

# Theses on the National and Colonial Question

*with supplementary theses provided by the Indian delegation*

Third (Communist) International, Second Congress

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1. – An abstract or formal conception of the question of equality in general and national equality in particular is characteristic of the bourgeoisie by its very nature. Under the pretense of the equality of the human person in general, bourgeois democracy proclaims the formal legal equality of the proprietor and the proletarian, of the exploiter and the exploited, and thus deceives the oppressed classes in the highest degree. The idea of equality, which is itself a reflection of the relations of commodity production, is transformed by the bourgeoisie, under the pretext of the absolute equality of the human person, into a tool in the struggle against the abolition of classes. The true significance of the demand of equality lies only in the demand for the abolition of classes.

2. – As the conscious expression of the proletarian class struggle to throw off the yoke of the bourgeoisie, and in accordance with its main task, which is the fight against bourgeois democracy and the unmasking of its lies and hypocrisy, the communist party should not place the main emphasis in the national question on abstract and formal principles, but in the first place on an exact evaluation of the historically given and above all economic milieu. Secondly it should emphasize the explicit separation of the interests of the oppressed classes, of the toilers, of the exploited, from the general concept of the national interest, which means the interests of the ruling class. Thirdly it must emphasize the equally clear division of the oppressed, dependent nations which do not enjoy equal rights from the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations, as a counter to the bourgeois-democratic lie which covers over the colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's total population, by a tiny

minority of the richest and most advanced capitalist countries, that is characteristic of the epoch of finance capital and imperialism.

3. – The imperialist war of 1914 has shown all the enslaved nations and oppressed classes throughout the world with particular clarity the mendacity of bourgeois-democratic phraseology. Justified on both sides by phraseology about peoples' liberation and the right of nations to self-determination, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest on the one side, and the Treaty of Versailles and St. Germain on the other, have shown that the victorious bourgeoisie determines even "national" frontiers to suit its economic interests. Even "national" frontiers are merely objects of trade for the bourgeoisie. The so-called "League of Nations" is merely the insurance policy by which the victors in this war mutually guarantee their booty. The strivings to re-establish national unity, for "reunification with ceded territories" are, for the bourgeoisie, nothing other than the attempts by the vanquished to gather strength for new wars. The reunification of nations that have been artificially torn apart also corresponds to the interests of the proletariat. The proletariat can however only achieve real national freedom and unity by the path of revolutionary struggle and over the body of the defeated bourgeoisie.

The League of Nations and the whole post-war policy of the imperialist states reveal this truth even more clearly and sharply, everywhere strengthening the revolutionary fight not only of the proletariat of the advanced countries but also of the toiling masses of the colonies and the dependent countries, and hastens the collapse of petty-bourgeois illusions in the possibility of peaceful coexistence and the equality of nations under capitalism.

4. – From the principles set forth, it follows that the whole policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based mainly on the union of the workers and toiling masses of all nations and countries in the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landlords and of the bourgeoisie. For only such a union can secure victory over capitalism, without which the destruction of national oppression and inequality is impossible.

5. – The international political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day, and all the events in international politics are concentrated inevitably around one central point, around the struggle of the international bourgeoisie against the Russian Soviet Republic. The latter rallies around itself, on the one hand, the soviet movements of the vanguard of the working class in every country and, on the other hand, all the national liberation movements of the colonies and the oppressed nationalities, who have been convinced by bitter experience that for them there is no salvation outside an alliance with the revolutionary proletariat and the victory of soviet power over world imperialism.

6. – Consequently it is impermissible today to limit oneself to mere recognition or proclamation of sympathy with the toilers of various nations, but it is necessary to pursue a policy of bringing about the closest possible alliance between all the national and colonial liberation movements with Soviet Russia. The forms of this alliance will be determined by the stage of development of the communist movement among the proletariat of every country, or of the revolutionary liberation movement in the backward countries and among the backward nationalities.

7. – Federation is a transitional form on the way to the complete unification of the toilers of all nations. Federation has already shown its expediency in practice, not only in the relations between the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and the other Soviet Republics (the Hungarian, Finnish, and Latvian in the past, those of Azerbaijan and the Ukraine at present), but also within the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, even in relation to nationalities who possessed neither political existence nor self-govern-

ment (for example the Bashkir and Tartar Republics in the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, which were set up in 1919 and 1920).

