic and political essence of imperialism, the profound contradictions of which Kautsky glosses over instead of exposing.

The bourgeoisie of an imperialist “Great” Power can economically bribe the upper strata of “its” workers by spending on this a hundred million or so francs a year, for its superprofits most likely amount to about a thousand million. And how this little sop is divided among the labour ministers, “labour representatives” (remember Engels’s splendid analysis of the term), labour members of War Industries Committees,[5] labour officials, workers belonging to the narrow craft

unions, office employees, etc., etc., is a secondary question.

Between 1848 and 1868, and to a certain extent even later, only England enjoyed a monopoly: that is why opportunism could prevail there for decades. No other countries possessed either very rich colonies or an industrial monopoly.

The last third of the nineteenth century saw the transition to the new, imperialist era. Finance capital not of one, but of several, though very few, Great Powers enjoys a monopoly. (In Japan and Russia the monopoly of military power, vast territories, or special facilities for robbing minority nationalities, China, etc., partly supplements, partly takes the place of, the monopoly of modern, up-to-date finance capital.) This difference explains why England's monopoly position could remain unchallenged for decades. The monopoly of modern finance capital is being frantically challenged; the era of imperialist wars has begun. It was possible in those days to bribe and corrupt the working class of one country for decades. This is now improbable, if not impossible. But on the other hand, every imperialist "Great" Power can and does bribe smaller strata (than in England in 1848–68) of the "labour aristocracy". Formerly a "bourgeois labour party", to use Engels's remarkably profound expression, could arise only in one country, because it alone enjoyed a monopoly, but, on the other hand, it could exist for a long time. Now a "bourgeois labour

party" is inevitable and typical in all imperialist countries; but in view of the desperate struggle they are waging for the division of spoils it is improbable that such a party can prevail for long in a number of countries. For the trusts, the financial oligarchy, high prices, etc., while enabling the bribery of a handful in the top layers, are increasingly oppressing, crushing, ruining and torturing the mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat.

On the one hand, there is the tendency of the bourgeoisie and the opportunists to convert a handful of very rich and privileged nations into "eternal" parasites on the body of the rest of mankind, to "rest on the laurels" of the exploitation of Negroes, Indians, etc., keeping them in subjection with the aid of the excellent weapons of extermination provided by modern militarism. On the other hand, there is the tendency of the masses, who are more oppressed than before and who bear the whole brunt of imperialist wars, to cast off this yoke and to overthrow the bourgeoisie. It is in the struggle between these two tendencies that the history of the labour movement will now inevitably develop. For the first tendency is not accidental; it is "substantiated" economically. In all countries the bourgeoisie has already begotten, fostered and secured for itself "bourgeois labour parties" of social-chauvinists. The difference between a definitely formed party, like Bissolati's in Italy, for example, which is fully social-imperialist, and, say, the semi-formed near-party of the Potresovs, Gvozdyovs,

Bulkins, Chkhaidzes, Skobelevs and Co., is an immaterial difference. The important thing is that, economically, the desertion of a stratum of the labour aristocracy to the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact; and this economic fact, this shift in class relations, will find political form, in one shape or another, without any particular "difficulty".

On the economic basis referred to above, the political institutions of modern capitalism—press, parliament associations, congresses etc.— have created political privileges and sops for the respectful, meek, reformist and patriotic office employees and workers, corresponding to the economic privileges and sops. Lucrative and soft jobs in the government or on the war industries committees, in parliament and on diverse committees, on the editorial staffs of "respectable", legally published newspapers or on the management councils of no less respectable and "bourgeois law-abiding" trade unions—this is the bait by which the imperialist bourgeoisie attracts and rewards the representatives and supporters of the "bourgeois labour parties". The mechanics of political democracy works in the same direction. Nothing in our times can be done without elections; nothing can be done without the masses. And in this era of printing and parliamentarism it is impossible to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords, and promising all manner of

reforms and blessings to the workers right and left—as long as they renounce the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of bourgeoisie. I would call this system Lloyd-Georgism, after the English Minister Lloyd George, one of the foremost and most dexterous representatives of this system in the classic land of the “bourgeois labour party”. A firstclass bourgeois manipulator, an astute politician, a popular orator who will deliver any speeches you like even r-r-revolutionary ones, to a labour audience, and a man who is capable of obtaining sizable sops for docile workers in the shape of social reforms (insurance, etc.), Lloyd George serves the bourgeoisie splendidly,[6] and serves it precisely among the workers, brings its influence precisely to the proletariat, to where the bourgeoisie needs it most and where it finds it most difficult to subject the masses morally.

And is there such a great difference between Lloyd George and the Scheidemanns, Legiens, Hendersons and Hyndmans, Plekhanovs, Renaudels and Co.? Of the latter, it may be objected, some will return to the revolutionary socialism of Marx. This is possible, but it is an insignificant difference in degree, if the question is regarded from its political, i.e., its mass aspect. Certain individuals among the present socialchauvinist leaders may return to the proletariat. But the socialchauvinist or (what is the same thing) opportunist trend can neither disappear nor “return” to the revolutionary proletariat. Wherever Marxism is popular among the workers, this political trend, this



“bourgeois labour party”, will swear by the name of Marx. It cannot be prohibited from doing this, just as a trading firm cannot be prohibited from using any particular label, sign or advertisement. It has always been the case in history that after the death of revolutionary leaders who were popular among the oppressed classes, their enemies have attempted to appropriate their names so as to deceive the oppressed classes.

The fact that is that “bourgeois labour parties,” as a political phenomenon, have already been formed in all the foremost capitalist countries, and that unless determined and relentless struggle is waged all along the line against these parties—or groups, trends, etc., it is all the same—there can be no question of a struggle against imperialism, or of Marxism, or of a socialist labour movement. The Chkheidze faction,[11] Nashe Dyelo and Golos Truda[12] in Russia, and the O.C. supporters abroad are nothing but varieties of one such party. There is not the slightest reason for thinking that these parties will disappear before the social revolution. On the contrary, the nearer the revolution approaches, the more strongly it flares up and the more sudden and violent the transitions and leaps in its progress, the greater will be the part the struggle of the revolutionary mass stream against the opportunist petty-bourgeois stream will play in the labour movement. Kautskyism is not an independent trend, because it has no roots either in the masses or in the privileged stratum which has deserted to the

bourgeoisie. But the danger of Kautskyism lies in the fact that, utilising the ideology of the past, it endeavours to reconcile the proletariat with the "bourgeois labour party", to preserve the unity of the proletariat with that party and thereby enhance the latter's prestige. The masses no longer follow the avowed social-chauvinists: Lloyd George has been hissed down at workers' meetings in England; Hyndman has left the party; the Renaudels and Scheidemanns, the Potresovs and Gvozdyovs are protected by the police. The Kautskyites' masked defence of the social-chauvinists is much more dangerous.

