



Political Strategy in the Third World

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In their struggle to end colonialism, defeat neo-colonialist controls and pressures, and end imperialist exploitation, the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East have accumulated many experiences. If one looks back over the whole period since 1945 certain things stand out.

First, the most obvious fact is the rapid collapse of the old imperialist system of direct colonial rule which formerly saw the armies, police, judges and civil administration of the Western powers in direct control over vast regions of the world.

Secondly, one can clearly observe the very great difficulties experienced by these developing countries in following up the winning of national independence by liberating themselves from imperialist control and exploitation, and thus being in a better position to tackle the poverty and misery which is still the lot of so many of their citizens.

Third, despite these difficulties there has been the development of a process, especially in the last few years, of several countries passing over from independence to revolutionary changes which have challenged or, in some cases swept from power, dictators and social strata which have acted as imperialism's internal ally. The most obvious recent examples have been Iran and Nicaragua.

The fourth striking feature is the great diversity of the paths being followed by these scores of separate states which make up what is sometimes termed the Third World.¹ The relevance of different national roads of development is not limited to Europe. Developments in, for example, Iran, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Jamaica, Yemen, Grenada, Iraq, India and Tanzania indicate only too well the rich variety of circumstances, of political and social alliances, of forms of struggle, and of institutions and organisations which are emerging in these countries. They are in no sense following preconceived blue-prints or particular models of social revolution. Neither, despite the tendency of political think-tanks to place all governments and movements in neat pigeon-holes marked 'East' or 'West', can they be so categorised. Where, for example, in this 'East-West' filing system would one place Iran or Libya?

Life, indeed, is proving much richer than is allowed for by dogmatists and State Department ideologues.

The changes taking place in the Third World demonstrate very clearly that although the trend to put these countries on a new progressive path persists in one degree or another, it nevertheless encounters very great obstacles. These stem from imperialist legacies and continued imperialist pressures. They also stem from the nature

Note: Based on a paper presented to the Round Table, 1978, on 'Socialism and the Developing Countries' — Cavtat, Yugoslavia, September, 1978.

of these societies and their stage of development. Yet many acute problems also arise owing to weaknesses within the ranks of the liberation forces, weaknesses which are themselves a consequence of the class character of their organisations and leaderships, and of their political experience. One can, perhaps, see this more clearly by examining some of the major questions with which the developing countries have to deal.

THE ECONOMIC LEGACY OF IMPERIALISM

Firstly, there is the problem of ending imperialist exploitation and overcoming the distortions in the economy arising from years of colonial and feudal domination. This *economic* task, and the building of viable economies capable of beginning to overcome the poverty and social backwardness inherited from imperialist control, is, in a sense, the central *political* question facing the developing countries. Failure to solve this economic problem produces acute political strains and stresses in the whole fabric of society and has the gravest consequences. Instability of governments and the mounting of military coups are among the major outcomes of such failure.

The last thirty years have shown that tackling this task is not easy. Many on the Left have possibly given too easy answers. Land reform, the nationalisation of foreign enterprises, state control of trade and investment, industrialisation, the development of a state sector of the economy, co-operative production and marketing, diversification of trading and economic links and especially the opening up of such connections with the socialist countries, have frequently been presented as if, in themselves, they would remove all the difficulties and set countries firmly on the socialist road.

Many of these measures I have just listed have been carried out in a number of developing countries — and they certainly need to be carried out. Yet, even so, the economic difficulties often remain, the gap between the developed capitalist countries and the developing countries persists, the gap between rich and poor *within* the developing countries (with few exceptions) continues to grow. While, compared with colonialism, important progress has been made, economic advances registered, and social change taken place as in education and health services, yet basic problems remain.

The exploitation, the robbery by big transnational companies continues, sometimes admittedly in new forms. Nationalisation under conditions in which the government takes 51% of the shares results in the former monopoly still providing management, technical experts,

¹ This term is used here to denote countries which are neither imperialist nor socialist but which still suffer from imperialist control and exploitation in one form or another.



