

"National liberation" in the 20th century: a strong link in the chain of imperialism

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Marx said that the truth of a theory is demonstrated in practice. For the proletariat, 70 years of bitter experience have clearly resolved the debate on the national question in favour of the position developed by Rosa Luxemburg and then by the groups of the Communist Left, especially Bilan, Internationalisme and our Current. In the first part of this article we saw how support for "national liberation of the people" played a crucial role in the defeat of the first international proletarian revolutionary wave between 1917 and 1923 (see [International Review no 66](#) ^[1]). In this second part we will see that the "national liberation" struggles have been an instrument of the imperialist wars and confrontations that have wracked the planet for the last 70 years.

1919-1945 THE IMPERIALIST MANOEUVRES BEHIND "NATIONAL LIBERATION"

The First World War marked the end of the ascendant period of capitalism and its plunge into the cesspit of the struggle between nation states for the division of the saturated world market. In this context the formation of new national states and the national liberation struggles were no longer an instrument for the expansion of capitalist relations and the development of the productive forces. Instead, they were converted into a cog in the generalised imperialist tensions between the different capitalist bandits. Already before the First World War, with the Balkan wars which gave Serbia, Montenegro, Albania etc their independence, Rosa Luxemburg had argued that these new nations were as imperialist as the old powers and were clearly insinuated into the bloody spiral towards generalised war:

"... Serbia is formally engaged in a national war of defence. But its monarchy and its ruling classes are filled with expansionist desires as are the ruling classes in all the modern states... Thus Serbia is today reaching out towards the Adriatic coast where it is fighting out a real imperialistic conflict with Italy on the backs of the Albanians... But above all this we must not forget: behind Serbian nationalism stands Russian imperialism" (The Junius Pamphlet, Chapter VII).

The world which emerged from the First World War was marked by the development of the revolutionary proletariat and this implied two counter posed historical perspectives: the extension of the world revolution or the survival of a decadent capitalism trapped in a spiral of crisis and wars. The crushing of the international proletariat's revolutionary wave signalled the frenzied sharpening of the tensions between the victorious bloc (Great Britain and France) and its powerful neighbour (Germany), aggravated by the expansion of the United States that threatened them all.

In this historical/world context 'national liberation' can not be seen from the point of view of the situation of just one country: *"From the point of view of Marxism, in discussing imperialism it is absurd to restrict oneself to conditions in one country alone, since all capitalist countries are closely bound together. Now, in time of war, this bond has grown immeasurably stronger. All humanity is*

thrown into a tangled bloody heap from which no nation can extricate itself on its own. Though there are more or less advanced countries, this war has bound them all together by so many threads that escape from this tangle for any single country acting on its own is inconceivable," (Lenin, 'Intervention on the Report on the Present Situation, at the 7th (April) Conference of the RSDLP(B), Collected Works, Vol. 2, page 73).

Using this method we can understand how 'national liberation' has been turned into the saviour of the imperialist policy of all states: the direct victors of the First World War, Great Britain and France, used it to justify their dismemberment of the defeated empires (the Austro-Hungarian, the Ottoman and Czarist) and to build a cordon sanitaire around the October Revolution. The United States elevated it to a universal doctrine, the 'principal' of the Society of Nations, in order, on the one hand, to combat the Russian Revolution, and on the other, to undermine the colonial empires of Great Britain and France which constituted the main obstacle to their own imperialist expansion. From the early 1920s, faced with the Treaty of Versailles, Germany used its 'national liberation' as the banner for the recovery of its imperialist potential. The 'just' and 'progressive' principle of the 'national liberation of Germany', which was defended in 1923 by the KPD and the Communist International after the Second Congress, was transformed by the Nazi Party into the 'Germany's right to living space'. For its part, Mussolini's Italy considered itself a 'proletarian nation' (a concept taken up later by the 'Marxist-Leninist' Mao-Tse-Tung) and demanded its 'natural rights' in Africa, the Balkans, etc.

The work of the treaty of Versailles

During the first years of the 1920's the victorious powers tried to implement a 'new world order' to serve their own interests. Its principle tool was the Treaty of Versailles (1919) officially based on 'democratic peace' and the 'right of self-determination', which granted independence to all the countries in Eastern and Central Europe: Finland, the Baltic countries, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland...

