

Class Struggle, National Struggle and Party Building

"In the final analysis, national struggle is a matter of class struggle. Among the whites in the US, it is only the reactionary ruling class who oppress the black people. They can in no way represent the workers, farmers, revolutionary intellectuals and other enlightened persons who comprise the overwhelming majority of white people." (Mao Zedong, Quotations, p.10). What does Mao mean by "national struggle is a matter of class struggle"? And is he not seriously underestimating the extent of racism in the US? An answer to both these questions may be found in the distinction between the objective interests of classes and strata among the people and their subjective ideology. The reactionary ruling circles influence the workers and turn them into racists. But they do not represent their true interests which objectively lie with the oppressed nationalities and against the ruling class of their own nation. "The working class does not benefit from national oppression, nor from the impoverishment of areas where national minority people live, nor from the exacerbation of national contradictions which is bound to occur where there is no national equality or national freedom." (Roots of Resistance, RCL Internal Journal).

By understanding the objective essence of the struggle between nations, it may be seen that national struggle is class struggle in that the oppressed nationality fights against the ruling class of the oppressor nationality. On the one side is a nationality, consisting of a number of classes. On the other, is the dominant class of another nationality.

Class struggle takes three other forms in the context of the relations between oppressor and oppressed nations. Firstly within the oppressed nationality, the subordinate classes are opposed to the dominant class. The dominant class includes elements who collaborate with the oppressor nationality and elements who support the national struggle. But the class struggle within the oppressed nationality is not synonymous with the struggle between nationalist and anti-national elements. "There is the question of the black nationalities being multi-class. Contradictions within the national minority community can become antagonistic. We have to engage in a class struggle of our own within our communities. One of the reasons why Black Power ideas in the USA began to lose their strength was the failure to deal with potentially antagonistic

contradictions. Similar problems are beginning to surface in UK. There will be black MPs, still part of the national struggle, but a dangerous element within it." (From a view of a black activist at a Birmingham meeting). Mao has provided the basic tool for dealing with this contradiction in his analysis of the relations between the classes engaged in national liberation struggle in 'On Democracy'. It will be a formidable task to apply this theory to the concrete struggle.

The second form is the class struggle between the subordinate classes and the dominant class within the oppressor nationality. The dominant class also uses its position to enlist the oppressed classes in the oppression of the oppressed nationalities, thereby weakening the oppressed classes.

Thirdly, the class struggle operates across national boundaries. The subordinate classes of the oppressed and oppressor nationalities together fight against the dominant class, which belongs primarily, but not exclusively to the oppressor nationality. The working class of the national minorities in Britain play a more solid proletarian role than their counterparts from the national majority in general.

Imperialism brings about a qualitative change in the relations between oppressor and oppressed nations. While objectively it creates the conditions for the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat of the oppressor nation and the masses of the oppressed nationality, it also evolves the ideology of racism, recruiting the working class of the oppressor nation to the side of their own ruling class. On the other hand, it enhances the revolutionary potential of the national struggle, even of those who are, in class terms, the most reactionary.

On consideration of the concrete conditions of British society, the RCL has posed the solution of the strategic alliance and free national development. "Imperialism is still in power precisely because it rests on both national oppression and the exploitation of the entire working class... All the oppressed nationalities in Britain will fight national oppression, just as the oppressed nations abroad, and the working class in Britain will fight for its emancipation from exploitation and oppression. Both types of struggle challenge the very basis of imperialist

state power and neither can succeed without overthrowing that state power. Similarly, neither can succeed without the other. The working class and the oppressed nationalities are allies, and Communists must build a revolutionary alliance between them. This revolutionary alliance will fuse into a single whole in the struggle for proletarian revolution." (Roots of Resistance). "The way forward is for these two struggles to support each other. A strategic alliance between the working class, which itself includes the bulk of the national minority people, and the national minorities must be built. But no compromises can be made with racist oppression, nor can the means of its destruction be made more palatable to the white working class. The solution is free national development, and the majority must be confronted with this demand." (October, Autumn 1985).

It is useful to emphasise certain aspects in this argument, since they may well have been obscured in the course of subsequent struggles. In the first place, the alliance will be forged between the national minorities and the working class as a whole. It is not a question of an alliance between the national minorities and the white working class. The analysis recognises the specific nature of each struggle, but it does not build a wall between them. On the contrary, it sees that they are already interlinked, not merely by the fact that each struggle is against a common enemy, the ruling class of the majority nationality, but also because the national minority working class are involved in each struggle. The Black Vanguard thesis is 'Re-Orientate the League' tried to distort the position of the national minority working class in each struggle in order to support their concept of a bridge across which the national majority working class could pass to join a genuinely anti-imperialist struggle. This concept sees the national minority working class as serving the interests of the white workers. It suggests that the white workers will themselves take part in the national struggle. And it fails to appreciate the fact that the struggle of the working class is itself anti-imperialist. In reality, the participation of the national minority working class creates a continuity between the class struggle in general and the specifically national struggle and from this continuity the revolutionary alliance against imperialism will eventually develop.

Secondly, the alliance can only be built in the struggle for proletarian revolution. Neither national freedom nor working class emancipation will be achieved without that revolution. Thus, the alliance itself can only exist with the aim and orientation towards proletarian revolution. This means that the alliance must itself be revolutionary. It must not compromise with bourgeois nationalism, racism or opportunism, and it can only come about in its final form in a revolutionary situation.