President Samora Machel

Mozambique

Describing how the needs of the people's revolution in Mozambique were sown in the midst of the liberation struggle against Portuguese colonialism, Sergio Vieira goes so far as to say: 'The armed struggle, when it was transformed into a People's Democratic Revolution, liquidated the material base for the survival of feudalism and the formation of a bourgeoisie.'²

Consequently, he argues, liberated Mozambique was able to move quickly to complete the process of liquidating the material basis for the emergence of a capitalist class, introducing nationalisation of key enterprises, control over the factories, banks, insurance companies, external trade and rented properties. As a result, the Mozambique 'bourgeoisie is a house without foundations'.³

Nationalisation alone was not the key. The key was the character of the political power established as a result of the liberation struggle, a political power which, to a large degree, embodied the aspirations of the workers and peasants. Thus nationalisation was accompanied by the introduction of new social relations of production, and these are 'fundamental' says Vieira, because 'they liquidate the antagonism between the proprietors and labour, because they do away with proprietorship and link the labouring classes not only to production but to the management of the actual production process'.⁴

More recent experiences in Mozambique indicate that the process is more complicated than might appear simply by reference to the points made by Vieira. Speeches in the last few months by President Samora Machel and decisions of the Mozambique government and Frelimo show that the effort to eliminate bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influences and to prevent the emergence of a new privileged bureaucracy which would hinder the transition to socialism requires constant vigilance and continuous struggle. The creation of a democratic state is a long, arduous process. Equally difficult is the building of a transitional economy which strengthens national independence, provides the basis for a better life for the people and blocks the road to a new capitalist class.

Despite all the talk about socialism in Egypt under Nasser, nationalisation of key sectors of the economy were accompanied by no

such change in the social relations of production as have taken place in Mozambique; and the political structure elaborated was one that *restricted* the democratic initiative and activity of the workers and peasants — the banning of the Communist Party leading to its dissolution; a state imposed one-party system which was an instrument of the state, not a democratic political party; state control of the trade unions; no real possibility of correcting mistakes by the government, the state, or the president by open, democratic debate and criticism.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The third problem I wish to comment on is the national question, which is particularly complex and acute in Africa and the Middle East, but of major significance in Asia as well. We have only to consider the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka, the struggle of the people of Bangla Desh to liberate themselves from Pakistan, the many national issues smouldering just beneath the surface in India, the Kurdish problem in Iraq, Iran and Turkey — to see why it is important for developing countries to find solutions to these critical challenges which threaten to rend their new states apart.

In Africa the national question is particularly complex and pressing. There are over 40 independent African states, some with very small populations. Most contain a considerable number of different nationalities and ethnic communities. Sometimes people of the same nationality or ethnic origin are divided by frontiers originally imposed by European imperialist powers when they carved up the African continent a hundred years ago.

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), in an attempt to prevent this inherited problem from becoming a source of friction and even armed conflict between the different African states, adopted a decision that existing frontiers between all African states, no matter what the origins of those frontiers were, should be adhered to. There should be no attempt to change them by force.

This decision, even if fully respected, covers only part of the problem, for as important as frontiers is the existence of different nationalities *within* the boundaries of the independent African states. Further theoretical study of this question is vital. Are these new states new nations? Or are they multi-national states? Can one talk of a Nigerian nation, a Kenyan nation, an Ethiopian nation? Or are they not multi-national states? And is this not the same for many other independent African states?

It seems to me that many of these African states are multi-national or, at least, in a very early stage of formation as a 'nation', with the continued existence of a number of different ethnic communities, separated by language, cultural patterns, history, 'tribal' or nationality loyalties and links. There is therefore a very complex problem facing many new states, namely that of uniting all these different communities within the frontiers of a single state and providing a stable basis for co-operation between them all.