The independence of these countries served two objectives of British and French imperialism: on the one side, as we analysed in the 1st part of this series, to confront the Russian Revolution and, on the other, to create around defeated German imperialism a chain of hostile nations that would block its expansion into a zone which, for strategic, economic and historical reasons, constituted its natural area of influence.

The most devious machiavellianism could not have conceived of more unstable states, racked from the beginning by violent internal and external conflicts, obliged to submit to the tutelage of the great powers and to serve in their war games. Czechoslovakia contained two historical rivals, Czechs and Slovaks, and an important German minority in the Sudetenland; the Baltic states encompassed important Polish, Russian and German minorities; Romania housed Hungarians, Bulgaria had Turks; Poland the Germans... But the culmination of this work, without doubt, was Yugoslavia (today again rocked by a terrible bloodbath). This 'new' nation contained 6 nationalities with the most absurdly different levels of economic development one could imagine (from the economically developed Slovenia and Croatia to the semi-feudal Montenegro), whose areas of economic integration lay on the borders of neighbouring countries (Slovenia was complementary with Austria; Voivodina - part of Serbia - is a natural extension of the Hungarian plain; Macedonia is separated from the rest by mountains which connect it with Bulgaria and Greece), and it also contained Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims who are longstanding religious rivals! Even worse, each of these 'nationalities' contains minorities of a neighbouring nationality and more ludicrous still, of neighbouring states - Serbia has Albanians and Hungarians; Croatia is home to Italians and Serbs; Bosnia-Herzegovina has Serbs, Muslims and Croats.

"The recently created small bourgeois states are merely the by-products of imperialism. A whole series of little nations have been created to give temporary support to imperialism - Austria, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Bohemia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Armenia, Georgia, etc. Whether openly oppressed or officially protected, in reality they remain vassals. By dominating them by means of the banks, the railways, the monopoly of coal, imperialism condemns them to suffer from intolerable economic and national difficulties, interminable quarrels and bloody conflicts" (Second Congress of the Communist International: 'The Capitalist World and the Communist International, Part 1, International Relations since Versailles').

From the start, these new nations behaved in a clearly imperialist way, as the CI pointed out: *"These artificially created small states, divided, exhausted from the economic point of view, within the limits to which they have been prescribed, struggle amongst themselves in order to gain ports, provinces, small cities, anything. They look for protection from the stronger powers, whose antagonisms grow daily"* (ibid). Poland manifested its ambitions over the Ukraine provoking the war against the proletarian bastion in 1920. It also exerted pressure on Lithuania by appealing to the Polish minority in that country. In order to counter-act Germany, it allied itself with France faithfully serving its imperialist designs.

'Liberated' Poland fell under the iron dictatorship of Pilsudski. This tendency to annul the formalities of 'parliamentary democracy' which also took place in other countries (with the exception of Finland and Czechoslovakia) give the lie to the illusion - upon which the degenerating CI fed - that 'national liberation' would lead to 'more open democracy'. On the contrary, in the milieu of world imperialism, the newly 'liberated' states' own imperialist tendencies, the chronic economic crisis and their congenital instability lead them to express in an extreme and caricatured way - through military dictatorship - the general tendency of decadent capitalism towards state capitalism.

The 1930's saw imperialist tensions reach fever pitch, demonstrating that the Treaty of Versailles was not an instrument for 'democratic peace' but the kindling for new and more terrible imperialist fires. A rebuilt German imperialism undertook the struggle against the 'order of Versailles', aimed at the re-conquest of Central and Eastern Europe. Its main ideological weapon was 'national liberation': it invoked 'the rights of national minorities' in order to work with the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia; it fostered Croatian 'national liberation' in order to counter Serbian hostility and to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean; in Austria its argument was 'union with Germany', while it offered the Baltic states protection against Russia...

The 'order of Versailles' collapsed. The claim that the new states could be a guarantee of 'peace and stability' - which the Kautskyists and Social Democrats had used to support the 'peace of Versailles' - was totally destroyed. Increasingly sucked towards the imperialist whirlwind, these states had no other option than to plunge right into it, thus contributing to its amplification and aggravation.