One of the most common sophistries of Kautskyism is its reference to the "masses". We do not want, they say, to break away from the masses and mass organisations! But just think how Engels put the question. In the nineteenth century the "mass organisations" of the

English trade unions were on the side of the bourgeois labour party. Marx and Engels did not reconcile themselves to it on this ground; they exposed it. They did not forget, firstly, that the trade union organisations directly embraced a minority of the proletariat. In England then, as in Germany now, not more than one-fifth of the proletariat was organised. No one can seriously think it possible to organise the majority of the proletariat under capitalism. Secondly— and this is the main point—**it is not so**

**much a question of the size of an organisation, as of the real, objective significance of its policy: does its policy represent the masses, does it serve them, i.e., does it aim at their liberation from capitalism, or does it represent the interests of the minority, the minority's reconciliation with capitalism?** The latter was true of England in the nineteenth century, and it is true of Germany, etc., now.

Engels draws a distinction between the “bourgeois labour party” of the old trade unions—the privileged minority—and the “lowest mass”, the real majority, and appeals to the latter, who are not infected by “bourgeois respectability”. This is the essence of Marxist tactics!

Neither we nor anyone else can calculate precisely what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social-chauvinists and opportunists. This will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be definitely decided only by the socialist revolution. But we know for certain that the “defenders of the fatherland” in the imperialist war represent only a minority. And it is therefore our duty, if we wish to remain socialists to go down lower and deeper, to the real masses; this is the whole meaning and the whole purport of the struggle against opportunism. By exposing the fact that the opportunists and social-chauvinists are in reality betraying and selling the interests of the masses, that they are defending the temporary privileges of a minority of the workers, that

they are the vehicles of bourgeois ideas and influences, that they are really allies and agents of the bourgeoisie, we teach the masses to appreciate their true political interests, to fight for socialism and for the revolution through all the long and painful vicissitudes of imperialist wars and imperialist armistices.

The only Marxist line in the world labour movement is to explain to the masses the inevitability and necessity of breaking with opportunism, to educate them for revolution by waging a relentless struggle against opportunism, to utilise the experience of the war to expose, not conceal, the utter vileness of national-liberal labour politics. In the next article, we shall try to sum up the principal features that distinguish this line from Kautskyism.

## **A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism -The Other Political Issues**

Lenin

The Other Political Issues Raised and Distorted By P. Kievsky

Liberation of the colonies, we stated in our theses, means self-determination of nations. Europeans often forget that colonial peoples too are nations, but to tolerate this "forgetfulness" is to tolerate chauvinism.

P. Kievsky "objects":

In the pure type of colonies, "there is no proletariat in the proper sense of the term" (end of §r, Chapter II). "For whom, then, is the 'self-determination' slogan meant? For the colonial bourgeoisie? For the fellahs? For the peasants? Certainly not. It is absurd for socialists [*Kievsky's italics*] to demand self-determination for the colonies, for it is absurd in general to advance the slogans of a workers' party for countries where there are no workers."

P. Kievsky's anger and his denunciation of our view as "absurd" notwithstanding, we make bold to submit that his arguments are erroneous. Only the late and unlamented Economists believed that the "slogans of a workers' party" are issued only for workers. No, these slogans are issued for the whole of the labouring

population, for the entire people. The democratic part of our programme— Kievsky has given no thought to its significance “in general”—is addressed specifically to the whole people and that is why in it we speak of the “people”.

The colonial and semi-colonial nations, we said, account for 1,000 million people, and P. Kievsky has not taken the trouble to refute that concrete statement. Of these 1,000 million, more than 700 million (China, India, Persia, Egypt) live in countries where there are workers. But even with regard to colonial countries where there are no workers, only slave-owners and slaves, etc., the demand for “self-determination”, far from being absurd, is obligatory hit every Marxist. And if he gave the matter a little thought, Kievsky would probably realise this, and also that “self-determination” is always advanced “for” two nations: the oppressed and the oppressing.

Another of Kievsky’s “objections”:

“For that reason we limit ourselves, in respect to the colonies, to a negative slogan, i.e., to the demand socialists present to their governments—‘get out of the colonies!’ Unachievable within the framework of capitalism, this demand serves to intensify the struggle against imperialism, but does not contradict the trend of development, for a socialist society will not possess colonies.”

The author's inability, or reluctance, to give the slightest thought to the theoretical contents of political slogans is simply amazing! Are we to believe that the use of a propaganda phrase instead of a theoretically precise political term alters matters? To say "get out of the colonies" is to evade a theoretical analysis and hide behind propaganda phrases! For every one of our Party propagandists, in referring to the Ukraine, Poland, Finland, etc., is fully entitled to demand of the tsarist government (his "own government"): "get out of Finland", etc. However, the intelligent propagandist will understand that we must not advance either positive or negative slogans for the sole purpose of "intensifying" the struggle. Only men of the Alexinsky type could insist that the "negative" slogan "get out of the Black-Hundred Duma" was justified by the desire to "intensify" the struggle against a certain evil.

Intensification of the struggle is all empty phrase of the subjectivists, who forget the Marxist requirement that every slogan be justified by a precise analysis of economic realities, the political situation and the political significance of the slogan. It is embarrassing to have to drive this home, but what can one do?

We know the Alexinsky habit of cutting short a theoretical discussion of a theoretical question by propaganda outcries. It is a bad habit. The slogan "get out of the colonies" has one and only one political and

economic content: freedom of secession for the colonial nations, freedom to establish a separate state! If, as P. Kievsky believes, the general laws of imperialism prevent the self-determination of nations and make it a utopia, illusion, etc., etc., then how can one, without stopping to think, make an exception from these general laws for most of the nations of the world? Obviously, P. Kievsky's "theory" is a caricature of theory.

