

Pamphlet no 20

**THE NATIONAL
QUESTION**

For years a national movement has existed in Quebec. And as the waves come and go, this movement has more or less gained in force following the sinuous transformations of the class struggle in Canada. To admit the existence of a national movement in Quebec is also to admit the reality of the oppression that the Quebec nation has to endure. Considering the conditions of the development of capitalism in our country, this oppression, under the disguise of federalism, could only serve the Canadian bourgeoisie and American imperialism 100%. The division of the Canadian people and the super-exploitation of the Quebec proletariat by Noranda Mines, John-Mansville, Dominion Textile, Firestone, Gypsum or United Aircraft, are the consequences of the oppression of the Quebec nation on the whole Canadian proletariat.

As throughout the country the resistance of the proletariat and Canadian people wins victories against the crisis measures of the bourgeoisie, the national question becomes most important. Today more than ever, bourgeois nationalists of all kinds are busy dividing the French-speaking proletariat from its English-speaking brothers though both face the same enemies in their struggle. To counter the various schemes of the bourgeois nationalists, the Canadian proletariat needs a clearcut strategy which recognizes both the necessity of the struggle against national oppression and that of its close link with the struggle for socialism in Canada. To do this, we must refer to the Marxist-Leninist principles on the question, principles enriched by more than 100 years of experience in advanced capitalist countries as well as in formerly exploited and oppressed nations such as China and Vietnam. But our goal must be to apply these principles to the concrete Canadian situation. In this way, we must unite the legitimate demands of the Quebec nation to those of the whole Canadian proletariat. These are the objectives of the present pamphlet.

I- Marxist-Leninist principles on the national question

Being the scientific theory of the revolutionary proletariat, Marxism-Leninism makes a correct analysis of national oppression and the struggle against it. **The basic principle of any correct position on the question is the following: all nations are equal in right, thus all nations have the right to dispose of themselves; they have the right to self-determination. Self-determination, in Lenin's own words, is "exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to political separation from the oppressor nation".**(1) In other words, this means actual and concrete recognition of the right of nations to dispose of themselves, recognition of the right of oppressed nations to establish their own independent State, without outside interference. The demand for self-determination is a demand of oppressed nations to be free, to determine their own social system and their own future.

Historically, this demand was first put forward by the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries in the course of the struggle of developing capitalism against the crumbling feudal system. Practically this gave the right to nations to secede from the feudal empires which dominated them, in order to establish their own nation-states. These nation-states were necessary to the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie for the creation of interior markets and for their domination of the developing proletariat.

Later, when capitalism changed from a progressive force into an obstacle to social progress, the proletariat picked up the banner of this demand. A new revolutionary force, it adapted this demand to the conditions of the development of capitalism in its ultimate stage: imperialism. Having reached this stage, capitalism has stepped beyond the limits of the nation-state in many countries and has replaced competition by monopoly. In its imperialist stage, capitalism sharpens class contradictions, develops militarism, multiplies wars, reinforces reaction, spreads its tentacles to the four corners of the world and ransacks the wealth of weaker and less-developed countries, the colonies.

The proletariat picks up the sword of self-determination

Indeed, the outcome of the imperialist First World War caused the explosion of the world into two factions in opposition with one another. On the one hand, a bunch of "advanced" capitalist countries, imperialist countries, who had just divided the world between themselves in the worst butchery humanity had ever known. And this fistful of countries continued to exploit and oppress vast colonies and dependent countries as well as the millions of people who lived there. In their own case these colonial countries had a democratic constitution and possessed rights that the people had managed, by long struggle, to win from the bourgeoisie. On the other hand stood a majority of dependent and colonized countries whose most elementary rights were ignored and who had to struggle to shed the imperialist yoke. It is in this context that the leaders of the revolutionary proletariat, of whom Lenin was then the most illustrious figure, elaborated the proletarian viewpoint on the national question with that of the right of the colonies to freedom.

"The national question was thereby transformed from a particular and internal State problem into a general and international problem, into a world problem of emancipating the oppressed peoples in the dependent countries and colonies from the yoke of imperialism" (2). Thus, under the conditions of imperialism, the right of self-determination was broadened to mean the right of the oppressed peoples of the colonies and dependent countries to complete secession and independence from their imperialist oppressors. In this way, the struggle for freedom of the colonial peoples joined the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against a common enemy: imperialism. The question of national rights wasn't isolated anymore for it became an integral part of the general question of proletarian revolution. Therefore it was the common interests of the proletarian movement in the imperialist countries and the national liberation movement in the colonies that sealed their indestructible unity against the world-wide forces of reaction.