The imperialists, of course, try to exploit the national question for their own purposes. 'Divide and rule' was the method they used during the period of direct colonial rule. Now that colonialism is almost universally eliminated, the imperialists still strive to sow dissention, or make use of existing tensions between nations and ethnic groups, whether it be between independent states or between communities, nationalities or nations within a single state. In the same

²'The New Man is a Process': speech by Sergio Vieira, member of the Central Committee, Frelimo, to the 2nd Conference of the Ministry of Education and Culture, December 1977.

³*ibid.*

⁴*ibid.*

way, especially in the nineteenth century and the first forty-five years of the twentieth century, major capitalist powers utilised national rivalries in the Balkans.

The fact that national problems have been exploited in this way by reactionary forces does not mean that the national question can be written off or explained away as an imperialist manoeuvre. It exists as a problem requiring solution. The way to stop imperialism using the national question to disrupt developing countries is to *solve* it so that it no longer festers, so that it no longer exists as a problem for imperialism to exploit.

Solving the national question is basically a democratic question. The prime difficulty very often is that the dominant nation or nationality, or rather its ruling circles which express capitalist or petty-bourgeois conceptions, try to solve the problems by force, by imposition, declaring as it were: 'You will remain united with us in a single state whether you want to or not'. This was the case, for example, with the former Pakistan before Bangla Desh broke away to form a separate independent state.

A temporary breathing space may be gained by the dominant nation through the use of such methods, but if there is a genuine problem of national neglect, discrimination or oppression, national discontent will again and again express itself, sometimes even violently.⁵

Of course, the recognition of the right of a nation to self-determination does not always mean that the right has to be exercised in the form of establishing an independent state. Each oppressed nation must judge that question for itself. The point is that it must have the right to choose.

The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea is a case in point. The Eritrean people have been fighting for eighteen years for the right to self-determination. Their struggle over the years was an important contribution to the struggle of the Ethiopian people to overthrow Haile Selassie. Once that was achieved it became vital to find a political solution to the Eritrean question. The leaders of the Ethiopian revolution were understandably concerned to safeguard their victory; but trying to solve the Eritrean question by armed force, even if accompanied by proposals for regional autonomy, has prolonged the conflict and made a solution very intractable.

It can be argued that the Eritrean leaders, in their turn, should have recognised that there was a different regime in Addis Ababa and should have sought a peaceful, political way out of the difficulty. Possibly, if the Ethiopian leaders had recognised the *right* of the Eritreans to self-determination, the latter might have opted for a federal solution. As it is the war has dragged on, providing possibilities for external interference.

A voluntary choice

Voluntary co-operation between the dominant nation and the dominated nation or nationality is the only firm and democratic basis for unity.

A multi-national state, whether large or small, whether federal or not, needs to be maintained by voluntary agreement between the nations and on the basis of the right of self-determination if it is to be a stable, democratic structure.

It might appear that recognising the right to self-determination, including the right of secession or formation into a separate state would lead to 'disunity' and hinder the building of a really firm, stable community of all the peoples within the boundaries of the given federal or multi-national state. But it is only if the people of a formerly oppressed, economically neglected or culturally discriminated against nation see that their aspirations are being met by their former 'oppressors' that they will recognise that there has been a real change. In this way the suspicion and mistrust of the past can be broken down, friendship of the nations can be built and voluntary agreement of the aggrieved nation or nations won to co-operate and unite within the frontiers of a single state. Such voluntary co-operation cannot be won unless the state is a democratic one in which the former oppressed nation will feel secure and able to fulfil its national and democratic aspirations.