Commodity production and capitalism, and the connecting threads of finance capital, exist in the vast majority of colonial countries. How, then, can we urge the imperialist countries, their governments, to "get out of the colonies" if, from the standpoint of commodity production, capitalism and imperialism, this is an "unscientific" and "utopian" demand, "refuted" even by Lensch, Cunow and the rest?

There is not even a shadow of thought in the author's argumentation!

He has given no thought to the fact that liberation of the colonies is "unrealizable" only in the sense of being "unrealizable without a series of revolutions". He has given no thought to the fact that it is realizable in conjunction with a socialist revolution in Europe. He has given no thought to the fact that a "socialist society will not possess" not only colonies, but subject nations in general. He has given no thought to the fact that, on the question under discussion, there is no economic or



political difference between Russia's "possession" of Poland or Turkestan. He has given no thought to the fact that a "socialist society" will wish to "get out of the colonies" only in the sense of granting them the free right to secede, but definitely not in the sense of recommending secession.

And for this differentiation between the right to secede and the recommendation to secede, P. Kievsky condemns us as "jugglers", and to "scientifically substantiate" that verdict in the eyes of the workers, he writes:

"What is a worker to think when he asks a propagandist how the proletariat should regard samostiinost [political independence for the Ukraine], and gets this answer: socialists are working for the right to secede, but their propaganda is against secession?"

I believe I can give a fairly accurate reply to that question, namely: every sensible worker will think that Kievsky is not capable of thinking.

Every sensible worker will "think": here we have P. Kievsky telling us workers to shout, "get out of the colonies". In other words, we Great-Russian workers must demand from our government that it get out of Mongolia, Turkestan, Persia; English workers must demand that the English Government get out of Egypt, India, Persia, etc. But does this mean that we

proletarians wish to separate ourselves from the Egyptian workers and fellahs, from the Mongolian, Turkestan or Indian workers and peasants? Does it mean that we advise the labouring masses of the colonies to “separate” from the class-conscious European proletariat? Nothing of the kind. Now, as always, we stand and shall continue to stand for the closest association and merging of the class-conscious workers of the advanced countries with the workers, peasants and slaves of all the oppressed countries. We have always advised and shall continue to advise all the oppressed classes in all the oppressed countries, the colonies included, not to separate from us, but to form the closest possible ties and merge with us.

We demand from our governments that they quit the colonies, or, to put it in precise political terms rather than in agitational outcries— that they grant the colonies full freedom of secession, the genuine right to self-determination, and we ourselves are sure to implement this right, and grant this freedom, as soon as we capture power. We demand this from existing governments, and will do this when we are the government, not in order to “recommend” secession, but, on the contrary, in order to facilitate and accelerate the democratic association and merging of nations. We shall exert every effort to foster association and merger with the Mongolians, Persians, Indians, Egyptians. We believe it is our duty and, in our interest, to do this, for otherwise socialism in Europe will not be secure. We shall endeavour to render these nations, more

backward and oppressed than we are, “disinterested cultural assistance”, to borrow the happy expression of the Polish Social-Democrats. In other words, we will help them pass to the use of machinery, to the lightening of labour, to democracy, to socialism.

**If we demand freedom of secession** for the Mongolians. Persians, Egyptians and all other oppressed and unequal nations without exception, we do so not because we favour secession, but only because we stand for free, voluntary association and merging as distinct from forcible association. **That is the only reason!**

And in this respect the only difference between the Mongolian or Egyptian peasants and workers and their Polish or Finnish counterparts is, in our view, that the latter are more developed, more experienced politically than the Great Russians, more economically prepared, etc., and for that reason will in all likelihood very soon convince their peoples that it is unwise to extend their present legitimate hatred of the Great Russians, for their role of hangman, to the socialist workers and to a socialist Russia. They will convince them that economic expediency and internationalist and democratic instinct and consciousness demand the earliest association of all nations and their merging in a socialist society. And since the Poles and Finns are highly cultured people, they will, in all probability, very soon come to see the correctness of this attitude, and the possible secession of Poland and Finland after

the triumph of socialism will therefore be only of short duration. The incomparably less cultured fellahs, Mongolians and Persians might secede for a longer period, but we shall try to shorten it by disinterested cultural assistance as indicated above.

There is no other difference in our attitude to the Poles and Mongolians, nor can there be. There is no “contradiction”, nor can there be, between our propaganda of freedom of secession and our firm resolve to implement that freedom when we are the government, and our propaganda of association and merging of nations. That is what, we feel sure, every sensible worker, every genuine socialist and internationalist will “think” of our controversy with P. Kievsky.

Running through the article is Kievsky’s basic doubt: why advocate and, when we are in power, implement the freedom of nations to secede, considering that the trend of development is towards the merging of nations? For the same reason—we reply—that we advocate and, when in power, will implement the dictatorship of the proletariat, though the entire trend of development is towards abolition of coercive domination of one part of society over another. Dictatorship is domination of one part of society over the rest of society, and domination, moreover that rests directly on coercion. Dictatorship of the proletariat, the only consistently revolutionary class, is necessary to overthrow the bourgeoisie and repel its attempts at

counter-revolution. The question of proletarian dictatorship is of such overriding importance that he who denies the need for such dictatorship, or recognises it only in words, cannot be a member of the Social-Democratic Party. However, it cannot be denied that in individual cases, by way of exception, for instance, in some small country after the social revolution has been accomplished in a neighbouring big country, peaceful surrender of power by the bourgeoisie is possible, if it is convinced that resistance is hopeless and if it prefers to save its skin. It is much more likely, of course, that even in small states socialism will not be achieved without civil war, and for that reason the only programme of international Social Democracy must be recognition of civil war, though violence is, of course, alien to our ideals. The same, *mutatis mutandis* (with the necessary alterations), is applicable to nations. We favour their merger, but now there can be no transition from forcible merger and annexation to voluntary merger without freedom of secession. We recognise—and quite rightly—the predominance of the economic factor, but to interpret it *a’la* Kievsky is to make a caricature of Marxism. Even the trusts and banks of modern imperialism, though inevitable everywhere as part of developed capitalism, differ in their concrete aspects from country to country. There is a still greater difference, despite homogeneity in essentials, between political forms in the advanced imperialist countries—America, England, France, Germany. The same variety will manifest itself also in the path mankind will follow

