

Class, not nation: a world to win

Nationalism, integrationist or separatist, in spite of and against one another, breeds patriotism that feeds on contempt for and hostility towards people in others, whereunder fratricidal strives are inevitable. Instances abound around. But these strives, in essence, are expressions of the dynamic of a system that feeds on profit.

"Independence", "My country", "Sovereignty", "Self-sufficiency", "Indigenous growth", "Prosperity", "Peace" et al pertain to the ideology of nationalism that forestalls class-consciousness.

This ideology speaks in terms of "common bonds" – race, religion, language, economic interests – to define the nation-state. But such homogeneity is conspicuously absent in almost all the 195 countries¹ on our planet. And all nations are class-divided.

All definitions are confusing. In fact what capitalism needs for its continual reproduction is not so much "a nation" as "a state" based on the economics of value-price-profit oriented private property institution. And for that matter, a nationalist "liberator" integrationist or separatist, is bound to appeal to the prejudiced emotions of his "people" over a territory at all times in the name of a national "story" – christened "history" – invariably told by "the heroes"!

Colonial expansion of trade and commerce transgressed feudal formations and established the World Market in the past century. Capitalist production and distribution assumed global dimensions. Striving capitalist interests raised heads in the colonies under the banner of "freedom movements". Direct colonial rule of the capitalist metropolis over other lands became anachronistic. Colonialism gave way to modern "imperialism". Imperialistic hostility has actually turned many "freedom struggles" into mere pawns in its hands. Passing through the experiences of two World Wars and never-ceasing regional and local wars rival interests find this ideology the most useful instrument for gaining ground in their manoeuvres for war.

Winning "national independence" is a capitalist objective. A change of a capital's "Capital" with a change of its governors does not make workers "independent". Workers remain workers – as exploited and oppressed as before. The transfer of political power that takes place takes place between two rival "nationalist" minorities belonging to the same exploiting and ruling class who own and control the means of production and distribution all over the world.

But the saga of "independence" is unending. While towards power, one must remain a "freedom fighter", and once in power, one finds much reason in "joint ventures" or "collaborations" with any "imperialisms" of any colour including the one it fought against – a trajectory from "independence" to impasse.

India is no exception to this rule. "Indian" capitalists got India "freed" from their "foreign" rival to the extent that they now have a market of their own and a working class to exploit. But the market they got was partitioned between the two "leading" factions of theirs at the terrible price of workers sweat and blood and life sacrificed on

both sides. The wound their "freedom" has inflicted on the social body of this sub-continent is still taking its toll, and it will until workers of all "nations" recognise themselves as workers belonging to the one single world working class.

Just as the abandonment of colonial forms of domination reflected the demise of the British power through two World Wars, so it marked the opening up of the sub-continent for world "imperialism" at large. For not "independence" but "interdependence" is the order of the day.

The so-called "relative prosperity" achieved by some people during about a decade-and-a-half after 1947 cannot be attributed to "independence", but to the post-war "reconstruction" of the World Economy.

Hangovers with other class-layers alongside the two main capitalist antagonists in India have misled many ideologues to raise guess-works on misconceptions and mystifications about the nature of the Indian society. They miserably fail to understand that feudalism in India had long gone and "The Indian Economy" is nothing but capitalism at work and further that the "peasant question" persists due not to there being an absence of agrarian "land reforms", but to there being a multi-million landless agrarian cheap labour force beside the robbed homeless and hungry "refugee" masses.

The whole lot of "anti-feudal" and "anti-imperialist" pseudo-theories using a motley collection of definitions such as "The Third World", "Developing Countries" etc., stand on the fallacious treatment of each "nation" in isolation and viewing each one having to go through and to complete every historic stage in mechanical imitation of the European states.

Nationalism and colonial independence are not things that ought to concern the working class. Wherever they live and work, their only concern ought to be socialism. The material basis for socialism exists in the World Economy. Gone are the days of "the economies". There is no need for all "the economies" to be industrialised and all "the peoples" to be proletarianised before socialism could be established. Thus the theories which ask workers of all places to wait for industrialisation to "develop" their localities before attempting to establish socialism are hopelessly irrelevant.

