

The National Democratic Revolution

In our last issue we reported on the seminar held in Aden on the subject of the national democratic revolution and the experience of South Yemen. There were selections from the presentations made by Comrade Ali Nasser Mohammad, General Secretary of the Yemeni Socialist Party, and by the Greek Communist Party. In this issue we print a translation of the paper presented by the PFLP at the seminar.

The nature, tasks, dynamic forces and perspectives of the national democratic revolution

The national democratic revolution is a bourgeois democratic revolution of a new type, induced by the contemporary stage of capitalism's development into imperialism, and the resulting oppression of the peoples of the three continents (Asia, Africa and Latin America) by world colonialism. Specifically, the emergence of the national democratic revolution coincided with the present stage of the general crisis of capitalism, which began when capitalism was defeated by the end of the second world war, and socialism became a world system encompassing many European and Asian countries. This meant the emergence of new international conditions favorable to the peoples' struggle for national independence and social progress in the colonized and subordinate countries.

The national democratic revolution may occur in a number of countries with differing levels of economic and social development. It may occur in severely backward countries where feudal and pre-feudal relations still prevail, where the working class is not yet crystallized as a class, and the bourgeoisie is still in the formative stage, as is the case in many African countries. It may occur in countries where capitalist relations of production have developed sufficiently for a working class to be constituted in one form or another, and the national bourgeoisie to be crystallized to the degree of being a class with economic and social influence. This is the case in many Arab countries, such as Egypt, Algeria and Iraq, and in other Asian countries.

The national democratic revolution arises on the basis of two kinds of contradictions: external and internal. The sharp, antagonistic contradiction with colonialism and imperialism constitutes the main contradiction. This gives these revolutions the character of national liberation, hostile to imperialism and to the different forms of colonial subordination and economic plunder imposed by imperialism on the oppressed people of the colonized and subordinate countries. The oppressed people aspire to political and economic emancipa-

tion and to establishing independent national states. Therefore, the upsurge of the national liberation movements in the three continents has contributed greatly to deepening the general crisis of contemporary capitalism and to the collapse of the colonial empires.

In as much as the peoples' struggle for liberation is against the political and economic hegemony of imperialism, to the same extent it attacks the essence of the capitalist relations of production... In this context, Lenin pointed out that the struggle for national liberation is a part of the revolutionary socialist transformation of the world: «The socialist revolution will not only be the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in every country, but the struggle of the colonies and countries that are subordinated and oppressed by imperialism, against world imperialism». Thus, from the point of view of the world revolutionary process, liberating the oppressed people from imperialism corresponds not only to their national interests, but also to the class interests of the international proletariat and socialism. Moreover, the class struggle waged by the international proletariat, first and foremost the socialist countries, plays a major role in abolishing capitalism. Thus, it creates favorable conditions for national liberation revolutions, aiding them in achieving freedom and national independence. This provides the objective basis for the unity of the forces hostile to imperialism: the national liberation movements, the socialist countries and the working class in the capitalist countries. Strengthening the alliance between the world socialist system and workers' movement on the one hand, and the national liberation movements in the three continents on the other, assumes great significance for the coming struggle against imperialism.

The main thrust of the national democratic revolution is a liberation revolution against colonialism and imperialism, aiming to achieve national independence and build independent national states. Yet this can only be achieved on the basis of specific forms of internal contradictions. The feudal and semi-feudal relations that exist in the countries prone to national democratic liberation cannot continue indefinitely. On the contrary, the time is ripe for these relations to vanish and be



Ali Naser Mohammed, the revolutionary leader

replaced with more developed relations of production. Thus, the national democratic revolution is required to resolve these internal contradictions.

Hence, the tasks of the national democratic revolution include the following: enacting agrarian reform to the benefit of the working peasants; fostering the growth of industrial and agricultural production; expanding the internal market; cancelling the exploitative social and economic relations and forms of class oppression enforced by colonial rule and by the class hegemony of feudalist and reactionary forces in these societies. Furthermore, taking measures to spread democracy gives these revolutions their democratic character.

The dynamic class forces, leadership, tasks and perspectives for development of the national democratic revolution vary due to differences in the level of social and economic development, national characteristics and the political conditions of the struggle in the countries concerned, and due to differences in the regional and international alliances.

The class forces with interests in the national democratic revolution are the working class, the peasants, the petit bourgeoisie and the middle strata of the population. Also the national bourgeoisie may play a role in this revolution. However, it is not long before the role of this class decreases and vanishes, due to its fear of the upsurge of the mass movement and its own dual nature.