from the imperialism of today to the socialist revolution of tomorrow. All nations will arrive at socialism—this is inevitable, but all will do so in not exactly the same way, each will contribute something of its own to some form of democracy, to some variety of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the varying rate of socialist transformations in the different aspects of social life. There is nothing more primitive from the viewpoint of theory, or more ridiculous from that of practice, than to paint, “in the name of historical materialism”, this aspect of the future in a monotonous grey. The result will be nothing more than Suzdal daubing. And even if reality were to show that prior to the first victory of the socialist proletariat only 1/500 of the nations now oppressed will win emancipation and secede, that prior to the final victory of the socialist proletariat the world over (i.e., during all the vicissitudes of the socialist revolution) also only 1,500 of the oppressed nations will secede for a very short time—even in that event we would be correct, both from the theoretical and practical political standpoint, in advising the workers, already now, not to permit into their Social-Democratic parties those socialists of the oppressor nations who do not recognise and do not advocate freedom of secession for all oppressed nations. For the fact is that we do not know, and cannot know, how many of the oppressed nations will in practice require secession in order to contribute something of their own to the different forms of democracy, the different forms of transition to socialism. And that the negation of freedom of

secession now is theoretically false from beginning to end and in practice amounts to servility to the chauvinists of the oppressing nations— this we know, see and feel daily.

“We emphasise,” P. Kievsky writes in a footnote to the passage quoted above, “that we fully support the demand ‘against forcible annexation’....”

But he makes no reply, not even by a single word, to our perfectly clear statement that this “demand” is tantamount to recognising selfdetermination, that there can be no correct definition of the concept “annexation” unless it is seen in context with self-determination. Presumably Kievsky believes that in a discussion it is enough to present one’s arguments and demands without any supporting evidence!

He continues: “... We fully accept, in their negative formulation, a number of demands that tend to sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism, hut there is absolutely no possibility of working out corresponding positive formulations on the basis of the existing system. Against war, yes, but not for a democratic peace....”

Wrong—wrong from the first word to the last. Kievsky has read our resolution on “Pacifism and the Peace Slogan” (in the pamphlet *Socialism and War*, pp. 44–45[4] ) and even approved it, I believe. But obviously he did not understand it. We are for a democratic

peace, only we warn the workers against the deception that such a peace is possible under the present, bourgeois governments “without a series of revolutions”, as the resolution points out. We denounced as a deception of the workers the “abstract” advocacy of peace, i.e., one that does not take into account the real class nature, or, specifically, the imperialist nature of the present governments in the belligerent countries. We definitely stated in the Sotsial-Demokrat (No. 47) theses that if the revolution places our Party in power during the present war, it will immediately propose a democratic peace to all the warring countries.

Yet, anxious to convince himself and others that he is opposed “only” to self-determination and not to democracy in general, Kievsky ends up by asserting that we are “not for a democratic peace”. Curious logic!

There is no need to dwell on all the other examples he cites, and no sense in wasting space on refuting them, for they are on the same level of naïve and fallacious logic and can only make the reader smile.

There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a “negative” SocialDemocratic slogan that serves only to “sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism” without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of how Social-Democracy will solve the problem when it assumes power. A “negative” slogan unconnected with a



definite positive solution will not “sharpen”, but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation.

P. Kievsky does not understand the difference between “negative” slogans that stigmatise political evils and economic evils. The difference lies in the fact that certain economic evils are part of capitalism as such, whatever the political superstructure, and that it is impossible to eliminate them economically without eliminating capitalism itself. Not a single instance can be cited to disprove this. On the other hand, political evils represent a departure from democracy which, economically, is fully possible “on the basis of the existing system”, i.e., capitalism, and by way of exception is being implemented under capitalism—certain aspects in one country, other aspects in another. Again, what the author fails to understand is precisely the fundamental conditions necessary for the implementation of democracy in general!

The same applies to the question of divorce. The reader will recall that it was first posed by Rosa Luxemburg in the discussion on the national question. She expressed the perfectly justified opinion that if we uphold autonomy within a state (for a definite region, area, etc.), we must, as centralist Social-Democrats, insist that all major national issues—and divorce legislation is one of them—should come within the jurisdiction of the central government and central parliament. This example clearly demonstrates that

one cannot be a democrat and socialist without demanding full freedom of divorce now, because the lack of such freedom is additional oppression of the oppressed sex—though it should not be difficult to realise that recognition of the freedom to leave one's husband is not an invitation to all wives to do so!

P. Kievsky "objects":

"What would this right [of divorce] be like if in such cases [when the wife wants to leave the husband] she could not exercise her right? Or if its exercise depended on the will of third parties, or, worse still, on the will of claimants to her affections? Would we advocate the proclamation of such a right? Of course not!"

That objection reveals complete failure to understand the relation between democracy in general and capitalism. The conditions that make it impossible for the oppressed classes to "exercise" their democratic rights are not the exception under capitalism; they are typical of the system. In most cases the right of divorce will remain unrealizable under capitalism, for the oppressed sex is subjugated economically. No matter how much democracy there is under capitalism, the woman remains a "domestic slave", a slave locked up in the bedroom, nursery, kitchen. The right to elect their "own" people's judges, officials, school-teachers, jurymen, etc., is likewise in most cases unrealizable under capitalism precisely because of the economic subjection of the workers and peasants. The same

applies to the democratic republic: our programme defines it as “government by the people”, though all Social-Democrats know perfectly well that under capitalism, even in the most democratic republic, there is bound to be bribery of officials by the bourgeoisie and an alliance of stock exchange and the government.

Only those who cannot think straight or have no knowledge of Marxism will conclude: so there is no point in having a republic, no point in freedom of divorce, no point in democracy, no point in self-determination of nations! But Marxists know that democracy does not abolish class oppression. It only makes the class struggle more direct, wider, more open and pronounced, and that is what we need. The fuller the freedom of divorce, the clearer will women see that the source of their “domestic slavery” is capitalism, not lack of rights. The more democratic the system of government, the clearer will the workers see that the root evil is capitalism, not lack of rights. The fuller national equality (and it is not complete without freedom of secession), the clearer will the workers of the oppressed nations see that the cause of their oppression is capitalism, not lack of rights, etc.