Global Economy

All nationalistic ideas simply seek to turn back the wheel of history by fettering the ongoing process of capitalist globalisation. The process has been precisely well-narrated by Om Das/Ramesh in the following words:

"Impelled by the dynamic of the system the process of globalisation is going full steam and the problems are by definition global. The globalisation of markets, the incompatibility of state of playing a significant role, the imperativeness of old economic models that policymakers had used to guide their actions, give the impression that an invisible hand guides the destiny of the economy. Shifts in consumer demand, new technologies, and new distribution methods that change their markets, are giving difficult time to the corporate giants. Ideas, beliefs, fashions, attitudes and opinions are formed, reformed, challenged and

defied almost every second. Companies all over the world are planning workforce reductions and sweeping changes in working practices. “Restructuring”, “downsizing”, “rationalising”, “re-engineering” are the euphemistic labels under which big corporations are shrinking the world over.

Nation-states which played a predominant role in human affairs in the past few centuries have lost their old importance. In fact they have become an impediment in the march forward of the world order – an irresolvable contradiction of a system essentially constituted of nation-states.”²

Impressively enough, here is a commentary coming from a top capitalist manager, William J. Amelio³:

"I live the worldsourced life. As CEO of Lenovo (...), I am an American CEO based in Singapore. Our chairman, who is Chinese, works from North Carolina. Other top executives are based around the globe. A meeting of my company's senior managers looks like the United Nations General Assembly. My company is like some of the world's most popular consumer products. It may say "Made in China" on the outside, but the key components are designed and manufactured by innovative people and companies spread across six continents. (...) The products of companies that practice worldsourcing may be labeled "Made in Switzerland," or "Made in the U.S.A." or "Made in China," but in the new world in which we all now live, they should more truthfully be labeled, "Made Globally. (...) In today's world, assessing companies by their nation of origin misses the point." (*Forbes Magazine* 17 August 2007)⁴

Globalisation of capitals is not synonymous with globalisation of the interests of capitals. What has set capitals in an illusory unification expressed through the post-Second World War Breton Woods mechanism of inter-national liquidity management, credit expansion and manipulative tariff and trade diplomacy with the organisations like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (now the World Trade Organization or WTO) etc. just in the opposite direction of their "nationalist" interests is the experience of 1929.

National liberation (or so-called national self-determination) is a cornerstone of Leninism, and it is all integrated into the question of imperialism, anti-imperialism and the ‘Colonial Question’. In all these facets Lenin distorted socialism completely. Due to the fact that imperialism is not superior to and different from capitalism, anti-imperialism is a call to motivate the workers to make alliance with their own exploiting and ruling class. The fact is that every capitalist country is potentially an imperialist.

Lenin's very notion that "imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism" supposes that one nation exploits another, so requiring a "national liberation" movement for the subject nation, which leads the working class of two different countries into a game of slaughtering each other. But the working class has no nation, only a world to win.

We know that, historically, unless a particular class monopolises the means of production and distribution and forces the rest of the people to sell their labour power, no capitalist production is possible. Private property is monopoly. Coupled with the division of labour it is the basis of commodity production as of exchange, money, the

market, etc.

But to Lenin monopoly was not this class monopoly but the mere concentration and centralisation of capital. Whereas according to Marx, the very existence of capitalist society involves both monopoly (in this sense) and competition, which nullifies Lenin's supposition that such monopoly is only a feature of "imperialism":

"In the economic life of the present time you find not only competition and monopoly but also their synthesis, which is not a formula but a movement. Monopoly produces competition, competition produces monopoly"⁵

The basic nature of capital always remains the same both in developed and undeveloped form – production for profit (i.e. the unpaid portion of labour). The defining feature of capitalist production is that it is based on wage-labour. Wages presuppose capital and vice versa. Here also, Lenin failed to understand why different rates of wages prevail in different countries. According to him, wages are higher in imperialist countries because the capitalists there bribe their workers out of the super-profits which they earn from exploiting the subjugated countries.