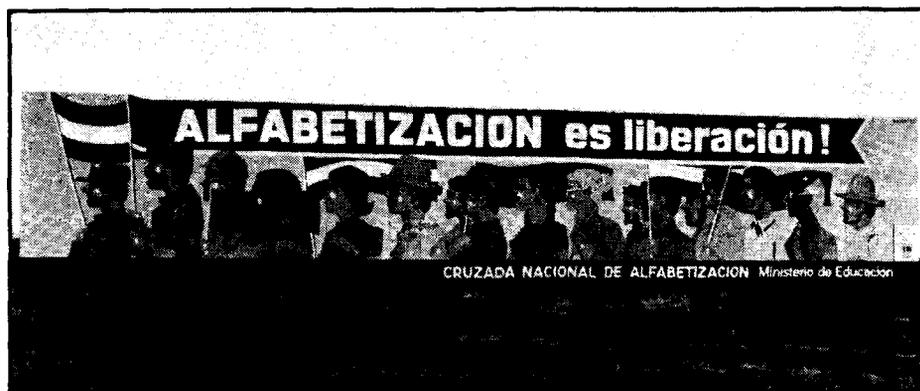
In their turn, those in the dominated nation, while championing the national aspirations of their own people, will need to point out the value of the unity of all progressive forces, of all nations and nationalities within the single multi-national state. Recognising the *right* to self-determination does not absolve a nation from the responsibility of judging how, in what form, and when that right is to be exercised.

Self-determination, the free exercise of choice, may well be the decision to remain as part of a unified federal state rather than *voluntarily* breaking away to form a separate state; but, in either case, it must be a *voluntary* choice.

Not every ethnic community can be regarded as a nation, with the full national right to separate and form an independent state. New developing states, especially in Africa, containing a number of ethnic communities, need to examine this question with extreme care in order to avoid creating new problems. However small an ethnic community may be, the main thing is that there should be no neglect or suppression of a people's language, culture, history and traditions, nor any failure to take into account their particular problems and aspirations. There should be mutual respect for every nation or nationality, and for every language.

The language question is particularly important. Writing in 1914, Lenin opposed the idea of a 'compulsory official language', arguing 'in favour of every inhabitant of Russia having the *opportunity* (emphasis added) to learn the great Russian language', but adding: 'what we do not want is the element of *coercion*. We do not want to have people driven into paradise with a cudgel'.⁶

Acting in this spirit the Sudanese Communist Party has opposed a policy of the constitutional entrenching of Arabic as the official state language, arguing instead that a genuine unity of the peoples of the



Sudan can be achieved not through an infringement of their cultural traditions, but through 'a revival of their languages and dialects with the support and assistance of the state'. In other words, to solve the problem by a democratic approach, free from chauvinism and national exclusiveness, and without any discrimination in respect of other languages.

As I have endeavoured to demonstrate, democracy is an essential element in all these three problems — winning economic liberation, establishing people's power, solving the national question. It is no less vital for dealing with the fourth problem, that of alliances.

POLITICAL ALLIANCES

Recent experience in several countries makes it necessary to give much thought to this question. Both to liberate itself from imperialism as well as to advance to socialism the people of a developing country need to establish the utmost unity of purpose, organisation and struggle. In the struggle for independence, this unity seeks to embrace the working class, peasantry, middle strata (artisans, intellectuals, small traders, professional and technical personnel, including administrative staff and military officers), and sections of the bourgeoisie. Though united in their common desire for independence, all these classes and strata have different aims and views as to the kind of independent state they wish to see established. Consequently, on the morrow of independence a struggle commences which, even if at times in very muted forms, is at bottom a conflict of classes.

Both the alliance and the conflict are expressed in political terms, but the form in which these political alliances and conflicts take place varies considerably from state to state. There are particular problems in those countries where Communist Parties exist alongside strong parties of the national bourgeoisie or parties expressing the interests and viewpoints of other strata and political tendencies. For Communist Parties these situations pose some very acute questions.

If the Communist Party fails to preserve its ideological and political independence, and starts to tail behind the ruling party and the class interests it serves, then it becomes identified in the public eye with the ruling party. Consequently, when the ruling party fails to solve the people's problems and indeed starts to act as the people's oppressor, the Communist Party becomes tarnished with the same brush.

The results were seen vividly in the case of both India and Sri Lanka. In the former, the Communist Party of India had, over a long period, given qualified support to the Congress government including to the Emergency. When the Congress Party of Mrs Gandhi was swept out of office, the Communist Party suffered heavy losses, too, since for large sections of people it had become too identified with the

national discontent will again and again express itself, sometimes even violently.

unpopular government. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), which had been opposed to the Congress Party throughout, and was against the Emergency from the beginning, did not share the same fate, although it could be argued that it, too, made political errors, especially in supporting the Janata Party.