The major characteristic of the contemporary world is the transition from capitalism to socialism. The balance of class forces on the international level is continuously tilting in favor of the forces of liberation, socialism and peace. Thus, national democratic revolutions were victorious in many countries of the three continents; the great majority won national independence and established independent states.

At the same time, some peoples with differing degrees of social and economic development not only achieved national democratic liberation, but moved into the stage of socialist transformation. Lenin declared that while fighting to eradicate colonial oppression and achieve national independence, the oppressed people are simultaneously struggling against the basis of capitalist exploitation. This has been substantiated: Some peoples, having abolished colonial rule, the positions of imperialism and the remnants of feudalism, were able to embark on the transition to socialism while undertaking the tasks of the national democratic revolution.

The revolutions that have occurred in the three continents, from the end of the second world war until today, are national democratic in nature. Accordingly, the major tasks of these revolutions were antagonistic to imperialism and the pre-capitalist relations of production.

Other revolutions have failed to accomplish all the national democratic tasks, were unable to accomplish them fully, or to create the material and spiritual conditions conducive to socialist transformation. This can be traced to the nature of the social classes and political parties that led these revolutions.

There was a time when the national bourgeoisie (comprising all its strata, petit and middle, its political parties and leadership) had the opportunity to lead such revolutions, as happened in a number of Arab countries. Yet this bourgeoisie was unable to lead the national democratic revolution to its logical end, due to its class limitations, vacillation and fear of the mass movement. Rather the bourgeoisie stopped halfway and eventually repudiated the national democratic course.

On the other hand, national democratic revolution occurred in countries such as Cuba, China, Korea, Vietnam and other countries in the Southeast Asia. In some of these countries, the level of social and economic development was lower than that in Arab countries such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria. Yet the working class, via its vanguard political parties, was prepared to play a leading role. It established a revolutionary alliance with the peasant masses, and with the urban and rural petit bourgeoisie. This enabled these national democratic revolutions against colonialism and feudalism to accomplish not only the tasks of the national revolution, but to embark directly on the transition to socialist revolution as well.

From 1905, Lenin, the leader of the great October Revolution, was always vigilant about clarifying to Russian revolutionaries, and to all revolutionaries of the world, the significance of struggling to secure working class leadership in the bourgeois revolution. In his book, *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, he emphasized: «Marxism teaches the proletariat not to keep aloof from the bourgeois revolution, not to be indifferent to it, not to allow the leadership of the revolution to be assumed by the bourgeoisie, but, on the contrary, to take a most energetic part in it, to fight most resolutely for consistent proletarian democracy, for the revolution to be carried to its conclusion. We cannot get out of

the bourgeois-democratic boundaries of the Russian revolution, but we can vastly extend these boundaries, and within these boundaries we can and must fight for the interests of the proletariat, for its immediate needs and for conditions that will make it possible to prepare its forces for the future complete victory.» (V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p.454).

The strategy and tactics of the communist movement formulated by Lenin, concerning the possibility and need for working class leadership in the bourgeois revolution, are no longer mere theoretical hypotheses. Rather they have been confirmed by many experiences in many countries, despite differences in the social and economic development and political conditions. The October Revolution led by the Bolsheviks is a classical model of the possibility of the working class and its communist party taking the leadership of the bourgeois revolution, after the bourgeoisie became incapable, in the conditions of imperialism, to lead this revolution to its final end. Moreover, the popular democratic revolutions that occurred in a number of East European countries were national liberation movements hostile to fascism. These revolutions, which were led by the working class and its parties, were also democratic, since their tasks were hostile to the pre-capitalist relations of production and the remnants of the Middle Ages. While implementing the necessary transformations in the bourgeois democratic framework more deeply and decisively, these revolutions began the transition to socialist transformation under the leadership of the working class.

The national democratic revolutions led by the working class in Asian countries (such as China, North Korea, Vietnam and later in Cambodia and Laos) against colonialism, imperialism and the feudal relations of production, took a course of economic and social development that prevented the growth of capitalist relations of production. Thus, they embarked on socialist development by creating the material and spiritual conditions, and the forces of production needed to

establish and advance socialist relations of production. For this reason, the potential of the working class for leading the national democratic revolution is not a mere theoretical hypothesis. On the contrary, it became a reality, a practical formula that finds different applications in many countries.

The revolutionary essence of the strategy and tactics of the democratic revolution has nothing in common with trends that aim to separate mechanically between the democratic and the socialist revolution.