Marx had a quite different explanation as to why wages were higher in these countries. Both productivity and the rate of exploitation (ratio of unpaid to paid labour, i.e., surplus value divided by variable capital) were higher there:

"The more productive one country is relative to another in the world market, the higher will be its wages compared with the other. In England, not only nominal wages but (also) real wages are higher than on the continent. The worker eats more meat, he satisfies more needs. This, however, only applies to the industrial worker and not the agricultural labourer. But in proportion to the productivity of the English workers their wages are not higher (than the wages paid in other countries)."⁶

A lower rate of wages does not make any one country any less capitalist than another:

"The different states of the different civilized countries, in spite of their manifold diversity of form, all have this in common, that they are based on modern bourgeois society, only one more or less capitalistically developed."⁷

To be capitalist, a country need not be as industrially and commercially developed as the USA, Britain or Germany. Nor is it necessary that each and every district of every capitalist country should be as developed as the Ruhr in Germany or Sheffield and Birmingham in England. The basic requirement is that the production system of the country is conducted on a capitalistic basis, i.e., is based on employers and employees. A country may be highly industrialised or a developed agricultural one or the chief supplier of raw materials for industry or whatever. This happens due to the division of labour amongst the various capitalist countries. So one "nation" cannot exploit another "nation". Workers all over the world are collectively exploited by the world capitalist class as a collective.

The absurdity of Lenin's theory can be proved by a living example from the life of a worker of our Indian subcontinent. Suppose he is 70 years old and now a citizen of

so-called independent Bangladesh. He was a subject of Pakistan and before that of the British Empire. According to Lenin's theory, he was subjugated by "British imperialists" up to 1947, then by "Pakistani imperialists" up to 1972. Now by which? Yet all through these years he remained a wage slave, not free, though his masters and nationality changed. What a ridiculous proposition is Lenin's theory!

Lenin's theory of imperialism fails to grasp the world-wide nature of capitalist society by pitting the working class of undeveloped countries against that of the developed ones. It leads to upholding national interest against class interest, which is detrimental to the world working class interest and their emancipation.

It is now crystal clear that as capitalism is a universal and cosmopolitan phenomenon so also is the working class. The working class cannot emancipate itself nationally.

Marx, in his Inaugural Address to the International Working Men's Association in 1864, denounced "a foreign policy in pursuit of criminal design, playing upon national prejudices and squandering in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure".⁸ But this is precisely what Lenin and his heirs practised in the USSR, East Europe, China, Cuba, etc. from 1917 onwards. Numerous open and secret treaties, wars and proclamations by so-called socialist states testify to this.

That "the emancipation of labor is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries" (IWMA General Rules)⁹ should be the guiding principle of the working class of the world.

Notes:

- 1 <http://geography.about.com/cs/countries/a/numbercountries.htm>
- 2 Cited in the *Manifesto* of the World Socialist Party (India), March 1995. Asok Kumar Chakrabarti also contributed to this chapter.
- 3 William J. Amelio is the president and CEO of Lenovo, a global leader in the PC market with research, manufacturing, sales and marketing operations on six continents. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Amelio
- 4 Business Strategy / *Worldsource Or Perish*, William J. Amelio 08.17.07, 6:00 AM ET. http://www.forbes.com/2007/08/16/lenovo-world-sourcing-oped-cx_wja_0817lenovo.html
- 5 Marx's letter to Annekov, 28 December 1846, Selected Correspondence, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1975, p. 35 Also at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46_12_28.htm
- 6 Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part II, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1978, pages 16-17 Also at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch08.htm#s1>
- 7 Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875, Foreign Language Press, Peking

1976, p. 27 Also at:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch04.htm>

8 <http://marxengels.public-archive.net/en/ME1400en.html>

9 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1864/rules.htm>