China: the massacre of the proletariat gave the green light to imperialist antagonisms

Along with Eastern and Central Europe, China was another hot spot of international imperialist tensions. In 1911 the Chinese bourgeoisie attempted a late and weak democratic revolution, which rapidly became a fiasco. The collapse of the imperial state led to the general disintegration of the country into a thousand gangster territories dominated by warlords fighting amongst themselves, while at the same time being manipulated by Great Britain, Japan, the USA and Russia in a bloody battle for the strategic domination of the Chinese subcontinent.

For Japanese imperialism, China was crucial for its domination of the Far East. With this aim it 'disinterestedly' supported the cause of independence for Manchuria, one of the most industrialised

areas of China and the nerve centre for controlling Siberia, Mongolia and all of central China. Between 1924-28 they used the services of Chang-Tso-Ling, an old gangster who they converted into a Major-General and then into the Viceroy of Manchuria. In 1931 the Japanese bourgeoisie dispensed with him (by assassination), and used this as a pretext for their invasion and occupation of the whole of Manchuria, which they then converted into a sovereign state and elevated to an 'empire' placing Pou-Yi, the last decadent remnant of the Manchu dynasty, at its head.

This Japanese expansion clashed with Stalinist Russia that had a natural field of expansion in China. To satisfy the interests of Russian imperialism, Stalin openly betrayed the Chinese proletariat. This demonstrated unequivocally the irreconcilable antagonism between 'national liberation' and the proletarian revolution and, vice versa, the complete solidarity between 'national liberation' and imperialism. *"In China where a proletarian revolutionary struggle developed, the Russian Stalinists looked for an alliance with the Kuomintang of Chiang-Kai-Chek, ordering the young Communist Party of China to renounce its organisational autonomy, forcing it to adhere to the Kuomintang, and inventing for the occasion the 'front of 4 classes'... However, the desperate economic situation pushed millions of workers, lead by the workers of Shanghai, to insurrection; they took over the city against both the imperialists and the Kuomintang. The insurrectionary workers, organised by the rank and file of the Chinese CP, decided to confront Chaing-Kai-Chek's liberation army, which was supported by Stalin. The latter then ordered the cadres of the International to carry out the disgraceful task of placing the workers, once again, under the orders of Chaing-Kai-Chek. This was to have terrible consequences"* (Internacionalismo no 1: 'Democratic Peace, Armed Struggle and Marxism', 1964).

This crossfire of imperialist interests, fired also by British and Yankee imperialism also fanned, provoked a war that inflicted 30 years of death and destruction on the workers and peasants of China.

The Ethiopian War: a crucial moment in the build-up to World War II

Italian imperialism's invasion of Ethiopia, along with its occupation of Libya and Somalia, not only threatened British imperialism's position in Egypt but also its imperialist domination of the Mediterranean and Africa, and its communications with India.

The Ethiopian war, along with the Spanish Civil War [1] [2], thus marked a decisive step in the build-up to World War II. An important aspect of this massacre was the enormous propaganda effort and ideological mobilisation of the population, which was carried out by both sets of bandits and especially by the 'democracies' (France and Great Britain). Their interest in the 'independence' of Ethiopia was wrapped in the banner of 'national liberation', while Italian imperialism invoked its 'humanitarian' and 'liberating' mission in order to justify its invasion: the Negus had not fulfilled his promise to abolish slavery.

The Ethiopian war revealed 'national liberation' as the ideological recruiting sergeant for imperialist war, as a preparation for the orgy of nationalism and chauvinism which both imperialist gangs were to unleash, a means of mobilisation for the terrible slaughter of World War II. It was a trick that Rosa Luxemburg had already denounced: *"Today the nation is but a cloak that covers imperialist desires, a battle cry for imperialist rivalries, the last ideological measure with which the masses can be persuaded to play the role of cannon fodder in imperialist wars"* (The Junius Pamphlet Chapter VII).

1945-89: 'NATIONAL LIBERATION': A TOOL OF BOTH IMPERIALIST BLOCS

The Allied imperialists' victory in World War II marked a qualitative aggravation of decadent capitalism's tendencies towards militarism and the permanent war economy. The victorious bloc divided into two rival imperialist blocs - headed by the United States and the USSR - which rigidly controlled their spheres of influence through a network of military alliances - NATO and the Warsaw Pact - and ensured submission through a forest of organisations for 'economic cooperation', monetary regulation etc. All of which was backed up by the development of mind-boggling nuclear arsenals, which by the beginning of the 1960s could destroy the whole world.