It must be said again and again: It is embarrassing to have to drive home the ABC of Marxism, but what is one to do if Kievsky does not know it?

He discusses divorce in much the same way as one of the secretaries of the Organising Committee abroad,

Semkovsky, discussed it, if I remember rightly, in the Paris Golos. His line of reasoning was that freedom of divorce is not, it is true, an invitation to all wives to leave their husbands, but if it is proved that all other husbands are better than yours, madame, then it amounts to one and the same thing!!

In taking that line of argument Semkovsky forgot that crank thinking is not a violation of socialist or democratic principles. If Semkovsky were to tell a woman that all other husbands were better than hers, no one would regard this as violation of democratic principles. At most people would say: There are bound to be big cranks in a big party! But if Semkovsky were to take it into his head to defend as a democrat a person who opposed freedom of divorce and appealed to the courts, the police or the church to prevent his wife leaving him, we feel sure that even most of Semkovsky's colleagues on the Secretariat Abroad, though they are sorry socialists, would refuse to support him!

Both Semkovsky and Kievsky, in their **“discussion” of divorce, fail to understand the issue and avoid its substance**, namely, that under capitalism the right of divorce, as all other democratic rights without exception, is conditional, restricted, formal, narrow and extremely difficult of realisation. Yet no self-respecting Social-Democrat will consider anyone opposing **the right of divorce** a democrat, let alone a socialist. **That is the crux of the matter.** All

“democracy” consists in the proclamation and realisation of “rights” which under capitalism are realisable only to a very small degree and only relatively. **But without the proclamation of these rights**, without a struggle to introduce them now, immediately, without training the masses in the spirit of this struggle, **socialism is impossible**.

Having failed to understand that, Kievsky bypasses the central question that belongs to his special subject namely, how will we Social-Democrats abolish national oppression? He shunts the question aside with phrases about the world being “drenched in blood”, etc. (though this has no bearing on the matter under discussion). This leaves only one single argument: the socialist revolution will solve everything! Or, the argument sometimes advanced by people who share his views: self-determination is impossible under capitalism and superfluous under socialism.

From the theoretical standpoint that view is nonsensical; from the practical political standpoint it is chauvinistic. It fails to appreciate the significance of democracy. For socialism is impossible without democracy because: (1) the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for democracy; (2) victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy. To claim that self-determination is

superfluous under socialism is therefore just as nonsensical and just as hopelessly confusing as to claim that democracy is superfluous under socialism.

**Self-determination is no more impossible under capitalism, and just as superfluous under socialism, as democracy generally.**

The economic revolution will create the necessary prerequisites for eliminating all types of political oppression. Precisely for that reason it is illogical and incorrect to reduce everything to the economic revolution, for the question is: how to eliminate national oppression? It cannot be eliminated without an economic revolution That is incontestable. But to limit ourselves to this is to lapse into absurd and wretched imperialist Economism.

We must carry out national equality; proclaim, formulate and implement equal "rights" for all nations. Everyone agrees with that save, perhaps, P. Kievsky. But this poses a question which Kievsky avoids: is not negation of the right to form a national state negation of equality?

Of course, it is. And consistent, i.e., socialist, democrats proclaim, formulate and will implement this right, without which there is no path to complete, voluntary rapprochement and merging of nations.

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## “NATIONAL CULTURE”

Lenin

### Critical Remarks on the National Question

As the reader will see, the article in *Severnaya Pravda*, made use of a particular example, i. e., the problem of the official language, to illustrate the inconsistency and opportunism of the liberal bourgeoisie, which, in the national question, extends a hand to the feudalists and the police. Everybody will understand that, apart from the problem of an official language, the liberal bourgeoisie behaves just as treacherously, hypocritically and stupidly (even from the standpoint of the interests of liberalism) in a number of other related issues.

The conclusion to be drawn from this? It is that all liberal-bourgeois nationalism sows the greatest corruption among the workers and does immense harm to the cause of freedom and the proletarian class struggle. This bourgeois (and bourgeois-feudalist) tendency is all the more dangerous for its being concealed behind the slogan of “national culture”. It is under the guise of national culture—GreatRussian, Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian, and so forth—that the Black Hundreds and the clericals, and also the bourgeoisie of all nations, are doing their dirty and reactionary work.

Such are the facts of the national life of today, if viewed from the Marxist angle, i. e., from the standpoint of the class struggle, and if the slogans are compared with the interests and policies of classes, and not with meaningless “general principles”, declamations and phrases.

The slogan of national culture is a bourgeois (and often also a Black Hundred, and clerical) fraud. Our slogan is: the international culture of democracy and of the world working-class movement.

Here the Bundist Mr. Liebman rushes into the fray and annihilates me with the following deadly tirade:

“Anyone in the least familiar with the national question knows that international culture is not non-national culture (culture without a national form); non-national culture, which must not be Russian, Jewish, or Polish, but only pure culture, is nonsense; international ideas can appeal to the working class only when they are adapted to the language spoken by the worker, and to the concrete national conditions under which he lives; the worker should not be indifferent to the condition and development of his national culture, because it is through it, and only through it, that he is able to participate in the ‘international culture of democracy and of the world working-class movement’. This is well known, but V. I. turns a deaf ear to it all....”



Ponder over this typically Bundist argument, designed, if you please, to demolish the Marxist thesis that I advanced. With the air of supreme self-confidence of one who is “familiar with the national question”, this Bundist passes off ordinary bourgeois views as “well known” axioms.

It is true, my dear Bundist, that international culture is not nonnational. Nobody said that it was. Nobody has proclaimed a “pure” culture, either Polish, Jewish, or Russian, etc., and your jumble of empty words is simply an attempt to distract the reader’s attention and to obscure the issue with tinkling words.

The elements of democratic and socialist culture are present, if only in rudimentary form, in every national culture, since in every nation there are toiling and exploited masses, whose conditions of life inevitably give rise to the ideology of democracy and socialism. But every nation also possesses a bourgeois culture (and most nations a reactionary and clerical culture as well) in the form, not merely of “elements”, but of the dominant culture. Therefore, the general “national culture” is the culture of the landlords, the clergy and the bourgeoisie. This fundamental and, for a Marxist, elementary truth, was kept in the background by the Bundist, who “drowned” it in his jumble of words, i. e., instead of revealing and clarifying the class gulf to the reader, he in fact obscured it. In fact, the Bundist acted like a bourgeois, whose every interest requires the spreading of a belief in a non-class national culture.