8. – The task of the Communist International in this respect consists not only in the further development of this federation based on the soviet order and the soviet movement, but also in its study and the testing of our experiences with it. Recognizing that federation is a form in the transition to complete unification, we must strive for an ever closer federal link. What must be taken into consideration is first the impossibility for the soviet republics, surrounded as they are by the militarily significantly stronger imperialist states of the whole world, of continuing to exist without closer links with other soviet republics; secondly the necessity of a close economic alliance between the soviet republics, without which it is impossible to restore the productive forces destroyed by capitalism and assure the welfare of the toilers; and thirdly the efforts to create a unified world economy according to a common plan regulated by the proletariat of all nations. This tendency has already emerged quite openly under capitalism and insistently seeks its further development and completion under socialism.

9. – In the sphere of relations within states, the national policy of the Communist International cannot confine itself to the bare formal recognition of the equality of nations, expressed only in words and entailing no practical obligations, to which the bourgeois democracies confine themselves, even those that call themselves "socialist".

It is not sufficient for the communist parties to expose unflinchingly in their propaganda and agitation both on the parliamentary tribune and elsewhere the continually repeated offenses in every capitalist state, in spite of all the "democratic" constitutions, against the equality of nations and the guaranteed rights of national minorities. It is also necessary first to clarify constantly the point that only the soviet order is capable of assuring nations true equality by uniting first the proletariat and then the whole mass of the toilers in the fight against the bourgeoisie, and secondly to give direct support to the revolutionary movements in dependent nations and those deprived of their rights (e.g. in Ireland, and among America's black population), through the communist parties

of the countries in question.

Without the last particularly important condition, the struggle against the oppression of the dependent nations and the colonies, and the recognition of their right to a separate political existence remains the kind of mendacious hypocrisy that we see in the parties of the Second International.

10. – Recognizing internationalism in words alone and watering it down in practice with petty-bourgeois nationalism and pacifism is a common phenomenon not only among the parties of the Second International, but also among those that have left the International. This phenomenon is frequently seen even in those parties that now call themselves communist.

The fight against this evil, against the most deeply-rooted petty-bourgeois nationalist prejudices (which appear in every possible form, such as racial hatred, the baiting of minorities, and anti-Semitism) must be brought all the more into the foreground the more burning becomes the question of transforming the dictatorship of the proletariat from a national dictatorship (i.e. a dictatorship existing only in one country and incapable of pursuing an independent international policy) into an international dictatorship (that is, a dictatorship of the proletariat in at least a few advanced countries which is capable of exercising a decisive influence on international politics).

What petty-bourgeois nationalism means by internationalism is the mere recognition of the equality of nations (irrespective of the fact that such recognition is granted in words alone) which leaves national egoism untouched. Proletarian internationalism on the other hand demands: 1) the subordination of the interests of the proletarian struggle of the one country to the interests of this struggle on a world scale, and 2) the ability and the readiness on the part of the nation that carries out its victory over the bourgeoisie to make the greatest national sacrifice in order to overthrow international capitalism.

Therefore the first and most important task, in those countries that are already completely capitalist and have workers' parties that really do represent a vanguard of the proletariat, is to combat the petty-bourgeois pacifist distortions of the conceptions and policies of internationalism.

11. – In relation to those states that have a more backward, predominantly feudal, patriarchal, or peasant-patriarchal character, special attention must be paid to the following points:

- a) All communist parties must support the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries by their deeds. The form the support should take must be discussed with the communist party of the country in question, should such a party exist. This obligation to offer active assistance effects, in the first place, the workers of those countries on which the backward countries are in a position of colonial or financial dependence.
- b) An unconditional struggle must be carried out against the reactionary and medieval influence of the clergy, the Christian missions, and similar elements.
- c) A struggle is necessary against Pan-Islamism, the Pan-Asiatic movement, and similar currents which try to tie the liberation struggle against European and American imperialism to the strengthening of the power of Turkish and Japanese imperialism, the nobility, the big landlords, the clergy, etc.
- d) Support for the peasant movement in the backward countries against the landowners and every form and remnant of feudalism is particularly necessary. What must be striven for above all is to give the peasant movement as revolutionary a character as possible, and wherever possible to organize the peasants and all victims of exploitation in soviets, and thus bring about as close a link as possible between the Western European communist proletariat and the revolutionary movement of peasants in the East, in the colonies, and in the backward countries.
- e) A determined fight is necessary against the attempt to put a communist cloak around revolutionary liberation movements that are not really communist in the backward countries. The Communist International has the duty to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies, only for the purpose of gathering the components of the future proletarian parties—communist in fact and not just in name

