

Editorial

"Unconditional Support" and "Follow Third World Leadership"

Marxist-Leninists in Europe and North America usually manage to "forget" Lenin's clear statement that communists must support "... in deed, not merely in word . . . all revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations . . . and in the colonies." When the Communist International made unconditional support for revolutionary anti-colonial movements a condition of affiliation, it assumed — correctly for that period — that the center of the revolutionary process was among the working classes of the developed capitalist states in Europe and North America. This is no longer the case.

Following the defeat and containment of the revolutionary upsurge in the imperialist countries after World War I, the main focus of the revolutionary process shifted to anti-imperialist movements on the periphery of the world capitalist system. Neither the weaknesses and limitations of these movements, nor the ultimate importance of the metropolitan proletariat to the achievement of communism, diminish the present centrality of anti-imperialist national liberation movements.

History has not rendered Lenin's imperative obsolete. It has become more, not less, important for revolutionaries in the imperialist countries. Initially, it was seen as a necessary step towards winning hegemony for the revolutionary proletariat among the working masses — particularly the "toilers of the East." Now it marks the requirement for the class struggle in the imperialist center to be integrated into the general revolutionary movement against the capitalist world system.

Support for national liberation and full equality of peoples is not just one of a number of features of proletarian internationalism. It embodies the practical recognition of the international character of the extraction, appropriation, and distribution of surplus value, and of the actual alignment of forces for and against revolution in the world. In the absence of a proper appreciation of this principle, the workers in the metropolis will not be able decisively to break through the limits of social-democratic reformism.

The rejection, explicit or implicit, of this Leninist understanding of imperialism is a general characteristic of the (white) U.S. left. However, an incorrect opposing view has some currency also. Although it is an infinitely less serious weakness, it can lead to political errors.

Two related concepts are often used to summarize the Leninist conception. Put in slogan form, they are: "follow Third World leadership" and "unconditional support for national liberation." Frequently they are combined to yield: "unconditional support for Third World leadership." There is a basic validity to these concepts, but as they are commonly used they mystify political issues and undercut the very goals they seek to promote.

"Third World leadership" designates a reality. Not only do oppressed peoples and their organizations determine the form and content of their own struggles — a proposition that is widely accepted in words and denied in deeds; the movements of national liberation are the main component of the international class struggle and

decisively influence the class struggle within the imperialist states. This affects, for example, the terrain of the trade union struggle. That there is no wall between national liberation and the class struggle is immediately obvious in this country, where nationally oppressed peoples occupy strategically decisive positions within the working class.

These are important issues which merit elaboration, but our concern here is the element of error, not that of validity, in the use of the concept of "Third World leadership."

The first error is to reduce the revolutionary struggle in the imperialist countries to a question of following Third World leadership, or, more broadly, of solidarity with national liberation. There are two closely connected components of the world revolutionary process: the struggles of the oppressed peoples for national liberation, and the struggles of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. The former are at the present time the most active component; within the U.S. there exist national liberation struggles that decisively influence the form and content of class struggle, and identification with national liberation is the central element in the emergence of the proletariat as a revolutionary class. However, even in this situation, national liberation is not the totality of the revolutionary process.

Even on the level of tactics, if the specific approaches which proved successful in Vietnam may not be applicable to industrialized semi-colonies like Iran or Argentina, their applicability to a country like the U.S. is even more dubious, and it cannot be assumed that

those who have proven their ability to develop strong revolutionary movements under certain conditions necessarily have the answers for all situations.

Furthermore, while successful national liberation movements represent the most visible hopes for communism, they don't constitute a guarantee of it. Events constantly remind us of the reversibility of national liberation and the tenaciousness of the world capitalist system. The problems of moving from a military-political break with imperialism to the construction of a communist society largely remain to be solved. If this is the case for successful anti-imperialist revolutions, how can the strategy for revolution in imperialist countries be fabricated out of a simple identification with anti-imperialism?

The second error is the confusion of unconditional support for national liberation with an uncritical identification with positions taken by the national liberation leadership or elements of it. Unconditional support involves a conscious subordination of political differences for definite political reasons. The political leadership of national liberation movements must be followed on questions concerning the form and content of the movements they head, not because this leadership is always right, but because it is the social force whose correct and incorrect positions "matter." This has nothing to do with any attribution of infallibility and omniscience. We do liberation movements no favor by disguising disagreements, or, still worse, by evading questions which must be of

concern to all revolutionaries.

Communists and communist groups cannot cede their right to participate critically in the determination of revolutionary policy — not if they wish to remain communist. This is true no matter how insignificant our resources and capabilities appear when contrasted with the organized leadership of mass revolutionary movements. We should note well the disastrous consequences for the movement when genuinely revolutionary forces all over the world abandoned responsibility for all major political questions to the Soviet leadership. And after all, the Soviet party was the party that had made the first successful assault against capitalism and had defended itself in a bloody war against the combined forces of the capitalist world.

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