A demand to be resolved by revolution

But Lenin also remarked that during capitalism's ultimate decadent stage, its imperialist stage, "the national question can be solved only in connection with and on the basis of the proletarian revolution" (3). In other words, this means that during the imperialist stage, the national question can only be and must only be resolved in a perspective of class struggle, that is in regard of the highest interests of the proletariat. In fact, the right of nations to dispose of themselves, as is the case of any democratic right in a capitalist system, cannot be considered in itself, from a metaphysical viewpoint but rather from the concrete viewpoint of the proletariat's struggle for freedom. Contrary to the blatant lies of the bourgeois ideologists, the proletariat never refuses to lead the struggle against national oppression, in the same way it leads any democratic struggle. But it must subordinate this struggle to the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Thus the proletariat takes for its own advantage the democratic demands, even becomes their most consequent spokesman but always with the aim of serving its revolutionary struggle.

This clearly means that the proletariat supports a democratic demand only when it weakens its principal enemy and helps its struggle advance towards its final goal: socialism. The practical consequence of such a position is that the proletariat does not support a national movement on the simple basis that it is a national movement. Stalin clearly stated that we must not consider the support of national movements from an abstract and formal point of view: "This does not mean, of course, that the proletariat must support every national movement, everywhere and always, in every individual and concrete case. It means that support must be given to such national movements as tend to weaken, to overthrow imperialism, and not to strengthen and preserve it" (4).

Therefore, a national movement is supported by the proletariat only when it serves to advance the proletarian revolution. For in our times, the proletarian revolution is the only one capable of offering the conditions of not only formal but true equality between nations. Only this revolution can lead to the very disappearance of nations. However, this will be accomplished only with the arrival of communism, that is, with the disappearance of class struggle. Communism, which is the ultimate goal of the actions of the re-

volutionary proletariat, will permit the fusion of nations and will cause them to disappear. But to be able to accomplish it, this integration presupposes the complete liberation of all the oppressed nations and the fixing of boundaries of the State by the agreement of the people. It is in this way, that frictions and distrust between nations will disappear, that reconciliation will be accelerated, and that the union of nations leading to the extinction of the State will be possible.

As Stalin says; "Because communism knows that the union of peoples in a single world economic system is possible only on the bases of mutual confidence and voluntary agreement, and that the road to the formation of a voluntary union of the peoples lies through the separation of the colonies from the "integral" imperialist "whole", through the transformation of the colonies into independent States." (5)

That is to say that socialism, the transitory stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat leading to the abolition of classes, is also the transition stage, on the road towards the amalgamation of nations and the disappearance of nation-states.

Indeed, the State of the dictatorship of the proletariat, "A State a hundred times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois State," (Lenin) explicitly supports, not only the right of self-determination of all the nations within it; but also the right of each of them to separate. Under a socialist regime, the national problem is solved either by the freely arrived at continuation of the existing arrangement of a federation of nations within a national framework; or by pure and simple separation. But in both cases, this implies the total liberty of propaganda in favour of separation; and the solution of this problem by way of a referendum within the nation wishing to separate.

Furthermore, for the nations that prefer not to separate, the socialist State favours regional autonomy in order to guarantee equality as well as the full development of the rights of all the nations concerned. Moreover, it protects the rights of the dispersed minorities, for whom regional autonomy cannot be realized, by assuring them full national equality and by abolishing all national privileges.

In the Soviet Union, at the time of Lenin and Stalin when the country was still socialist, and in China today, the communists have successfully waged the struggle for equality between nations. In both cases, the great majority of nations and oppressed national minorities have been joined together in a centralized State, thus creating the conditions to heighten and strengthen the unity and internationalism of the entire working class.

However, in both these countries, the fight for equality between the nations did not stop with their federation into a centralized State. Regional autonomy became a reality in order to insure an authentic equality between the nations in the respect of their language, of their life, of their culture and of their economic development. In this way, the application of the two principles — the right to self determination and regional autonomy is the real solution to the national problem in a bi-national or multi-national socialist State.

In order to guarantee a just solution to the national question, as with all other questions, Marxism-Leninism teaches that there can be only one vanguard party of the working class. This party must reflect the unity of the working class against national oppression both politically and organizationally. Indeed, it must undertake to promote and realize the complete equality of the workers of the oppressed nation with those of the oppressor nation. If not, it is impossible for the proletariat to uphold a political line independent from the bourgeoisie's.