—in all the backward countries and training them to be conscious of their special tasks, the special tasks, that is to say, of fighting against the bourgeois-democratic tendencies within their own nation. The Communist International should accompany the revolutionary movement in the colonies and the backward countries for part of the way, should even make an alliance with it; it may not, however, fuse with it, but must unconditionally maintain the independent character of the proletarian movement, be it only in embryo.

- f) It is necessary to continuously lay bare and to explain among the broadest masses of all, but in particular of the backward countries, the deception committed by the imperialist powers with the help of the privileged classes in the oppressed countries when, under the mask of politically independent states, they bring into being state structures that are economically, financially, and militarily completely dependent on them. The Zionists' Palestine affair can be characterized as a gross example of the deception of the working classes of that oppressed nation by Entente imperialism and the bourgeoisie of the country in question pooling their efforts (in the same way that Zionism in general actually delivers the Arab working population of Palestine, where Jewish workers only form a minority, to exploitation by England, under the cloak of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine). In today's economic conditions there is no salvation for the weak and dependent nations outside of an alliance with soviet republics.

12. – The centuries of enslavement that the weak and colonial nationalities have suffered at the hands of the great imperialist powers has left in the toiling masses of the enslaved countries not only a feeling of combativity, but also a feeling of mistrust towards the nations that have exploited them in general, including the proletariat of those nations. The despicable betrayal of socialism by the majority of the official leaders of that proletariat between 1914 and 1919, when the social patriots masked the defense of "their" bourgeoisie's "rights" to enslave and plunder the financially dependent countries under "defense of

the Fatherland"—this betrayal could only strengthen that completely justified mistrust. Since this mistrust and national prejudices can only be rooted out after the destruction of imperialism in the advanced countries and the radical transformation of the whole basis of economic life in the backward countries, the removal of these prejudices will only be able to proceed very slowly. This means that the class-conscious communist proletariat of every country has the duty of giving special care and attention to the national feelings, in themselves outdated, in those long-enslaved countries and nationalities, and at the same time the obligation to make concessions in order to overcome this mistrust and these prejudices all the more rapidly. Without the voluntary alliance of the proletariat, and with them the toiling masses of every country and nation in the world, united as one, the victory over capitalism cannot be drawn to a completely successful conclusion.

## Supplementary Theses

1. – One of the most important questions that faces the Second Congress of the Communist International is to establish exactly the mutual relations between the Communist International and the revolutionary movements in the politically oppressed countries dominated by their own capitalist system, like India and China. The history of the world revolution is living through a period which requires a correct conception of this mutual relationship. The great European war and its consequences have shown clearly that the masses of people in the oppressed non-European countries have, as a result of the centralization of world capitalism, been indissolubly bound up with the proletarian movement in Europe, which found an expression during the war, for example in the sending of colonial troops and numerous masses of workers to the front.

2. – European capitalism draws its strength in the main not so much from the industrial countries of Europe as from its colonial possessions. Its existence depends on control of extensive colonial markets and a broad field of opportunities for exploitation. England, the bulwark of imperialism, has already suffered from overproduction for a century. Without the extensive colonial possessions that are essential for the sale of her goods,

and at the same time form the source of her raw materials, the capitalist order in England would long since have collapsed under its own weight. At the same time that British imperialism makes hundreds of millions of the inhabitants of Asia and Africa into slaves, it also keeps the British proletariat under the domination of the bourgeoisie.

3. – The super-profits made in the colonies form one of the main sources of the resources of contemporary capitalism. The European working class will only succeed in overthrowing the capitalist order once this source has finally been stopped up. The capitalist countries try, not indeed without success, to restore their shaky position by extensive and intensive exploitation of human labor and the natural wealth of the colonies. As a result of the exploitation of the colonial population, European imperialism is in a position to grant the labor aristocracy in Europe a whole range of concessions. While on the one hand European imperialism tries to force down the absolute minimum level necessary to keep the proletariat alive by the import of goods produced by the cheaper labor-power of the workers of the colonial countries, it is on the other hand prepared to sacrifice the increased profits it could make in the home country in order to receive the super-profits it can obtain by exploitation in the colonies.

