

# Nationalism is a deadly poison for the class struggle

(Part 2)



## Internationalist Voice

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## Lenin and the national question

Workers have no homeland, while national pride is totally alien to the working class. But, first, we should reproduce some quotes from Lenin:

“Is a sense of national pride alien to us, Great-Russian class-conscious proletarians? Certainly not! We love our language and our country, and we are doing our very utmost to raise her toiling masses (i.e., nine-tenths of her population) to the level of a democratic and socialist consciousness. To us it is most painful to see and feel the outrages, the oppression and the humiliation our fair country suffers at the hands of the tsar’s butchers, the nobles and the capitalists. We take pride in the resistance to these outrages put up from our midst, from the Great Russians; in that midst having produced Radishchev the Decembrists and the revolutionary commoners of the seventies; in the Great-Russian working class having created, in 1905, a mighty revolutionary party of the masses; and in the Great-Russian peasantry having begun to turn towards democracy and set about overthrowing the clergy and the landed proprietors.... We are full of a sense of national pride, and for that very reason we **particularly** hate **our** slavish past...” [1]

And Lenin continues:

“And, full of a sense of national pride, we Great-Russian workers want, come what may, a free and independent, a democratic, republican and proud Great Russia, one that will base its relations with its neighbors on the human principle of equality, and not on the feudalist principle of privilege, which is so degrading to a great nation. Just because we want that, we say: it is impossible, in the twentieth century and in Europe (even in the far east of Europe), to “defend the fatherland” otherwise than by using every revolutionary means to combat the monarchy, the landowners and the capitalists of one’s own fatherland, i.e., the worst enemies of our country. We say that the Great Russians cannot “defend the fatherland” otherwise than by desiring the defeat of tsarism in any war, this as the lesser evil to nine-tenths of the inhabitants of Great Russia.” [2]

As we saw previously, the Second International lacked clarity about the parliamentary and national question. Lenin inherited his vagueness about the national question from the Second International. He tried to adapt it to fit with Marxism. Contrary to today’s leftists, who support “national liberation” throughout the world, Lenin tried to solve the problem based on historical conditions. He claimed that, in developed capitalist countries, national liberation was meaningless, while arguing that the situation in backward countries, such as Russia, which experienced progressive capitalist development, was different. Therefore, he wrote:

“First of all, it implies that a clear distinction must be drawn between the two periods of capitalism, which differ radically from each other as far as the national movement is concerned. On the one hand, there is the period of the collapse of feudalism and absolutism, the period of the formation of the bourgeois-democratic society and state, when the national movements for the first time become mass movements and in one way or another draw **all** classes of the

population into politics through the press, participation in representative institutions, etc. On the other hand, there is the period of fully formed capitalist states with a long-established constitutional regime and a highly developed antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie - a period that may be called the eve of capitalism's downfall.

The typical features of the first period are: the awakening of national movements and the drawing of the peasants, the most numerous and the most sluggish section of the population, into these movements, in connection with the struggle for political liberty in general, and for the rights of the nation in particular. Typical features of the second period are: the absence of mass bourgeois-democratic movements and the fact that developed capitalism, in bringing closer together nations that have already been fully drawn into commercial intercourse, and causing them to intermingle to an increasing degree, brings the antagonism between internationally united capital and the international working-class movement into the forefront.”[3]

The same assessment of the differences between developed and non-developed countries evolved out of Lenin's discussion with Luxemburg.

”In this respect Rosa Luxemburg has lost sight of the most important thing—the difference between countries, where bourgeois-democratic reforms have long been completed, and those where they have not.” [4]

Despite the lack of clarity that Lenin had on this matter, he rejected the national movements in developed countries such as Poland and focused on class solidarity and class struggles. As such, he discussed Polish social democracy and Polish workers as follows:

”The Polish Social-Democrats were therefore quite right in attacking the extreme nationalism of the Polish petty bourgeoisie and pointing out that the national question was of secondary importance to Polish workers, in creating for the first time a purely proletarian party in Poland and proclaiming the extremely important principle that the Polish and the Russian workers must maintain the closest alliance in their class struggle.”[5]

We must point out that Lenin's ultimate goal was a class goal or, better still, his only goal was a class goal contrary to that of today's leftists; nor did he believe that any nation was entitled to privilege.

”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.” [6]

### **Luxemburg and the national question**

Luxemburg was one of the leaders on the left wing of the Second International and clearer than Lenin about the national question. She stressed that it is only through socialism that self-determination can be realized. Her lessons about the decadence of capitalism, nationalism, imperialism and so on are still an inspiration source for revolutionaries. For her, national war during the decadence of capitalism was no longer possible. She believed that referring to national interests only misleads the masses and lures them into serving their mortal enemy, imperialism.

”International socialism recognizes the right of free independent nations, with equal rights. But socialism alone can create such nations; can bring self-determination of their peoples. This slogan of socialism is like all its others, not an apology for existing conditions, but a guidepost, a spur for the revolutionary, regenerative, active policy of the proletariat. So long as capitalist states exist, Le., so long as imperialistic world policies determine and regulate the inner and the outer life of a nation, there can be no “national self-determination” either in war or in peace.