On this point Stalin was most clear:

"We still have to settle the question of how to organize the proletariat of the various nations into a single, common party. One plan is that the workers should be organized according to nationality — so many nations, so many parties. This plan was rejected by the Social-Democrats (communists-IN STRUGGLE!). Experience has shown that the organization of the proletariat of a given State according to nationality only leads to the downfall of the idea of class solidarity. All the proletarian members of all the nations in a given State must be organized in a single, indivisible proletarian collective." (6)

Socialism, transitional stage on the road to the disappearance of nations

An essential condition to resolve the national question: one proletarian Party

In an imperialist country, when the revolutionary proletariat, undertakes the struggle for socialism, it is necessary to adopt a different attitude on the national question depending upon whether one belongs to the oppressor nation or the oppressed nation. Based on the fundamental principle of internationalism and socialism, that peoples oppressing other peoples cannot be free, the proletariat of the oppressor nation cannot limit itself to stereotyped, warmed-over phrases on general equality among nations. On the contrary, it must struggle to put an end to big nation chauvinism, which is in fact nothing but the legitimation of national oppression by the bourgeoisie.

In fact, the proletariat of the oppressor nation has to oppose the "preservation by force of oppressed nations inside the frontiers of these States; in other words it must struggle for the right to self determination. It must demand the liberty of political separation for the colonies and nations oppressed by "its" nation" (7)

If not, as Lenin says, the trust and the class solidarity between the workers of the oppressed nation and those of the oppressor nation are impossible.

As for the proletariat of the oppressed nation, it must, at the same time as it unreservedly supports the democratic program of the struggle against national oppression, also break away from narrow nationalism and parochialism. It has to struggle against all that holds the proletariat back from having an independent political line on this matter. It has to put forth class solidarity with the proletariat of the oppressor nation in order to overthrow the common enemy.

In short, those are the principles which enable us to do a scientific analysis of the national question in a given country, and to adopt a revolutionary line on this question. Guided by these principles, let us now analyse the national question in our country.

II- The national situation in Canada

Canada is a bi-national country; the English Canadian nation constitutes the majority and the Quebec nation, the minority. Quebec is most definitely a nation. Remember the characteristics as defined by Stalin: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make up manifested in a common culture." (8)

It is impossible to deny that Quebec is a stable community which was formed through its own particular history, with its own language and territory, and with its own particular psyche. All these factors contributed to give Quebec its own distinctive culture. Because of Quebec's atrophied economy, compared to Ontario for example, and its great dependence on American imperialism, the characteristic concerning the economic life of the community might perhaps seem blurred. However, as Stalin pointed out, nations are complex and concrete historically-recognized facts, and not "pure" and simple abstract nations established once for all time. In fact, a nation, like the rest of reality, is in motion and is subject to the laws of transformation; it has a history, a beginning, and an end. Besides, there is no single distinguishing characteristic of a nation. In comparing nations to each other, one finds here one feature standing out, and there, another. Thus it is precisely the concrete conditions of Quebec's national development, and the oppressed situation which so characterized that development, which explain why the economic life of the community could not develop in the same way as the other characteristics.

If it is easy to prove the existence of the Quebec nation, it is more difficult to date its origins. However, there is one thing about its history that is certain: the British Conquest quickly transformed the somewhat confused feeling of national belonging that already existed at the time among the people of New France, into a genuine national consciousness. From 1760 on, the nascent French Canadian nation was subject, by force of arms, to direct foreign administration in the interests of the British Empire. This foreign domination served to weld together the different classes of the French Canadian nation, with the exception of the traitors — the feudal land-

A short historical account of the Quebec nation

lords ("seigneurs") and the clergy. But the smallest burst of resistance from the people of Quebec was brutally crushed.

In addition to hindering the development of a national capitalism, the English bourgeoisie and the landed oligarchy which monopolized the majority of lands in the country, carried out a policy totally denying the French-Canadian nation the right to self-determination, the right to responsible government. And so, the bourgeoisie from London, and a handful of landowners and merchants in Canada, not only controlled the whole sphere of economic activities, but French-Canadians were withheld from any jobs of significant importance in the economic and political field.

It is out of these particularly harsh conditions of oppression against the Quebec people who had to support heavy taxes in order to finance the development of a colonial commerce, that a resistance movement by the Quebec nation rose and continued to grow, despite certain periods of flux. This resistance was directed against feudal relations imposed by the landed oligarchy and the clergy, traitors to the nation, and British colonialism, as well as against the reactionary policy which denied the French-Canadian nation the right to self-determination.