4. – The loss of the colonies and the proletarian revolution in the mother countries will bring the downfall of the capitalist order in Europe. In consequence, the Communist International must extend its field of activity. The Communist International must enter into much closer connection with the revolutionary forces that are at present participating in the overthrow of imperialism in the politically and economically oppressed countries. The collaboration of these two forces is necessary for the complete success of the world revolution.

5. – The Communist International is the concentrated will of the world proletariat. Its task is the organization of the working class of the whole world for the overthrow of the capitalist order and for the spread of communism. The Communist International is a fighting organization that must unite the revolutionary forces of every country in the world.

The Second International, permeated through and through with bourgeois culture and led by a handful of political dilettantes, underestimated the whole importance of the colonial question. The world outside simply did not exist as far as they were concerned. They did not recognize the necessity of the collaboration of the revolutionary movement in Europe and the other parts of the world. Instead of supporting the revolutionary movement in the colonies both materially and morally, the members of the Second International themselves became imperialists.

6. – The foreign imperialism violently forced upon the peoples of the East has without doubt hindered their social and economic development and robbed them of the opportunity of reaching the same level of development as has been achieved in Europe and America. Thanks to the imperialist policies, whose efforts are directed towards holding up industrial development in the colonies, the native proletariat has only come into existence fairly recently. The dispersed local cottage industries have given way to the centralized industries of the imperialist countries. As a result, the vast majority of the population was forced to engage in agriculture and export raw materials abroad. On the other hand we can observe a rapidly growing concentration of the land in the hands of big landowners, capitalists and the state, which again contributes to the growth of the number of landless peasants. The vast majority of the population of these colonies lives under conditions of oppression. As a result of these policies the underdeveloped spirit of outrage that lives in the masses of the people can only find an expression in the numerically small intellectual middle class. Foreign domination constantly obstructs the free development of social life; therefore the revolution's first step must be the removal of this foreign domination. The struggle to overthrow foreign domination in the colonies does not therefore mean underwriting the national aims of the national bourgeoisie, but much rather smoothing the path to liberation for the proletariat of the colonies.

7. – Two movements can be discerned which are growing further and further apart with every day that passes. One of them is the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement, which pursues

the programme of political liberation with the conservation of the capitalist order; the other is the struggle of the property-less peasants for their liberation from every kind of exploitation. The first movement attempts, often with success, to control the second; the Communist International must, however, fight against any such control, and the development of the class consciousness of the working masses of the colonies must consequently be directed towards the overthrow of foreign capitalism. The most important and necessary task however is the creation of communist organizations of peasants and workers in order to lead them to the revolution and the setting up of the soviet republic. In this way, the masses of the people in the backward countries will be brought to communism not by capitalist development, but by the development of class consciousness under the leadership of the proletariat of the advanced countries.

8. – The real strength, the foundation of the liberation movement, will not allow itself to be forced into the narrow framework of bourgeois-democratic nationalism in the colonies. In the greater part of the colonies there already exist organized revolutionary parties which work in close contact with the working masses. The Communist International must make contact with the revolutionary movement in the colonies through the mediation of these parties and groups, for they are the vanguard of the working class. At present they are not numerous, but they express the will of the working class and lead the revolution behind them. The communist parties of the various imperialist countries must work in the closest contact with the proletarian parties of the colonies, and through them support the revolutionary movement in general both materially and morally.

9. – In the first period, the revolution in the colonies will not be communist; if, however, from the very start the communist vanguard emerges at its head the revolutionary masses will be brought on to the correct path along which, through the gradual gathering of revolutionary experience, they will reach the hidden goal. It would be a mistake to try to solve the agrarian question straight away according to purely communist principles. In the first stage of its development, the revolu-

tion in the colonies must be carried out according to the programme of purely petty-bourgeois demands, such as distribution of the land and so on. But from this it must not be concluded that the leadership in the colonies can be allowed to fall into the hands of the bourgeois democrats. On the contrary, the proletarian parties must carry out an intensive propaganda of communist ideas and found workers' and peasants' councils at the first opportunity. These councils must work in the same way as the soviet republics in the advanced capitalist countries in order to bring about the final overthrow of the capitalist order throughout the whole world.



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