In advancing the slogan of "the international culture of democracy and of the world working-class movement", we take from each national culture only its democratic and socialist elements; we take them only and absolutely in opposition to the bourgeois culture and the bourgeois nationalism of each nation. No democrat, and certainly no Marxist, denies that all languages should have equal status, or that it is necessary to polemise with one's "native" bourgeoisie in one's native language and to advocate anti-clerical or anti-bourgeois ideas among one's "native" peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. That goes without saying, but the Bundist uses these indisputable truths to obscure the point in dispute, i. e., the real issue.

The question is whether it is permissible for a Marxist, directly or indirectly, to advance the slogan of national culture, or whether he should oppose it by advocating, in all languages, the slogan of workers' internationalism while "adapting" himself to all local and national features.

The significance of the "national culture" slogan is not determined by some petty intellectual's promise, or good intention, to "interpret" it as "meaning the development through it of an international culture". It would be puerile subjectivism to look at it in that way. The significance of the slogan of national culture is determined by the objective alignment of all classes in

a given country, and in all countries of the world. The national culture of the bourgeoisie is a fact (and, I repeat, the bourgeoisie everywhere enters into deals with the landed proprietors and the clergy). Aggressive bourgeois nationalism, which drugs the minds of the workers, stultifies and disunites them in order that the bourgeoisie may lead them by the halter—such is the fundamental fact of the times.

Those who seek to serve the proletariat must unite the workers of all nations, and unswervingly fight bourgeois nationalism, domestic and foreign. The place of those who advocate the slogan of national culture is among the nationalist petty bourgeois, not among the Marxists.

Take a concrete example. Can a Great-Russian Marxist accept the slogan of national, Great-Russian, culture? No, he cannot. Anyone who does that should stand in the ranks of the nationalists, not of the Marxists. Our task is to fight the dominant, Black-Hundred and bourgeois national culture of the Great Russians, and to develop, exclusively in the internationalist spirit and in the closest alliance with the Workers of other countries, the rudiments also existing in the history of our democratic and working-class movement. Fight your own Great-Russian landlords and bourgeoisie, fight their “culture” in the name of internationalism, and, in so fighting, “adapt” yourself to the special features of the Purishkeviches and Struves— that is

your task, not preaching or tolerating the Slogan of national culture.

The same applies to the most oppressed and persecuted nation—the Jews. Jewish national culture is the slogan of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie, the slogan of our enemies. But there are other elements in Jewish culture and in Jewish history as a whole. Of the ten and a half million Jews in the world, somewhat over a half live in Galicia and Russia, backward and semi-barbarous countries, where the Jews are forcibly kept in the status of a caste. The other half lives in the civilised world, and there the Jews do not live as a segregated caste. There the great world-progressive features of Jewish culture stand clearly revealed: its internationalism, its identification with the advanced movements of the epoch (the percentage of Jews in the democratic and proletarian movements is everywhere higher than the percentage of Jews among the population).

Whoever, directly or indirectly, puts forward the slogan of Jewish “national culture” is (whatever his good intentions may be) an enemy of the proletariat, a supporter of all that is outmoded and connected with caste among the Jewish people; he is an accomplice of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, those Jewish Marxists who mingle with the Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and other workers in international Marxist organisations, and make their contribution (both in Russian and in Yiddish) towards

creating the international culture of the working-class movement—those Jews, despite the separatism of the Bund, uphold the best traditions of Jewry by fighting the slogan of “national culture”.

Bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism—these are the two irreconcilably hostile slogans 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. In advocating the slogan of national culture and building up on it an entire plan and practical programme of what they call “culturalnational autonomy”, the Bundists are in effect instruments of bourgeois nationalism among the workers.

## THE FOUNDATION OF LENINISM

### STALIN

#### THE NATIONAL QUESTION

From this theme I take two main questions:

- a) the presentation of the question;
- b) the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples and the proletarian revolution.

1) The presentation of the question. During the last two decades the national question has undergone a number of very important changes. The national question in the period of the Second International and the national question in the period of Leninism are far from being the same thing. They differ profoundly from each other, not only in their scope, but also in their intrinsic character.

Formerly, the national question was usually confined to a narrow circle of questions, concerning, primarily, "civilized" nationalities. The Irish, the Hungarians, the Poles, the Finns, the Serbs, and several other European nationalities -- that was the circle of unequal peoples in whose destinies the leaders of the Second International were interested. The scores and hundreds of millions of Asian and African peoples who are suffering

national oppression in its most savage and cruel form usually remained outside of their field of vision. They hesitated to put white and black, "civilized" and "uncivilized" on the same plane. Two or three meaningless, lukewarm resolutions, which carefully evaded the question of the liberation of the colonies -- that was all the leaders of the Second International could boast of. Now we can say that this duplicity and halfheartedness in dealing with the national question has been brought to an end. Leninism laid bare this crying incongruity, broke down the wall between whites and blacks, between Europeans and Asians, between the "civilized" and "uncivilized" slaves of imperialism, and thus linked the national question with the question of the colonies. The national question was thereby transformed from a particular and internal state problem into a general and international problem, into a world problem of the liberation of the oppressed peoples in the dependent countries and colonies from the yoke of imperialism.

Formerly, the principle of self-determination of nations was usually misinterpreted, and not infrequently it was narrowed down to the idea of the right of nations to autonomy. Certain leaders of the Second International even went so far as to turn the right to selfdetermination into the right to cultural autonomy, i.e., the right of oppressed nations to have their own cultural institutions, leaving all political power in the hands of the ruling nation. As a consequence, the idea of self-determination stood in danger of being

transformed from an instrument for combating annexations into an instrument for justifying them. Now we can say that this confusion has been cleared up. Leninism broadened the conception of self-determination, interpreting it as the right of the oppressed peoples of the dependent countries and colonies to complete secession, as the right of nations to independent existence as states. This precluded the possibility of justifying annexations by interpreting the right to self-determination as the right to autonomy. Thus, the principle of self-determination itself was transformed from an instrument for deceiving the masses, which it undoubtedly was in the hands of the social-chauvinists during the imperialist war, into an instrument for exposing all imperialist aspirations and chauvinist machinations, into an instrument for the political education of the masses in the spirit of internationalism.