In such conditions it is a macabre joke of talk of 'national liberation'. *"Concretely, national liberation is impossible and unrealisable in the present framework of capitalism. The great blocs command the whole of capitalist life and no country escapes from one imperialist bloc without falling under the domination of the other... Of course, the national liberation movements are not merely pawns that Truman or Stalin move about as they please. Nonetheless, the end result is the same. If Ho-Chi-Minh, an expression of Vietnam's wretchedness, wants to consolidate his own wretched power, then while his own men fight with the bitterness born of desperation, he will be at the mercy of imperialist competition and will have to resign himself to joining with one or the other (...)"* (Internationalisme no 21, page 25, May 1947, 'The Right of Peoples to Self-Determination').

In this historical period regional wars, systematically presented as "national liberation movements" were nothing but different episodes in the bloody confrontations between the two blocs.

Decolonisation

The wave of 'independence for nations' in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, which swept the world between 1945-60 was in fact part of the larger struggle by American imperialism to dislodge the old colonial imperialisms from their positions, especially its most direct rival given the economic riches and strategic position of its colonies and naval power: British imperialism.

At the same time, the old colonial empires had turned into fetters for their metropolises: the saturation of the market and the development of world-wide competition, along with the increasing cost of colonial armies and administration, had transformed these fountains of profit into millstones around their necks.

Certainly, the local bourgeoisies wanted to wrest power from their former masters. They tended to organise in guerrilla movements or in parties of 'civil disobedience' - demanding of course the submission of the local proletariat to the struggle for 'national liberation' - and thus played an active role in the decolonisation process. However, this role was essentially secondary and always subordinated to the designs of the American or Russian bloc. The latter made good use of these conflicts of 'decolonisation' in order to conquer strategic positions outside its Euro-Asiatic zone of influence.

The decolonisation of the British empire clearly illustrates this process: *"The British withdrawals from India and Palestine were the most spectacular moments in the break-up of the Empire, and the Suez Fiasco in 1956 marked the end of any illusions that Britain was still a 'first class power'"* ('The Evolution of the British Situation Since the Second World War,' International Review 17).

The newly 'decolonised' countries were born in an even worse state than the 1919 Versailles vintage. Their frontiers were artificially drawn with set rule and square; ethnic, tribal, and religious divisions abounded; economies were dependent on just one crop or mineral; the bourgeoisie was weak or nonexistent; technical and administrative elites were ill-prepared and dependent on the old colonial powers...

India is an example of this catastrophic situation: in 1947 the newly born state suffered an apocalyptical war between Muslims and Hindus, which resulted in the secession of Pakistan, with the vast majority of the Muslim population. Ever since, these two states have been involved in devastating wars and today the imperialist tensions between them are a major source of world instability. Both states - whose populations suffer some of the worst living conditions in the world - maintain, regardless of cost, nuclear installations that allow them to produce atomic bombs. In this context of permanent imperialist confrontation, India in 1971 supported the war of 'national liberation' by the eastern 'part' of Pakistan - Bangladesh. This region itself was another absurd creation of imperialism, since it was more than 2000 kilometres from West Pakistan! However the war, which cost hundreds of thousands of lives, led to the creation of an 'independent' state which has in its turn known nothing but coups, massacres, dictatorships, while the population has died from hunger or through devastating floods.

The Arab-Israeli wars

For 50 years, the Middle East has been a focus of imperialist tensions due to its enormous oil reserves and its vital strategic position. In the hands of the moribund Ottoman Empire before the 1914 war it was prey to the expansionist ambitions of Germany, Russia, France, Great Britain. After the World War, British imperialism took the largest part of the cake and left only crumbs for the French (Syria and Lebanon).

