

# **THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND CLASS STRUGGLE**

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民族問題和階級斗争

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NATIONALITIES and classes are questions which are interrelated. The question of nationalities is in essence a question of classes. As Comrade Mao Tse-tung pointed out, "In the final analysis, a national struggle is a question of class struggle."<sup>1</sup> This is a Marxist-Leninist principle. It is a principle that we must keep firmly in mind when we examine and deal with the question of nationalities, whether it is a national and colonial question on the world-wide scale or one of our own country and whether it is a question in the period of democratic revolution or one in the period of socialist revolution and construction in China.

## 1

Nationality is a historical concept which grew up in the period when capitalism was in the ascendancy. The origin of the national question lies in the capitalist-imperialist system, in the system of exploitation based on the private ownership of the means of production. Marx said: "The existing relations of ownership provide the condition for the exploitation of one nation by another."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *Statement Calling on the People of the World to Unite to Oppose Racial Discrimination by U.S. Imperialism and Support the American Negroes in Their Struggle Against Racial Discrimination*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1964, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Speeches on Poland", *Collected Works*, German ed., Berlin, 1959, Vol. 4, p. 416.

Aside from oppressing and exploiting the working people of their own nationality, the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes of an oppressor nationality always oppress and exploit other nationalities in their own country, while in foreign countries they scramble for markets, regions producing raw materials and places for investment, and enlarge the scope of their exploitation. They strive to establish systems of national oppression and colonialism in order to carry out ruthless national aggression and oppression and subject other nationalities to their exploitation. So long as imperialism, capitalism, the exploiting classes and the system of exploitation exist, national oppression and national exploitation will not vanish.

National oppression is definitely not, as the bourgeois nationalists and other exploiting classes assert, a struggle and opposition between all the people of one nationality and all those of another. It is oppression of the vast majority of the people of an oppressed nationality, mainly its workers, peasants and other labouring people, by the ruling class of an oppressor nationality. The oppressors are a small handful, while the oppressed form the overwhelming majority. Comrade Mao Tse-tung said:

In the United States, it is only the reactionary ruling circles among the whites who oppress the Negro people. They can in no way represent the workers, farmers, revolutionary intellectuals and other enlightened persons who comprise the overwhelming majority of the white people. At present, it is the handful of imperialists headed by the United States, and their supporters, the reactionaries in different countries, who are inflicting oppression, aggression and intimidation on the overwhelming majority of the nations and peoples of

the world. We are in the majority and they are in the minority. At most, they make up less than 10 per cent of the 3,000 million population of the world.<sup>1</sup>

In oppressing other nationalities or carrying out aggression upon them, the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes always do it in the name of their whole nation and proclaim that they are doing it for the benefit of all their people. This is a shameless fraud. Their aggression upon and oppression of other nationalities are not only widely at variance with the interests of the proletariat and other working people of their own nationality but are a complete violation of those interests and stand in basic contradiction with them. Engels already stated: "A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations."<sup>2</sup> Referring to the hostile attitude of the English worker towards the Irish worker, Karl Marx, in a letter to Meyer and Vogt, said: "he . . . turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*."<sup>3</sup> Lenin said: "The oppression of 'subject peoples' is a double-edged weapon. It cuts both ways — against the 'subject peoples' and against the Russian people."<sup>4</sup> For this reason, the proletariat and the working people of various nationalities must see through this deception of the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes, and stand against national aggression and oppression of

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Speeches on Poland", *Collected Works*, German ed., Berlin, 1959, Vol. 4. p. 417.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*, International Publishers, New York, 1942, p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "National Equality", *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, Vol. 20, p. 238.

every kind, and support the struggle of oppressed nationalities for liberation.

Marx considered that the development of the national liberation movement is a decisive blow to the ruling classes of the capitalist countries and is necessary to the proletariat for their own emancipation. In his letter to Meyer and Vogt, Marx said that to the workers of England the national emancipation of Ireland "is no question of abstract justice or human sympathy but the first condition of *their own emancipation*".<sup>1</sup> Lenin developed the standpoint of Marx and Engels. He considered it necessary to distinguish the nationality which is oppressed from that which oppresses and put forward the slogan "Workers of All Countries and Oppressed Nations, Unite!" He said:

The revolutionary movement in the advanced countries would indeed be a mere deception if complete and close unity did not exist between the workers fighting against capital in Europe and America and the hundreds and hundreds of millions of "colonial" slaves who are oppressed by that capital.<sup>2</sup>

Under the historical conditions of the present age, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has further developed the Marxist-Leninist principle regarding the relation between the national liberation movement and the proletarian revolution. He sets great store on the significance of and the role played by the national liberation movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In his statement of August 8,

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Marx to Meyer and Vogt", *Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*, International Publishers, New York, 1942, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Second Congress of the Communist International", *Selected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1946, Vol. 10, p. 160.