Formerly, the question of the oppressed nations was usually regarded as purely a juridical question. Solemn proclamations about "national equality of rights," innumerable declarations about the "equality of nations" -- that was the stock in trade of the parties of the Second International, which glossed over the fact that "equality of nations" under imperialism, where one group of nations (a minority) lives by exploiting another group of nations, is sheer mockery of the oppressed nations. Now we can say that this bourgeois-juridical point of view on the national question has been exposed. Leninism brought the



national question down from the lofty heights of high-sounding declarations to solid ground and declared that pronouncements about the "equality of nations" not backed by the direct support of the proletarian parties for the liberation struggle of the oppressed nations are meaningless and false. In this way the question of the oppressed nations became one of supporting the oppressed nations, of rendering real and continuous assistance to them in their struggle against imperialism for real equality of nations, for their independent existence as states.

Formerly, the national question was regarded from a reformist point of view, as an independent question having no connection with the general question of the power of capital, of the overthrow of imperialism, of the proletarian revolution. It was tacitly assumed that the victory of the proletariat in Europe was possible without a direct alliance with the liberation movement in the colonies, that the national-colonial question could be solved on the quiet, "of its own accord," off the highway of the proletarian revolution, without a revolutionary struggle against imperialism. Now we can say that this anti-revolutionary point of view has been exposed. Leninism has proved, and the imperialist war and the revolution in Russia have confirmed, that the national question can be solved only in connection with and on the basis of the proletarian revolution, and that the road to victory of the revolution in the West lies through the revolutionary alliance with the liberation movement of

the colonies and dependent countries against imperialism. The national question is a part of the general question of the proletarian revolution, a part of the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The question is as follows: Are the revolutionary potentialities latent in the revolutionary liberation movement of the oppressed countries already exhausted, or not; and if not, is there any hope, any basis, for utilizing these potentialities for the proletarian revolution, for transforming the dependent and colonial countries from a reserve of the imperialist bourgeoisie into a reserve of the revolutionary proletariat, into an ally of the latter?

Leninism replies to this question in the affirmative, i.e., it recognizes the existence of revolutionary capacities in the national liberation movement of the oppressed countries, and the possibility of using these for overthrowing the common enemy, for overthrowing imperialism. The mechanics of the development of imperialism, the imperialist war and the revolution in Russia wholly confirm the conclusions of Leninism on this score.

Hence the necessity for the proletariat of the "dominant" nations to support -- resolutely and actively to support -- the national liberation movement of the oppressed and dependent peoples.

This does not mean, of course, that the proletariat must support every national movement, everywhere and always, in every individual concrete case. It means that support must be given to such national movements as tend to weaken, to overthrow imperialism, and not to strengthen and preserve it. Cases occur when the national movements in certain oppressed countries come into conflict with the interests of the development of the proletarian movement. In such cases support is, of course, entirely out of the question. The question of the rights of nations is not an isolated, self-sufficient question; it is a part of the general problem of the proletarian revolution, subordinate to the whole, and must be considered from the point of view of the whole. In the forties of the last century Marx supported the national movement of the Poles and the Hungarians and was opposed to the national movement of the Czechs and the South Slavs. Why? Because the Czechs and the South Slavs were then "reactionary nations," "Russian outposts" in Europe, outposts of absolutism; whereas the Poles and the Hungarians were "revolutionary nations," fighting against absolutism. Because support of the national movement of the Czechs and the South Slavs was at that time equivalent to indirect support for tsarism, the most dangerous enemy of the revolutionary movement in Europe.

"The various demands of democracy," writes Lenin, "including selfdetermination, are not an absolute, but 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." (See Vol. XIX, pp. 257-58.)

This is the position in regard to the question of particular national movements, of the possible reactionary character of "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," July 1916.

these movements -- if, of course, they are appraised not from the formal point of view, not from the point of view of abstract rights, but concretely, from the point of view of the interests of the revolutionary movement.

The same must be said of the revolutionary character of national movements in general. The unquestionably revolutionary character of the vast majority of national movements is as relative and peculiar as is the possible reactionary character of certain particular national movements. The revolutionary character of a national movement under the conditions of imperialist oppression does not necessarily presuppose the existence of proletarian elements in the movement, the existence of a revolutionary or a republican programme of the movement, the existence of a democratic basis of the movement. The struggle that the Emir of Afghanistan is waging for the independence of Afghanistan is objectively a revolutionary struggle, despite the monarchist views

of the Emir and his associates, for it weakens, disintegrates and undermines imperialism; whereas the struggle waged by such "desperate" democrats and "socialists," "revolutionaries" and republicans as, for example, Kerensky and Tsereteli, Renaudel and Scheidemann, Chernov and Dan, Henderson and Clynes, during the imperialist war was a reactionary struggle, for its result was the embellishment, the strengthening, the victory, of imperialism. For the same reasons, the struggle that the Egyptian merchants and bourgeois intellectuals are waging for the independence of Egypt is objectively a revolutionary struggle, despite the bourgeois origin and bourgeois title of the leaders of the Egyptian national movement, despite the fact that they are opposed to socialism; whereas the struggle that the British "Labour" government is waging to preserve Egypt's dependent position is for the same reasons a reactionary struggle, despite the proletarian origin and the proletarian title of the members of that government, despite the fact that they are "for" socialism. There is no need to mention the national movement in other, larger, colonial and dependent countries, such as India and China, every step of which along the road to liberation, even if it runs counter to the demands of formal democracy, is a steam-hammer blow at imperialism, i.e., is undoubtedly a revolutionary step.