If in this period the local bourgeoisies began to push towards independence, it was the manoeuvres of British imperialism that determined the configuration of the region. Far from calming already existing rivalries these machinations led to their explosion on a much vaster scale: *"British imperialism, as we know, drew the Arab landowners and bourgeoisie onto its side during the World War by promising them an Arab national state. The Arab revolt was indeed a decisive element in the downfall of the Turkish-German front in the Near East"* (Bilan 32, 'The Arab-Jewish Conflict in Palestine', June/July 1936). As a 'reward' Great Britain created a series of 'sovereign' states in Iraq, Trans-Jordan, Arabia, Yemen... confronting each other, with economically incoherent territories, undermined by ethnic and religious divisions: a well-known and typical manipulation by British imperialism which kept them all divided and constantly at loggerheads to subject the whole region to its designs. However it did not stop there: *"As a counter-weight it solicited the support of the Jewish Zionists, telling them that Palestine would be given over to them both for administration and colonisation"* (ibid).

If in the Middle Ages the Jews were expelled from many countries, during the 19th century they were in the process of integration, as much at the 'upper' levels of society - in the bourgeoisie - as at the 'lower' levels - the proletariat - into the nations in which they lived. This reveals the dynamic of integration and overcoming of racial and religious differences that took place in the capitalist nations during their period of progress. It was only at the end of the century, that is to say with the growing exhaustion of capitalism's dynamic of expansion, that sectors of the Jewish bourgeoisie launched the ideology of Zionism (the creation of a state in the 'promised land'). Its creation in 1948 not only constituted a manoeuvre by American imperialism to dislodge Britain from this zone and to stop Russia's meddling tendencies there, it also revealed - in connection with that imperialist objective - the reactionary character of the formation of new nations: it was not a manifestation of a dynamic of integration of populations as in the last century but of the separation and isolation of an ethnic group in order to use them as a lever to exclude another group - the Arabs.

The Israeli state from the beginning has been an immense barracks for permanent war which uses the colonisation of the desert lands as a military tool: the colonists are under military command, and receive military training; the state of Israel is a ruinous economic enterprise supported by enormous

credits from the USA and based on a draconian exploitation of the workers, the Jews as much as the Palestinians [2] [3].

American support for Israel led the most unstable Arab states with major internal and external contradictions to ally themselves with Russian imperialism. Their ideological banner from the beginning was the 'Arab cause' and the 'national liberation of the Palestinian people', which was converted into a favourite theme for the propaganda of the Russian bloc.

As in many other cases the Palestinians themselves were of the least importance. They were housed in wretched refugee camps in Egypt, Syria etc and were used as cheap labour in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, just as they were in Israel. The PLO was created in 1963 as a 'national liberation' movement; from its beginnings it has been a bunch of gangsters who have exacted a tribute from the miserable wages of the Palestinian workers in Israel, Lebanon and elsewhere. The PLO is a mere labour broker that controls the Palestinian work force and extorts up to half its pay. Its methods of discipline in the refugee camps and in the Palestinian communities are no better than those of the Israeli army and police.

Finally we must remember that the worst massacres of the Palestinians have been perpetrated by their 'brother' Arab governments: in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and, above all, in Jordan, where their 'friend' Hussein in September 1970 brutally bombed the Palestinian camps causing thousands of deaths.

It is important to underline in this respect the systematic utilisation by imperialism, as much by the great powers as the small ones, of the religious and ethnic divisions which are especially important in the most underdeveloped regions of the world: *"That the Jewish and Palestinian populations are pawns in the international imperialist intrigues, is beyond doubt. That in order to carry out this work, these manipulators stir up and exploit the anachronistic and backward national prejudices and sentiments, which are so strong in the masses due to the persecutions to which they have been subjected, is no surprise to us. As can be seen in one of these local flare ups: the war in Palestine, where in an increasingly bloody frenzy, Jews and Arabs have slaughtered each other"* ('On Particular Cases', Internationalisme 35, June 1948, page 18). Imperialism has played the sorcerer's apprentice with these conflicts: stimulating them, radicalising them and making them insoluble, because essentially the historical crisis of the system offers no terrain for absorbing them and in extreme cases they have finished up aggravating and making even worse the chaos and contradictions of the imperialist tensions, because they have taken on a 'life of their own'.

The wars in the Middle East have not had as their aim either 'Palestinian rights' or the 'national liberation' of the Arab people. The 1948 war served to dislodge British imperialism from the region. That of 1956 marked the reinforcement of American control. While those of 1967, 1973 and 1982 represented the American imperialism's counter-offensive against the growing penetration of Russian imperialism, which had made more or less stable alliances with Syria, Egypt and Iraq.