An inconsequent national struggle

But the French-Canadian nation's struggle was never carried to its successful conclusion. Why? Because when this struggle reached its peak in the form of violent and armed resistance against the invaders in 1837-38, it was under the inconsequential leadership of the liberal petty-bourgeoisie. This petty-bourgeoisie, who had joined the ranks of a similar liberal petty-bourgeoisie in Upper-Canada (Ontario), had managed, for a while, to rally all the strata of the French-Canadian people. But its political and economic weakness, its lack of homogeneity, prevented it from bringing its national liberation project to term.

The only class having enough strength and homogeneity to lead this struggle successfully would have been the industrial bourgeoisie, representative of a new mode of production seeking expansion at the time. But this bourgeoisie in Quebec was far too weak to be able to assume leadership of the struggle precisely because its development was hindered by the dominant feudal and colonial relations of the time. And just at the moment when the Quebec bourgeoisie would have been able to take the leadership of the national movement, the British Empire, under popular pressure, granted political independence to Canada while maintaining it under its economic dependence. Being able to accede to political power by collaborating with the British Empire, the Quebec industrial bourgeoisie, already completely integrated into the English-Canadian bourgeoisie, didn't lose time in rejecting the anti-colonial classes and in betraying the French-Canadian national interests.

By this fact, the foundation of bourgeois democracy in Quebec as in the rest of Canada and the creation of a national independent State, through the Confederation of 1867, was to be the most anti-democratic act ever. Indeed, this project was carried out by totally ignoring the right of the French-Canadian nation to self-determination, by forcing the French-Canadian people to join in a confederation that it had neither wished nor supported. In this manner the Canadian bourgeoisie set up the bases of its current power: by expropriating by force the Native and Inuit peoples, and the Métis people in the West, and by butchering the Quebec people's struggle against conscription and participation in the 1914-1918 imperialist war and by denying the political and cultural rights of the Quebec nation!

The P.Q.'s independence, a reactionary policy

Nowadays, the Quebec nation is still oppressed and dominated. But this oppression is more refined: it is now exercised in the framework of a bourgeois democratic regime which has reached its imperialist stage. Indeed, the Canadian bourgeoisie, including its Quebec section, has realized the concentration of capital and production into monopolies, has managed the fusion of banking and industrial capital in the hands of a financial oligarchy which controls the main levers of the Canadian economy and exports capital to several regions of the world. In this sense the oppression exerted upon the Quebec nation is by no means comparable to colonial oppression, as the "C"PC(M-L) would have us believe. In their

caricatural opportunism, they are ready to support any liberation movement which may rise in Quebec.

It is the development of capitalism which presides over the development of national oppression in our country. Consequently, **the only way to rid ourselves of national oppression at the moment is to rid ourselves of capitalism itself.**

It is here that the reactionary character of PQ-style nationalism reveals itself. This bourgeois party wants to turn back the clock of history by hoping to finish off, more than a century later, what the Patriots failed to achieve in 1837-38; the creation of a Quebec bourgeois democratic State.

The PQ's project is to install a French-Canadian bourgeoisie at the head of this State of bourgeois dictatorship and to drive out the English-Canadian elements of the bourgeoisie who rule the Quebec economy. In this way, the Quebec middle bourgeoisie and the non-monopolist sector that it represents, would see itself suddenly propelled to the point of a national bourgeoisie capable of directly compounding the sale of our natural resources to American imperialism.

This project is reactionary from A to Z because Canada, including Quebec, has long been an "advanced" bourgeois democratic society where capitalism has reached its imperialist stage. This implies that in our country the bourgeoisie has definitively outlived its historical revolutionary role and that from now on it is a decadent and declining class, 100% reactionary. To say that the bourgeoisie has outlived its historical role, is to state that bourgeois nationalism is lagging behind history, that it is essentially a reactionary ideology and that consequently it can't in any way serve the proletariat in its revolutionary struggle for power.

National oppression, an ever-present reality

With the deepening of the capitalist crisis, the oppression of the Quebec nation hasn't decreased an inch. The Quebec economy remains completely marked by the overwhelming space occupied by the English-Canadian bourgeoisie space which it shares with American imperialism. In another way, certain democratic rights, such as the right to one's language and culture are constantly abused in daily practice, and this despite the different laws voted with a lot of publicity, such as the sickening Bills 63 and 22, supposed protectors of the "cultural" rights of the Quebec nation. And the people, among them the proletariat, are always the ones hardest hit by the negation of these national rights. Particularly in the case of the proletariat, the situation of national oppression means harder working conditions, lower salaries, a greater number of factory and mine shut-downs, etc. Take salaries for example, the discriminatory situation of the Quebec proletariat compared to the situation of the English-speaking proletariat from other provinces is easy to measure: in 1973, the average hourly wage in Quebec was \$3.35 compared to \$4.06 in Ontario, \$3.45 in Manitoba, \$3.94 in Saskatchewan, \$4.11 in Alberta and \$4.91 in British Columbia. In addition to being submitted to a capitalist super-exploitation in the shops and mines, the Quebec proletariat must furthermore endure the fact that it cannot work in its own language.