India and the Congress Party

Explaining the mistakes made by the Communist Party of India, its General Secretary, C Rajeswara Rao, noted⁷ that the central leadership of the Party 'grossly underestimated' the extent to which the Indira Gandhi government was moving to the right, succumbing to the Indian monopolies and the multi-nationals, stepping up the exploitation of the working people and establishing an anti-

democratic authoritarian personal rule. He also criticised the mistake the Party made in believing that the emergency 'could bring about progressive shifts in the correlation of forces and state power in a national democratic direction'. This was due to a gross over-estimation of the 'potentialities of the bourgeoisie and the Indira Gandhi government', as well as of the Party's capacity to achieve a

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positive shift in the situation. The impact on the internal situation and of the government's progressive foreign policy were 'understood in a mechanical manner'. C Rajeswara Rao sums up this section of his analysis in these pregnant words:

'It was not properly realised that a progressive foreign policy cannot eventually be safeguarded without progressive internal policies. This was our main mistake and as a result of this wrong understanding we supported the emergency. What came about as a result of emergency was not the progressive shifts in the national democratic direction but exactly the opposite. Right reaction came to power though the ballot box as a champion of democratic rights. Hence the support for emergency was wrong from the beginning.'

Although C Rajeswara Rao only partially analyses the error, there is little doubt that it was not simply that 'a progressive foreign policy' required 'progressive internal policies'. There was a tendency to act as if the co-operation of the Indira Gandhi government with the Soviet Union of itself necessitated the Communist Party's support for the government. It seemed to be accompanied by a confidence that this would at the same time result in the government pursuing progressive domestic policies. In other words, the impression was created that the attitude of the Indian working class and progressive movement to the national bourgeoisie should be determined by the relations of the Congress government to the Soviet Union. Of course such relations were not unimportant, but it was wrong to assume that they should be considered as the determining factor in deciding Party policy.

The case of Sri Lanka

In the case of Sri Lanka, the Communist Party agreed to participate in a government dominated by the SLFP⁸, a party representing sections of the Sri Lanka bourgeoisie, including patriotic sections. The Communist Party was in no way powerful enough or sufficiently influential to determine government policy. When the SFLP was swept out of office the Communist Party also suffered a heavy setback. The Sri Lanka Communist Party has now recognised that its tactics during this period, including its participation in government, was a serious mistake. At its eleventh congress in March this year it made the following self-critical re-assessment of its tactics during this earlier period:

'The objective and subjective factors of the then existing situation show that it was incorrect for us to have entered the SLFP-LSSP-CP⁹ united front government in 1970 and for us to have agreed in 1968 to form a government of the SLFP-LSSP-CP. It would have been correct and beneficial for the party in those circumstances if it stayed outside the united front government thereby obtaining for the party in the context of the then prevailing balance of forces freedom of exercising its independence in the interests of the working class and the people'.

⁵ Ireland, after 800 years of British domination, shows that the imposition of a supposed "solution" by force is no solution.

⁶ V I Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol 20, p72.

⁷ *New Age*: April 30th, 1978.

⁸ Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

⁹ The Lanka Sama Samaja Party — a leftwing Party traditionally influenced by Trotskyist international connections.

These rights, to be meaningful, must include the right of working people to organise their own revolutionary party

It seems to me that the error did not lie solely in participating in government. It lay equally in the Communist Party muffling its own voice, accepting some of the policies of the ruling party, the SFLP, even when these endangered the interests of working people. The most striking example of this was over the SLFP-LSSP-CP government legislation limiting democratic rights, introduced in the aftermath of the armed uprising of young people. There were voices in the Party central committee which were opposed to this legislation and even an initial objection to the Bill: but this was quickly changed and the government given support for its anti-democratic measures.