1963, supporting the American Negroes in their fight against racial discrimination, Comrade Mao Tse-tung said emphatically:

The evil system of colonialism and imperialism grew up along with the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes, and it will surely come to its end with the thorough emancipation of the black people.<sup>1</sup>

In his talk with guests from Iraq, Iran and Cyprus on May 9, 1960, Comrade Mao Tse-tung said that the just struggles of the peoples of the various countries in the world have received and will continue to receive firm support from the 650 million people of China. He pointed out that the days of imperialism are numbered. The imperialists have committed all manner of evils and all the oppressed peoples of the whole world will never forgive them. He pointed out that to defeat the reactionary rule of imperialism, it is necessary to form a broad united front and unite with all forces, excluding the enemy, that can be united with and continue to wage arduous struggles.<sup>2</sup>

Among the people of the oppressed nationalities, those who actually suffer national oppression are mainly the oppressed and exploited classes, the workers and the broad masses of labouring people, most of whom are peasants. When their class interests are encroached upon by the imperialists through national oppression, the national bourgeoisie and even certain patriotic kings, princes and aristocrats of an oppressed nationality may sometimes fight against national oppression together with the broad masses of working people of their own nationality. In

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Chairman Mao Tse-tung's Important Talks with Guests from Asia, Africa and Latin America*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, p. 5.

this struggle the proletariat should unite with them, while at the same time they must understand that the attitude of these people towards imperialist national oppression is, in the final analysis, based on their own class interests. As to the reactionaries of the oppressed nationalities who are in league with the imperialists, they will never oppose national oppression; on the contrary, they will unite with the ruling classes of the oppressor nationalities, become their lackeys, and collaborate with them in the oppression and exploitation of the working people of their own nationalities.

From this we can see that national oppression is in reality class oppression, and that the struggle against national oppression is in reality a struggle against class oppression, and often simultaneously a struggle against the reactionaries and traitors of one's own nationality.

It is precisely for this reason that Marxist-Leninists do not consider the national question as an isolated one. They consider the solution of the national question as a problem of revolution, a part of the general question of revolution. At different stages of the revolution the political party of the proletariat has different tasks concerning the national question. During the period of imperialism the national question is a part of the general question of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In order to achieve national equality and total emancipation, the people of the oppressed nationalities must resolutely carry out national democratic revolution, put an end to the national oppression of the imperialists and overthrow the rule of their lackeys; they must then carry through the socialist revolution and destroy all the exploiting classes and systems. Marx and Engels said in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

The national question in China is a part of the general question of the Chinese revolution, and the task of the Chinese Communist Party in this field is a part of the general task of the Chinese revolution. The tackling of such a partial question in China must be subordinated to the interests of the Chinese revolution as a whole. It is only in the course of development of the revolution that the national question can be solved in our country.

Before liberation, China was a colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal country, and all its nationalities alike suffered national oppression by foreign imperialists. The minority nationalities of China suffered also the national oppression of Han chauvinism. In his political report made at the Seventh Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1945, Comrade Mao Tse-tung said:

The anti-popular clique of the Kuomintang denies that many nationalities exist in China, and labels all excepting the Han nationality as "tribes". It has taken over the reactionary policy of the governments of the Ching Dynasty and of the Northern warlords in relation

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, p. 55.

to the minority nationalities, oppressing and exploiting them in every possible way.<sup>1</sup>

The national oppression carried out by the foreign imperialists was in essence oppression carried out by the foreign monopoly bourgeoisie, while the national oppression of Han chauvinism within the country was in essence oppression carried out by the feudal and bureaucrat-capitalist classes of the Hans who oppressed the broad masses of Han working people as well. Within the minority nationalities there were also feudal and slave-owner classes who, collaborating with imperialists and the feudal and bureaucrat-capitalist classes among the Hans, oppressed and exploited the broad masses of working people. This, in short, was the substance and class nature of the national question in China during the period of democratic revolution. Imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism are the three great enemies of the people of all nationalities of China. Of these three, imperialism is their principal and most ferocious foe. Comrade Mao Tse-tung said:

The contradiction between imperialism and the Chinese nation and the contradiction between feudalism and the great masses of the people are the basic contradictions in modern Chinese society. . . . But the contradiction between imperialism and the Chinese nation is the principal one.<sup>2</sup>

During the period of democratic revolution in China the grave task of fighting against imperialism made it neces-

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "On Coalition Government", *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, Vol. III, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party", *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, Vol. II, p. 313.

sary for all the nationalities in our country to unite and consolidate in the closest manner. History has shown that only by uniting with the Hans in the struggle against their three enemies, especially against imperialist aggression and oppression, can the minority nationalities achieve national equality and liberation.

During the period of democratic revolution, in accordance with the theory of Marxism-Leninism and proceeding from the historical conditions of the Chinese revolution and the relationship among the nationalities obtaining at the time, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Comrade Mao Tse-tung laid down the fundamental principle for solving the national question in China. The principle is: to practise national equality, lead and unite all the nationalities to carry out the revolutionary struggle against the three great enemies, build after the victory of the revolution a united country, i.e. the People's Republic of China, abolish the system of national oppression, institute regional national autonomy and realize the common development and prosperity of all nationalities in the motherland — a great family based on national equality, solidarity, friendship and co-operation. Centring round this principle the Party formulated a series of policies with regard to the nationalities, and has led the people of the various minority nationalities to unite with the Han people to carry out a heroic revolutionary struggle for many years.