Thirdly, it is only Communists who can build the alliance. This is of crucial importance for the RCL, which is at a stage of seeking a strategy for Party building and is not clear on how to analyse the different elements of the working class in relation to Party building. The Party must be built with the strategic alliance in view as an eventual aim. The concept of an alliance between the proletariat of an oppressor nation and oppressed nationalities does not generally require a multi-national party. But where the oppressor and oppressed nationalities are in one country, and where the alliance is between a multi-national working class and oppressed nationalities, a multi-national party seem imperative. The strategic alliance is geared towards one revolution in one country. A single revolution requires a single party, and an alliance between nationalities requires that those nationalities be represented in that party. This does not mean that other organisations will not exist among the oppressed nationalities remaining independent from the party for a long time. The struggle to build a single party will be protracted and complex. Thus the Black Liberation Front have said: "We're for the right to self-determination: not for a separate state, but for organisational self-determination".

Should the multi-national party lead all the struggles of the national minority people? Until the oppressed nationalities are truly free and equal, they will not be prepared to subordinate themselves completely to multi-national leadership. Thus there may be issues on which the party will not be able to lead even under socialism. But it will generally be correct for a developed multi-national party to lead the struggles of the national minorities through its national minority sections.

The main question is how and when the party will reach this position. This must be related to the recruitment of national minority cadres and their promotion to leading posts. The extent to which the party can lead national minority struggles depends on the stage which it has reached in recruiting national minority members and the role which those cadres play in formulating policies.

The Black Vanguard thesis did not appreciate the complexity of the relationship between Communist leadership and national minority struggles. RTL said: "Black and Irish workers are the vanguard of the British working class. Communists must unite with, support, defend and build that vanguard." There was a countervailing view among some of the opponents of RTL that national minority people could only be organised into their own separate organisations, and that there was no scope for the party-building organisation to be involved with those organisations. This view was reflected in the line of the Birmingham branch that RCL members who were also members of national minority organisations must always follow the line of the national minority organisations in case of a conflict. One comrade even considered that "party-building is reactionary".

Although these two views appeared to be diametrically opposite to each other, in practice they led to the same result. White comrades on both sides renounced work with the white working class and set themselves up as part of the national minority struggle.

The relationship which the party or party-building organisation has with the national minority organisations must also depend on the stage which the party has reached in its development into a multi-national party. In the absence of substantial national minority membership, the RCL is obliged to rely heavily on supporting the lines put out by national minority organisations without doing any investigation or analysis of its own. Furthermore, the practicality is that for a long time the party-building organisation will be infected by the ideology of the national majority and will be seen as such. It will also be ignorant of the concrete situation in national minority communities. This will require the greatest caution in making judgements on national minority issues and organisations, and even more cautious in any public evaluations.

In practice, the RCL has always made distinctions between organisations of the national minorities. Some organisations, for instance, clearly represent a particular class and that conditions out attitude to them. Where that class is clearly comprador (collaborationist) bourgeoisie, it is not difficult to criticise. Where the organisation clearly represents the national bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie or working class, the organisation must be accorded respect verging on non-interference. Again, if the organisation represents a particular ideology, such as revisionism or social democracy, the positions it puts forward must be analysed on general principles. In practice, these things will tend to be mixed up and unclear, nowhere more so than where an organisation stands at the centre of a number of interlocking contradictions, such as black women's groups.

The RCL has also found a particular problem with "dual membership", where a comrade is a member of the RCL and of a national minority group. It has had to attempt to handle these problems with no clear line on the issues discussed here nor on dual membership itself. The questions have arisen: can the RCL member keep his/her membership secret in the national minority organisation? How should he/she appear in public, as a member of one or both? Can he/she keep the internal affairs of the national minority organisation secret from the RCL? Can he/she support a line which is different from that of the RCL? Can he/she discuss and receive support and advice on issues within the organisation in and from the RCL? Can he/she put the tactical interests of the organisation before the interests of the RCL?

The Birmingham branch faced these issues at the same time as strong personal and ideological contradictions arose with the individuals involved. There appear to have been no serious political differences between the RCL and the national minority organisations concerned, although there were severe contradictions between the organisations themselves. The outcome was a serious depletion of the branch, with an emphasis placed on the national minority organisations rather than the RCL by a number of comrades. One white comrade left to join an Irish national minority organisation, another to join a black national minority organisation.

The branch handled these problems with extreme liberalism, which was partly a result of the ongoing contradictions and partly contributed to the negative outcome. The issues within the national minority organisations were not discussed within the branch. The branch allowed comrades to put the interests of their national minority organisation first, even to the extent of taking the position that where there was a contradiction between an RCL line and the line of the national minority organisation, the latter should be followed by the national minority comrade.

It is suggested that the correct approach to such problems must be a recognition of the need to build the party to build the strategic alliance. This requires national minority cadres, and they will be those involved in and eventually leading national minority struggles. Thus dual membership is both positive and essential. In the long term, the party will develop lines on most of the issues within national minority communities. In the short term, the party-building organisation will have very few positions, but it must be seen by its members as the higher body ideologically. The first loyalty of a cadre must be to the party-building organisation, although the organisation can expressly approve certain relatively autonomous conduct where this is tactically sound and not opportunist.

31/5/87