The Ba'ath government in Syria

These experiences are relevant when assessing also the participation of the Syrian Communist Party in the Syrian government, where it plays a very minor role in a Ba'ath dominated government, and has to operate under very restricted conditions. It is legitimate to doubt whether such participation in government will not store up very considerable difficulties for the Syrian Communist Party in the future. Will it not be considered partly responsible, as a participant in government, of any serious blunders or worse that may be carried out by the Ba'ath government? And will it not, consequently, lose influence among the working people?

Yet, in other cases, Communist Parties in trying to avoid tailing behind the national bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeois parties, face other difficulties. In a number of cases Communist Parties in alliance with the national bourgeoisie or with petty-bourgeois parties, and sometimes even participating in government, have made strenuous efforts to preserve their independent status, their separate organisation, ideology and policies, and have insisted on their democratic right to act independently and advocate publicly what they believe is necessary. This has often led to rejection and even repression by the ruling party.

Sudan was a very tragic illustration of this problem. True, it was complicated by the action of patriotic officers who overthrew the Nimeiry regime by military action. But even prior to that ill-fated attempt, which led to the death of the three most outstanding leaders of the Sudanese Communist Party, the contradictions between the ruling group and the Sudanese Communist Party, which were in uneasy alliance, were coming to a head. Although there were two Communists in Nimeiry's original government, including Joseph Garang¹⁰, Minister for the South, the Party was not given legal status. It had to operate illegally, to issue its leaflets and journals illegally, to hold secret meetings and so on. The situation eventually became very acute when the Party had the temerity to issue a leaflet openly criticising the government's economic policy. Then came the armed action against Nimeiry, followed by the counter-coup and the open repression, from which the Sudanese people are still suffering.

Iraq

Another very relevant example here is the case of Iraq. Over a long period of time the Iraqi Communist Party strove for unity with the Ba'ath Socialist Party, even suffering acute repression in the process. Eventually, and on the basis of a theoretical acceptance by the Ba'ath of the Communist Party's organisational, political and ideological independence, a united front was formed, and Communists participated in the government.

In practice, however, the Ba'ath Party disavowed the Charter of the National Front which had been jointly drawn up after prolonged negotiations. The Communist Party was denied the democratic rights to function freely as a political party. It had to conduct a long political battle before being allowed its own public newspaper. Other restrictions were imposed, both on the Party and on other democratic organisations. From restrictions the ruling party passed over to persecution. At last, in 1979, the repression became so harsh that the Communist Party had to make a break, withdraw its members from the Front and the government, go underground and reassert its complete independence. It is now engaged, together with other patriotic and democratic forces, in building a broad front which is struggling in different forms, including by armed action, to overthrow the government in which the Communist Party formerly took part.

For a developing country to complete its liberation and to advance to socialism, the democratic rights of the working people are essential. These rights, to be meaningful, must include the right of working people to organise their own revolutionary party, based on scientific socialism, and the right to enjoy full political freedom to participate normally in the political life of the given country, to publicly advocate their own views and to have the possibility of winning popular support for their policies and beliefs. A state in which the ruling party restricts or, still more, represses, a Communist Party, cannot lead its people from liberation to socialism.

We live in an epoch in which the people of the developing countries are increasingly demanding a solution to their age-long problems of exploitation, poverty and repression. In struggling to overcome these legacies of imperialist domination they face a formidable foe. To achieve success they need the active solidarity of all forces of world progress. But, above all, they need the utmost development of their own internal movement, based on the firm unity of all those who want to break with the past.

The four problems on which I have briefly touched all relate to this purpose. Moreover, they all point to the importance of the mass, democratic involvement and participation of the people, at all stages and in all spheres, in taking decisions affecting their lives and the future of their country, and in having the possibility of exercising their political strength to achieve the aims charted by the decisions they have taken.

In an overall, long-term historic sense, the people of the developing countries are on the move from independence to complete liberation, and from liberation to socialism. But to travel this road requires a vast expansion of their democratic activity, and an expansion too, in their freedom to participate in the political life of their country. □

¹⁰One of the leaders who was later executed.

Critica marxista

Sommaro del n. 2, 1980

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