In all of this, the Arab states came off the worst, while the Jewish state was militarily strengthened. However the real victor was the United States.

The Korean War (1950-53)

At stake in this open war between the Russian and American imperialist blocs was America's ability to halt Russian expansion in the Far East. In the event, the American camp was successful.

The Russian gang presented its enterprise as a 'national liberation movement': *"The Stalinist propaganda has especially insisted that its 'democrats' are supposed to be struggling for national*

emancipation and within the framework of the right of peoples to self-determination. Their arguments are lent indisputable weight by the extraordinary corruption which reigns inside the ruling clique in South Korea, its 'Japanese' methods of policing, its feudal inability to resolve the agrarian question. They even go so far as to present Kim Il Sung as the 'new Garibaldi' (Internationalisme no 45, page 23: 'The Korean War').

Another element that marks the Korean War is the formation, as a direct result of inter-imperialist confrontation, of two national states on the same national territory: North and South Korea. This was also the case with East and West Germany, North and South Vietnam. From the point of view of the historical development of capitalism, this is a complete aberration that highlights the bloody and ruinous farce that is 'national liberation'. The existence of these states was directly linked not to a real 'nation' but to a real imperialist struggle between the blocs. These 'nations' were sustained as such, in a majority of cases, by means of brutal repression while their self-defeating and artificial character has been made clear by the spectacular collapse - within the general framework of the historic collapse of Stalinism - of the East German state.

Vietnam

The 'national liberation' struggle in Vietnam, which began in the 1920's, always fell into the orbit of one imperialist gang or the other. During World War 2 the Americans and British armed Ho-Chi-Minh and his Vietcong because he fought Japanese imperialism. After the Second World War, the Americans and British supported France - a Colonial power in Indo-China - given the pro-Russian inclination of the Vietnamese leaders. However, in 1946 both sides came to a 'compromise': confronted with a series of workers revolts which exploded in Hanoi, and in order to smash them, "*The Vietnamese bourgeoisie still needs French troops to keep its affairs in order*" (Internationalisme 13, 'The National and Colonial Question', September 1946).

However, from 1952-53, after its defeat in the Korean War, Russian imperialism turned towards Vietnam and for 20 years, the Vietcong confronted first the French and then the United States in a savage war where both sides committed the most appalling atrocities. The result was a devastated country which today, 16 years after its 'liberation', has not only been unable to rebuild but is increasingly sinking into catastrophe. The degeneracy and absurdity of this war is made clear when we see that Vietnam was made 'free' and 'united' because the United States had gained for its imperialist bloc the enormous prize constituted by Stalinist China and consequently, the Vietnamese pigmy became secondary in its plans.

It is important to underline the practice of the 'new anti-imperialist Vietnam', including before 1975, as a potential regional imperialist power in the whole of Indo-China: it submitted Laos and Cambodia to its influence. In Cambodia, under the pretext of 'liberating' the country from the barbarity of the Khmer-Rouge - which through its link to Peking was already tied to the American bloc - it invaded the country and installed a regime based on the occupying army.

The Vietnam War, especially in the 1960s, stirred up a formidable campaign by the Stalinists, Trotskyists, along with the old campaigners of the 'liberal' fractions of the bourgeoisie. This campaign presented this barbarity as the spear-head which would awaken the proletariat of the industrialised countries. In this grotesque way the Trotskyists tried to resuscitate the errors of the CI on the national and colonial question about the "*unity between the workers' struggles in the metropolis and the struggle for national emancipation in the Third World*" (for a critique of this idea see the first part of this series).

One of the arguments used to support this mystification was that the growing number of demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the US and Europe were a factor in the historical awakening of the workers' struggle from 1968. In reality the defence of 'national liberation' struggles, along with the defence of the 'socialist countries', which was so fashionable in the student milieu, played on the contrary a role of mystification and thus constituted a barrier of the first order against the recovery of the proletarian struggle.

Cuba

During the 1960's, Cuba was a major link in all the 'anti-imperialist' propaganda. A poster of the "heroic guerrilla" Che Guevara was an obligatory decoration for the room of any politically-minded student. Today, Cuba's disastrous economic situation (mass emigration, shortages of everything, even bread) perfectly illustrate the complete impossibility of any kind of 'national liberation'. At first, the bearded gangsters of the Sierra Maestra had no particular sympathy for Russia. Their desire to conduct a policy that would be 'autonomous' with regard to the United States inevitably pushed them into the arms of Russia capital.