With the victory of the Chinese people's revolution, the rule by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism represented by the reactionary Kuomintang ruling clique was overthrown. A people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and founded on the alliance of workers and peasants was established, and the task of the

Chinese people of unifying their motherland and gaining independence and emancipation from foreign domination was successfully accomplished, the system of national oppression within the country completely abolished, and equality between all the nationalities and unity and regional autonomy realized.

The fundamental policy of our Party in solving the national question is to exercise regional national autonomy by the minority nationalities within the big family of the unified motherland. This policy has worked successfully. Regional national autonomy is a part of the system of the people's democratic dictatorship. It has ensured the unification of the motherland and the unity of the nationalities, protected the rights of equality and autonomy for the people of the minority nationalities, and united the working people and all those who can be united among the various nationalities in the autonomous regions. Apart from this, regional national autonomy is a system by which the working people of the minority nationalities carry out democratic reforms, protect the fruits of victory of the democratic revolution, and help forward socialist revolution and construction; it is a weapon of the working people of the minority nationalities for waging class struggle and struggle against the enemy.

With the founding of the People's Republic of China, the national question, however, was not completely solved, for the rule of the feudal class and even slave-owners still existed among many minority nationalities. Remaining in power and continuing their exploitation, they tried in every way to use the historical legacy of national misunderstandings to sow dissension among the nationalities; they even launched insurrections, tried to break the unity

of the motherland and sabotage the people's revolution of the various nationalities, so as to attain their criminal aim of preserving and extending the selfish class interests of a few. Under their oppressive rule, the working people of the minority nationalities suffered ruthless exploitation and led an exceedingly miserable life. Under such conditions the oppressed and exploited people of the minority nationalities were unable to fully enjoy, if at all, the right of national equality given them by the state. Furthermore, it was not possible to transform the backward productive forces of these nationalities. In short, these people were not completely emancipated — not emancipated as a class. Without class emancipation, the broad masses of the working people of the minority nationalities could not gain complete national liberation.

In solving the national question in China, two fundamental points must be clearly understood:

1. There are classes within every nationality. What people, or to be more specific, what class, then, is the essential part of a nationality? When we say national interests, to whose interests do we refer? When we say national liberation, whose liberation do we mean? When we say national equality and progress, to whom do these terms apply? In the answers to these questions lies the difference between the proletarian view of nationality and the view of the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes.

The bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes always put their own class interests above those of the people of the whole nationality. They want to monopolize the term "nationality" and proclaim themselves the representatives of the nationality and custodians of the national interests. According to them, their own exploiting classes are the

essential part of the nationality and their class interests are the national interests. For them, so long as their demands with regard to their selfish class interests are satisfied, national equality and national liberation are achieved and the national question is solved. Marxist-Leninists, on the contrary, consider that the essential part of a nationality can only be the oppressed and exploited working people who are the vast majority of its population. In the case of China's minority nationalities, the essential part of a nationality consists of the peasants, herdsmen, serfs and slaves, most of whom are poor, miserable and greatly oppressed. Comrade Mao Tse-tung said:

Our government represents not only the workers and peasants but the whole nation. This has been implicit in our slogan of a workers' and peasants' democratic republic, because the workers and peasants constitute 80 to 90 per cent of the population.<sup>1</sup>

In the final analysis, national interests are the interests of the proletarians and other working people, who are the overwhelming majority of the population. Apart from the class interests of the proletariat there can be no real national interests. National liberation must be the liberation of the vast majority of the nation, i.e. the working people. The same principle applies to national equality and development. The national question is essentially one of the emancipation of the broad masses of oppressed and exploited working people of all nationalities. If the working people, the overwhelming majority of the people of all nationalities, do not enjoy equality and emancipation.

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism", *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, Vol. I, p. 168.



then those nationalities are not equal or free, and the national question cannot be said to be solved.

2. Who is to be relied on for the solution of the national question? According to the exploiting classes of the minority nationalities, national equality and national emancipation could be achieved and the national question solved simply by relying on the few persons in the exploiting class, i.e. the upper strata of the nationalities, who will adopt and carry through certain reform measures, or by hanging on to a certain imperialist country, or living on the bounty of the reactionary ruling class in the country. They are fundamentally opposed to the masses and revolution; they, of course, will not choose the path of revolution by relying on the masses. To Marxist-Leninists, however, the national question can only be solved through revolutionary struggles carried out by the broad masses of the people of the exploited classes of oppressed nationalities. To solve this question completely, the political party of the proletariat must mobilize and give leadership to the broad masses of the oppressed and exploited working people of the minority nationalities and win over and unite with all those who can be united to wage the revolutionary struggle and resolutely carry the revolution through to the very end. All doctrines of reform and reliance on favours are basically wrong and must be strongly opposed. This is another difference between the proletarian and bourgeois views of nationalities.

The question of revolution is the basic question for any nationality. The national question can never be solved apart from revolution and class struggle. It is in order to solve the national question that the political party of the proletariat leads the people of the minority nationalities to