In the present imperialistic milieu there can be no wars of national self-defence. Every socialist policy that depends upon this determining historic milieu, that is willing to fix its policies in the world whirlpool from the point of view of a single nation, is built upon a foundation of sand.” [7]

The core of Luxemburg’s lessons on the national question is the following:

"No one oppressed nation can obtain freedom and independence by the states that was provided by imperialist or as a result of the war. The small nations whose ruling classes are in cahoots with their reigns colleagues in the power group is merely chess pieces in major powers' imperialist game and like the proletariat abused of the war as a tool for them, therefore, after the war, abandonment and extradited to capitalist interests." [8]

In fact, during the decadence of capitalism, an organization cannot be a revolutionary one unless its programs are internationally oriented.

“The labor movement of today, [because of] its more arduous daily economic struggle, bases its mass organization on cooperation [with worker movements] in all capitalist countries.” [9]

### **Luxemburg and the united German Republic question**

Rosa Luxemburg was unclear when she pitted herself against the imperialist war, as identified by Marx and Engels’ national programme from 1848, under the slogan of a united German Republic. This platform was articulated by the avant-gardists of the proletariat during the growth of capitalism and adapted to reflect this period. Therefore, Lenin criticized from a Marxist perspective the lack of clarity in Luxemburg’s approach to this question. Luxemburg wrote:

”In Germany the determination of the people found concrete expression in the demands formulated by the German revolutionary democrats of 1848; the first fighters of the German

proletariat, Marx, Engels, Lassalle, Bebel and Liebknecht, proclaimed and fought for a **united German Republic.**" [10]

### **Is imperialism a major (economic and military) oppressive power?**

The left of capital defines imperialism as the manifestation of a major economic, military and repressive power such as the US, Japan and the UK. The consequence of this definition is to mobilize the working class behind the weakness of imperialism.

"But while the leftists condemn the imperialism in countries like USA, UK and France, they usually also argue that Iraq or other 'small' countries are not imperialist. For them, only great powers are imperialist and by challenging of the United States by Saddam Hussein, he is fighting "objectively" against imperialism and therefore would be worthy to support by workers and "socialists". In this way using both the right and left of capital their definition of imperialism to mobilize workers behind one or the other side of the conflict in the Persian Gulf.

Against this assert the revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg said during the First World War against all hypocrites and charlatans who claimed that only one side was imperialistic but not the other." [11]

A free state and nation cannot exist in the decadent period of capitalism. It must integrate itself into the capitalist mode of production and participation in world markets. This means that the new states arising from national movements will themselves become imperialists, regardless of their size or economic power.

An illustrative example is the Worker-communist Party of Iran, which supports or requires the creation of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. If this becomes a reality, then "Kurdistan" will become an imperialist state. Moreover, it will be a weak imperialist state. This means that the Worker-communist Party of Iran supports a future "Kurdish" imperialism against "Arab" (Iraqi) imperialism. The consequence will be that the Worker-communist Party of Iran will try to end or distract attention from the class struggle in the region. This allegation is "**blasphemous**" in the leftist milieu. Like *The Satanic Verses*, this party must be condemned.

"If a national bourgeoisie escaped the tentacles of one bloc, it immediately fell into the maws of another.

To give a few examples:

- In the Middle East the Zionists fight the British-backed Arab armies with Russian and Czech arms, but Stalin's plans to draw Israel into Russia's sphere of influence fail, and Israel is integrated into the US orbit. Since then, Palestinian resistance to Zionism, having previously relied on British and German imperialism, is forced into the hands of imperialist powers hostile to the US or to Israel: Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and China;

- In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh helps the French and British defeat the Japanese; then under the aegis of Russia and China he defeats the French, and inflicts wounding blows on the Americans;
- In Cuba, Castro withdraws from the US orbit to fall unambiguously into the hands of Russian imperialism.”[12]

“Just like the military regimes of that time, they were forced to put down the workers’ resistance to austerity. They were and remained self-imperialists, and then they were forced to make their way in the world market. Imperialism is not a matter of ‘great’ against ‘small’, but it is capitalism as a mode of global production where everyone is strong or weak capital in international competition. Therefore, production may not ‘be disturbed’ by the workers’ struggle.” [13]

### **Are all states (regardless of their size, wealth, power etc.) imperialist?**

In the decadent period of capitalism, **all** states regardless of their size, wealth and power were imperialist. The fact is that capital cannot be accumulated in **complete isolation** and no state can avoid this. They had to integrate themselves into the global market. *Nation or Class* describes this as follows:

“In addition to acting as agents of the big imperialisms by accepting their aid, advice, and arms, local bourgeois factions themselves become imperialist pure and simple as soon as they grab control of the state. Because no nation can accumulate in absolute autarky they have no choice but to begin to expand at the expense of other nations even more backward, and thus engage in policies of annexation, unequal exchange, etc. **In the epoch of capitalist decadence, every nation state is an imperialist power.**” [14]

To Be Continued

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### **Notes:**

[1] On the National Pride of the Great Russians, Lenin

[2] As above

[3] The Right of Nations to Self-Determination - Chapter 2, Lenin

[4] As above

[5] The Right of Nations to Self-Determination - Chapter 7, Lenin

[6] The Right of Nations to Self-Determination - Chapter 4, Lenin

[7] The Junius Pamphlet - Chapter 7, Rosa Luxemburg

[8] Guidelines for the tasks of the international social democracy, Rosa Luxemburg

[9] The Junius Pamphlet - Chapter 8, Rosa Luxemburg

[10] The Junius Pamphlet - Chapter 7, Rosa Luxemburg

[11] IR No 41 -1991

[12] Nation or Class? - Chapter 1, ICC

[13] IR No 2

[14] As above