In reality Fidel Castro headed a nationalist fraction that adopted 'scientific socialism', liquidating many of its former 'comrades' - who finished up in the Miami gang, i.e., the American bloc - because his only way of surviving was in the Russian bloc. This 'help' was amply paid for, amongst other things, by making the Cuban army the imperialist sergeant in Ethiopia - in support of the pro-Russian regime - in South Yemen and above all, in Angola, where Cuba sent 60,000 soldiers. This sub-imperialist role of providing cannon fodder for the wars in Africa has cost the lives of many Cuban workers - to which we must add the Africans who died for their 'liberation' - and which has contributed as much as to the atrocious misery to which the proletariat and Cuban population has been subject, as the actions of the American bloc.

1980s: The 'Freedom Fighters'

After up-rooting the Russians from their positions in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, the American bloc continued its offensive to completely encircle the USSR. The war in Afghanistan has to be understood in this context. When the Soviets rolled into Afghanistan in 1979, the USA responded by forming a coalition of 7 Afghan guerrilla groups whom it armed with the most sophisticated weapons. This trapped the Russian troops in a dead end, which fed the enormous discontent that already existed in throughout the USSR and which was to contribute - within the global framework of the decomposition of capitalism and the historic collapse of Stalinism - to the spectacular collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989.

Arising out of this important strengthening of the American bloc, it was able to tear away from the Russians the mantle of defenders of 'national liberation', which for 30 years Russia had monopolised.

As we have shown throughout this article, all the different imperialisms have been able to use 'national liberation' as a tool: the fascist gang employed it in every imaginable concoction and so has 'democracy'. However, from the 1950's, Stalinism tried to present itself as the 'progressive' and 'anti-imperialist' bloc, covering its criminal plans with ideological clothes which represented the 'socialist countries' not as 'imperialists' but on the contrary as 'militant anti-imperialists' and reaching the height of delirium, when it presented 'national liberation' as a direct step towards 'socialism'. This was a fraud which, despite its errors, the Thesis on the National and Colonial Question denounced: *"A determined fight is necessary against the attempt to put a communist cloak around revolutionary*

liberation movements that are not really communist in the backward countries" (Theses on the National and Colonial Question, point 11, 2nd Congress of the CI, March 1920).

This entire strategy came undone in the 1980's. Along with the principal factor - the development of the workers' struggles and consciousness - the interminable twists and turns dictated by the imperialist necessities of Russia caused its decline: let us recall, amongst many others, the case of Ethiopia. Until 1974, when the Negus' regime was in the Western gang, Russia supported the National Liberation Front of Eritrea - converting it into a champion of 'socialism'. However with the fall of the Negus, replaced by nationalist officers orientated towards Russia, things changed: now Ethiopia was converted into a 'Marxist-Leninist socialist' regime and the Eritrean Front overnight was transformed into an 'agent of imperialism' when it allied itself to the American bloc.

SINCE 1989: "NATIONAL LIBERATION" SPEARHEAD OF CHAOS

The events of 1989, the thunderous fall of the Eastern bloc and the disintegration of the Stalinist regimes, has lead to the disappearance of the previous configuration of world imperialism, characterised by the division into two great enemy blocs and, therefore to an explosion of nationalist conflicts.

The Marxist analysis of this new situation - which is set in the understanding of the process of the decomposition of capitalism (see International Review's 57 and 62) - allows us to confirm conclusively the positions of the Communist Left against 'national liberation'.

In respect to the first part of the question - the nationalist explosion - we can see that the whirlwind Stalinism's collapse has created a bloody spiral of inter-ethnic conflicts, massacres and pogroms [3] [4]. This phenomenon is not specific to the old Stalinist regimes. The majority of African countries have old tribal and ethnic conflicts that - in the framework of the process of decomposition - have been accelerated in the last few years leading to massacres and interminable wars. In the same way India has suffered similar nationalist, religious and ethnic tensions, which have caused thousands of deaths.