III- Our tasks regarding national oppression

Facing the situation of national oppression which prevails in our country, what should be the tasks of the revolutionary proletariat?

First of all, the right of the Quebec nation to self-determination must not only be recognized in words but a struggle must be waged for its effective recognition. This means an open condemnation of the domination of the English-Canadian exploiter nation of the Quebec nation. Moreover, this also means to openly recognize the rightful struggle of this nation for the acceptance of its democratic rights.

As well, we must work to convince the whole Quebec people that it is not in its interests to struggle for the creation of an independent Quebec national State. We must convince it that it must aim at developing the unity of all the Canadian people around the

proletariat in order to get closer to the socialist revolution. Indeed, if socialist revolution is the only way, considering the stage our country has reached in capitalist development, to unite the necessary conditions to put a definite end to Quebec's national oppression, we must always keep in mind the following question when we examine the national question: in the present situation does the advent of the Quebec nation's independence favor or not the advent of socialism in our country? We must therefore examine the question from the viewpoint of the revolutionary interests of the whole Canadian proletariat. Now, we believe that at the present time, any national movement aiming at the creation of an independent Quebec State reinforces the slightest desire of control and seizure of the Quebec economy by American imperialism, since the movement contributes to the division and thereby to the weakening of the Canadian proletariat and Canadian people.

From this follows two specific tasks, one concerning the Quebec proletariat and the other concerning the English-Canadian proletariat. Concerning the Quebec proletariat, it is important for it to fight without interruption the narrow chauvinism spread into its ranks by bourgeois nationalists and other reactionaries such as the Trotskysts who repeat the same nonsense under a revolutionary mask. On the contrary, the Quebec proletariat must demand with all its strength the complete unity of the proletariat of the two nations. Only in this way will the Quebec proletariat be able to definitely separate itself from "right-wing" and "left-wing" bourgeois nationalism, obstacles to any real progress on the road to socialist revolution in Canada.

Regarding the English-Canadian proletariat, it will have to struggle without fail against its big nation chauvinism that the NDP and the revisionists of the so-called Communist Party of Canada, they who have never recognized the right of the Quebec nation to organize itself as it sees fit, have for years spread in its ranks. So, if the Canadian bourgeoisie tries to intensify its repression of the Quebec nation's democratic rights, the Canadian proletariat will be able to counter the bourgeoisie's reactionary policy.

Finally, the immediate task, which is a prerequisite to the accomplishment of all the others, is the struggle for the construction of a real, single and centralized proletarian Party (Marxist-Leninist), indispensable instrument for the accomplishment of the revolution in our country. This party will defend thoroughly the right to self-determination of Quebec, and also its cultural, political and economic rights. This Party will be a bi-national Party, composed of representatives of the vanguard of the whole Canadian working class, from coast to coast. For if the Canadian proletarian Party does not succeed in achieving the unity of the vanguard of the whole proletariat in its own ranks, how will it be able to educate the whole of the Canadian proletariat and people in a real internationalist and socialist spirit? How will it be able to convince the two nations that socialism is the key to the correct solution of the national question? No, the highest unity of the Canadian proletariat in its sole vanguard Party is the prerequisite for the achievement of the unity of the whole Canadian people, unity which is indispensable to defeat the bourgeoisie and to set up the dictatorship of the proletariat.

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- (1) LENIN, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", Collected Works, Vol. 20, p. 325
 - (2) STALIN, "Foundations of Leninism", Works, Vol. 6, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1953, p. 144
 - (3) Ibid. p. 146
 - (4) Ibid. p. 147
 - (5) Ibid. p. 152
 - (6) STALIN, "Report on the National Question at the Seventh Conference of the RSDLP-B", Selected Works, p. 97.
 - (7) LENIN, On the national and colonial questions (our translation I.S.!)
 - (8) STALIN, Marxism and the National Question, Works, Volume 2, p. 307 Foreign Languages Publishing House Moscow 1953