Lenin was right in saying that the national movement of the oppressed countries should be appraised not from the point of view of formal democracy, but from

the point of view of the actual results, as shown by the general balance sheet of the struggle against imperialism, that is to say, "not in isolation, but on a world scale." (See Vol. XIX, p. 257)

2) The liberation movement of the oppressed peoples and the proletarian revolution. In solving the national question Leninism proceeds from the following theses:

a) **The world is divided into two camps:** the camp of a handful of civilized nations, which possess finance capital and exploit the vast majority of the population of the globe; and the camp of the oppressed and exploited peoples in the colonies and dependent countries, which constitute that majority.

b) The colonies and dependent countries, oppressed and exploited by finance capital, constitute a vast reserve and a very important source of strength for imperialism.

c) The revolutionary struggle of the oppressed peoples in the dependent and colonial countries against imperialism is the only road that leads to their emancipation from oppression and exploitation.

d) The most important colonial and dependent countries have already taken the path of the national liberation movement, which cannot but lead to the

crisis of world capitalism.

e) The interests of the proletarian movement in the developed countries and of the national liberation movement in the colonies call for the union of these two forms of the revolutionary movement into a common front against the common enemy, against imperialism.

f) The victory of the working class in the developed countries and the liberation of the oppressed peoples from the yoke of imperialism are impossible without the formation and consolidation of a common revolutionary front.

g) The formation of a common revolutionary front is impossible unless the proletariat of the oppressor nations renders direct and determined support to the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples against the imperialism of its "own country," for "no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations." (Engels.)

h) This support implies the upholding, defense and implementation of the slogan of the right of nations to secession, to independent existence as states.

i) Unless this slogan is implemented, the union and collaboration of nations within a single world economic system, which is the material basis for the victory of world socialism, cannot be brought about.

j) This union can only be voluntary, arising on the basis of mutual confidence and fraternal relations among peoples.

Hence the two sides, the two tendencies in the national question: the tendency towards political emancipation from the shackles of imperialism and towards the formation of an independent national state -- a tendency which arose as a consequence of imperialist oppression and colonial exploitation; and the tendency towards closer economic relations among nations, which arose as a result of the formation of a world market and a world economic system.

"Developing capitalism," says Lenin, "knows two historical tendencies in the national question. First: the awakening of national life and national movements, struggle against all national oppression, creation of national states. Second: development and acceleration of all kinds of intercourse between nations, breakdown of national barriers. creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.

"Both tendencies are a world-wide law of capitalism. The first predominates at the beginning of its development, the second characterizes mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society." (See Vol. XVII, pp. 139-40.)



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 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 in dependent states. "Critical Remarks on the National Question," October-December 1913.

Hence the necessity for a stubborn, continuous and determined struggle against the dominant-nation chauvinism of the "Socialists" of the ruling nations (Britain, France, America, Italy, Japan, etc.), who do not want to fight their imperialist governments, who do not want to support the struggle of the oppressed peoples in "their" colonies for emancipation from oppression, for secession.

Without such a struggle the education of the working class of the ruling nations in the spirit of true internationalism, in the spirit of closer relations with the toiling masses of the dependent countries and colonies, in the spirit of real preparation for the proletarian revolution, is inconceivable. The revolution would not have been victorious in Russia, and Kolchak and Denikin would not have been crushed, had not the Russian proletariat enjoyed the sympathy and support of the oppressed peoples of the former Russian Empire. But to win the sympathy and support of these peoples it had first of all to break the fetters of Russian imperialism and free these peoples from the yoke of national oppression.

Without this it would have been impossible to consolidate Soviet power, to implant real internationalism and to create that remarkable organization for the collaboration of peoples which is called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and which is the living prototype of the future union of peoples in a single world economic system.

Hence the necessity of fighting against the national isolationism, narrow-mindedness and aloofness of the Socialists in the oppressed countries, who do not want to rise above their national parochialism and who do not understand the connection between the liberation movement in their own countries and the proletarian movement in the ruling countries.

Without such a struggle it is inconceivable that the proletariat of the oppressed nations can maintain an independent policy and its class solidarity with the proletariat of the ruling countries in the fight for the overthrow of the common enemy, in the fight for the overthrow of imperialism.

Without such a struggle, internationalism would be impossible.

Such is the way in which the toiling masses of the dominant and the oppressed nations must be educated in the spirit of revolutionary internationalism.

Here is what Lenin says about this twofold task of communism in educating the workers in the spirit of internationalism:

"Can such education . . . be concretely identical in great, oppressing nations and in small, oppressed nations, in annexing nations and in annexed nations?

"Obviously not. The way to the one goal -- to complete equality, to the closest relations and the subsequent amalgamation of all nations -- obviously proceeds here by different routes in each concrete case; in the same way, let us say, as the route to a point in the middle of a given page lies towards the left from one edge and towards the right from the opposite edge. If a Social-Democrat belonging to a great, oppressing, annexing nation, while advocating the amalgamation of nations

in general, were to forget even for one moment that 'his' Nicholas II, 'his' Wilhelm, George, Poincaré, etc., also stands for amalgamation with small nations (by means of annexations) -- Nicholas II being for 'amalgamation' with Galicia, Wilhelm II for 'amalgamation' with Belgium, etc. -- such a Social-Democrat would be a ridiculous doctrinaire in theory and an abettor of imperialism in practice.

"The weight of emphasis in the internationalist education of the workers in the oppressing countries must necessarily consist in their advocating and upholding freedom of secession for oppressed countries. Without this there can be no internationalism. It is our right and duty to treat every Social-Democrat of an oppressing nation who fails to conduct such propaganda as an imperialist and a scoundrel. This is an absolute demand, even if the chance of secession being possible and 'feasible' before the introduction of socialism be only one in a thousand.

"On the other hand, a Social-Democrat belonging to a small nation must emphasize in his agitation the second word of our general formula: 'voluntary union' of nations. He may, without violating his duties as an internationalist, be in favor of either the political independence of his nation or its inclusion in a neighboring state X, Y, Z, etc. But in all cases, he must fight against small-nation narrowmindedness, isolationism and aloofness, he must fight for the recognition of the whole and the general, for the

subordination of the interests of the particular to the interests of the general.

"People who have not gone thoroughly into the question think there is a 'contradiction' in Social-Democrats of oppressing nations insisting on 'freedom of secession,' while Social-Democrats of oppressed nations insist on 'freedom of union.' However, a little reflection will show that there is not, and cannot be, any other road leading from the given situation to internationalism and the amalgamation of nations, any other road to this goal." (See Vol. XIX, pp. 261-62.)

“Does recognition of the right of nations to self-determination really imply support of any demand of every nation for self-determination? After all, the fact that we recognize the right of all citizens to form free associations does not at all commit us”

“no Marxist, without renouncing the principles of Marxism and of socialism generally, can deny that the interests of socialism are higher than the interests of the right of nations to self-determination.”  
Lenin