"The absurd ethnic conflicts where populations massacre each other because they do not have the same religion or the same language, because different folk traditions which have been perpetuated for decades, appeared to be confined to the countries of the 'Third World', Africa, the Middle East... But now it is in Yugoslavia, only a few hundred kilometres from the industrial centres of Northern Italy and Austria, that we are seeing these absurdities unleashed... All these movements reveal an even greater absurdity: in a period where the internationalisation of the economy has reached levels never known before in history, where the bourgeoisie of the advanced countries has tried, without success, to give itself a framework beyond that of the nation in order to manage its economy - the EEC is an example of this - the dissolution of the nations which were bequeathed by the 2nd World War into a multitude of petty states is a pure aberration, even from the mere point of view of the capitalists' interests. As far as the fate of the population of these regions is concerned it is not going to be better but much worse: growing economic disorder, submission to chauvinist demagogues and xenophobia, the settling of accounts and pogroms between communities which have lived together until now and, above all, tragic divisions between different sectors of the working class. Yet more misery, oppression, terror, the destruction of class solidarity between workers in front of their exploiters, this is the meaning of nationalism today" (Manifesto of the 9th Congress of the ICC).

This nationalist explosion is the extreme consequence, of the aggravation of the contradictions of the imperialist politics of the last 70 years towards their culminating point. The destructive and chaotic tendencies of 'national liberation', which have been hidden by the mystifications of 'anti-imperialism'

and 'developing economies' etc. and which had been clearly denounced by the Communist Left, have in their annihilating fury surpassed the most pessimistic visions. 'National liberation' in the phase of decomposition represents the rotten fruit of all the aberrant and destructive work carried out by imperialism.

"The phase of decomposition appears as the result of an accumulation of all of the characteristics of a moribund system, completing the 75-years death agony of a historically condemned mode of production. Concretely, not only do the imperialist nature of all states, the threat of world war, the absorption of civil society by the state Moloch, and the permanent crisis of the capitalist economy continue during the phase of decomposition, they reach a synthesis and an ultimate conclusion within it." (International Review 62: 'Decomposition, Final Phase of the Decadence of Capitalism, point 3, page 16).

The mini-states emerging from the dislocation of the ex-USSR and Yugoslavia are the first characteristic steps of this more brutal imperialism. Yeltsin the 'democratic hero' of the Russian Federation threatens his neighbours and savagely represses the move towards independence by the autonomous Chechen Republic. Lithuania represses the Polish minority; Moldavia its Russian minority. Azerbaijan openly confronts Armenia... The immense ex-Soviet sub-continent is giving way to 16 mini-imperialist states, which could well become involved in mutual conflicts that will make the slaughter in Yugoslavia look like a tea party. Amongst other dangers, they could bring into play the nuclear arsenals dispersed throughout the ex-USSR.

This heightened utilization of 'national liberation' will produce even more chaotic and catastrophic consequences than in the past. And this in turn can only lead to a bloody pandemonium of increasingly fierce conflicts.

The proletariat must recognise 'national liberation' more than ever as a policy, a slogan, a standard, which has been totally integrated by the reactionary and decadent capitalist order. Against it must develop the proletariat's own policy: Internationalism, the struggle for the world revolution.

Adalen 18.11.1991

[1] [5] In this article we do not analyse the War in Spain since we have published many articles in the Review on this (see International Reviews nos 7, 25, 47) as well the pamphlet which collects together the texts of Bilan on this question. The nationalist and anti-fascist mystifications which, in large dosages, fell on the local and international proletariat hid from them the reality that the Spanish war was a crucial episode, along with Ethiopia, in the maturation of World War Two.

[2] [6] *"These latest events have rewarded us with a new state: the state of Israel. We have no intention within the framework of this article, to develop on the Jewish problem... The future of the Jewish 'people' does not consist in the reinstallation of its autonomy and its national rights but in the disappearance of all frontiers and all ideas of national existence. The bloody persecution of the Jews these last years and in the last war, though they were tragic, are not a particular case but a manifestation of the barbarity of a decadent society, which is struggling in the convulsions of its agony and of a humanity which has not been able to advance to its salvation: socialism,"* (Internationalisme no 35, June 1948).

[3] [7] For an analysis of these events see 'Nationalist Barbarity' in International Review no 62.

Deepen:

- Balance sheet of 70 years of "national liberation" struggles ^[8]

Heritage of the Communist Left:

- The national question ^[9]

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