Chapter VII

The National Question and Communism


§ 55. National oppression

One of the types of oppression of man by man is national oppression. One of the partitions dividing mankind, apart from class-partitions, is national disunity, including national enmity and hatred.

One of the means of stupefying the proletariat and dulling its class-consciousness is national persecution,

1. [From Bukharin and Preobrazhensky 1920. The ABC of Communism was written by N.I. Bukharin and E.A. Preobrazhensky and was first published in 1919 to elaborate the new party-programme of the RKP adopted in March at the Eighth Party-Congress. This translation comes from the 1920 edition. The foreword to the book indicated which author contributed the particular chapters. Since the book has long been available in English translation, we have re-translated here only the chapters written by E.A. Preobrazhensky. This translation follows the Russian text more closely than does the one by Eden and Cedar Paul, first published in 1922.]
which the bourgeoisie knew how to use in its own interests.

Let us consider how the conscious proletarian must approach the national question and must resolve it in the interest of the speediest victory of communism.

A nation or nationality is a group of people who are united by a single language and who inhabit a particular territory. There are other indicators of nationality, but these are the most important and fundamental ones.²

The meaning of national oppression is best clarified by an example. The tsarist government persecuted the Jews, did not allow them to live throughout Russia, did not admit them into state-service, restricted their entry into schools, organised anti-Jewish pogroms, and so on. The same government did not allow Ukrainians to teach their children in schools using the Ukrainian language, they were forbidden to publish newspapers in their own language, and not a single nationality in the state was permitted freely to decide whether or not they wanted to live as a part of the Russian state.

The German government closed Polish schools; the Austrian government persecuted the Czech language and forcibly imposed German on the Czechs. The English bourgeoisie humiliated, and still humiliates, the indigenous people of Africa and Asia, subjugates the backward semi-savage peoples, plunders them and shoots them for attempts to free themselves from oppression.

In a word, when one nation in a state enjoys all the rights, and another only part of those rights; when a weaker nation is joined to a stronger one and is compelled by it to adopt a foreign language, customs and so forth against its will, so that it cannot live its own life – this is national oppression and national inequality.

§ 56. The unity of the proletariat

First of all, we must pose and resolve the most important and fundamental question: is the German, the Frenchman, the Englishman, the Jew, the Chinaman or the Tatar, regardless of which class he belongs to, an enemy of the Russian worker and peasant? Can he hate or be suspicious of a representative of another people simply because the latter speaks a different language, has skin that is black or yellow, or has different customs and morals? It is clear that he cannot and must not do so. The worker of Germany, the worker of France, or the Negro worker is a proletarian just like the Russian worker. Whatever language the

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² For instance, the Jews once had a territory and a common language, but now they have no territory and not all of them know the ancient Jewish language; the gypsies have their language, but they do not have a definite territory. The non-nomadic Tunguses in Siberia have a territory, but they have forgotten their language.