The socioeconomic conditions that led to the impotence of the ruling Arab bourgeoisie in the national democratic revolution

Due to the weakness of the economic and social development in the Arab countries, and consequently of the working class, the national bourgeoisie assumed the leading role in the Arab national liberation movement. In the meantime, the working class participated in this movement to varying degrees. The bourgeoisie established their own states in most of the Arab countries, whereas the Zionist-imperialist invasion of Palestine placed tremendous obstacles in the path of the Palestinian liberation movement's endeavours to achieve national democratic revolution and an independent national state. The establishment of the aggressive, racist state of 'Israel' created a direct threat to the Arab national liberation movement and its national states in Syria and Egypt. Moreover, it became a factor in wearing down their material and human potentials and hindering their independent economic and social development.

Nonetheless, the petit and middle bourgeoisie that assumed the leadership of the national democratic revolution in some Arab countries, was able to throw off the political, economic and military fetters of colonialism and achieve a certain level of economic and social development. This included building national industry, implementing agrarian reform to varying degrees, and nationalizing some of the productive sector and foreign trade, thus establishing a public sector and improving the level of the working class and all the working people. These measures remained in the framework of capitalist development.

The socioeconomic changes that occurred in these Arab countries were enacted in an atmosphere of revoking democratic liberties. The regimes deliberately neglected the role of the popular masses, especially the working class. As a result, tremendous changes occurred in the social structure of these countries. These changes allowed for the rapid growth of bureaucratic, parasitic bourgeois strata, not to mention the traditional big bourgeoisie. This in turn hindered natural growth and prevented the achievement of the tasks of the national democratic revolution for which the Arab people had struggled, and which the bourgeoisie eventually renounced.

The socioeconomic policy of the ruling Arab bourgeoisie

Yemeni fighters, the spark of the revolution



relied on the huge oil revenues, especially after the price of crude oil quadrupled in 1973. This rapidly enriched certain strata of the middle and petit bourgeoisie, which were connected with the ruling strata by political relationships and/or clan and regional loyalties. Furthermore, it led to these strata becoming a parasitic and bureaucratic bourgeoisie engaged in marginal (non-productive) fields of the economy, as middlemen between the state institutions and the international monopolies, in exchange for huge commissions or bribes. This money is then divided among big state officials, ministers, directors and government economic administrators.

Meanwhile, the great majority of the petit bourgeoisie (merchants, employees, small workshops owners, etc.) and the urban workers experienced more economic and social deprivation. Their share in the national income decreased, while the gap separating them from the richer strata in the society increased.

The same thing occurred in agriculture. There was mass migration from the rural areas to the city, motivated by the needs of industrial growth and of enlarging the consumptive sector of the economy that depended on oil revenues. Agriculture and animal husbandry declined sharply. The countryside could no longer supply the growing food needs. The middle and rich farmers began to flourish at the expense of the small peasants and rural proletariat. Gradually capitalist agriculture became predominant in accordance with the bourgeoisie's policy of renouncing agricultural reform.

The social origins of the forces and parties that led and still lead the Arab liberation movement in these countries, is urban and rural sectors of the middle and petit bourgeoisie. However,

the socioeconomic changes implemented by this leadership played a major role in the growth of the parasitic, bureaucratic and big bourgeoisie, which are linked to the world capitalist market. With some exceptions, this leadership and the ruling parties basically represent the interests of the wealthy strata of the bourgeoisie.

This distorted path of capitalist development followed by these countries in the framework of subordination to the imperialist, neocolonial economy, has had long range effects on social conditions. Broad strata of the bourgeoisie were led into organic linkage with the capitalist market; they were subordinated not only economically, but politically and ideologically as well. Thus, these strata definitively lost their nationalist, anti-imperialist sentiment. This was embodied in the economic trend declared by Sadat, known as the open door policy, which emerged in other countries under different banners, such as the policy of using western technology as a method for rapid, explosive development, and consequently neglecting and abandoning state projects in favor of the private capitalist sector, as happened in Egypt and Iraq, etc. This is also evident in the sharp increase in imports, mainly consumer goods from the imperialist countries, depending on the huge financial resources provided by Arab oil production and price increases. This involves not only the oil-producing countries, but other Arab countries as well.

Despite the ruling bourgeoisie's demagoguery about democracy, human rights and what is called the «state of institutions», the fascist, dictatorial tendencies of bourgeois rule have been reinforced by revoking more of the political and

Workers share in the development of the country





The new revolutionary generation in South Yemen

social democracy achieved by the popular masses through long, hard struggle. Moreover, the power of the state's repressive apparatus, used against the mass movement, political forces and the opposition, is increasing. As the social base of these regimes shrinks, the fascist tendencies grow. Suppression and harassment increases against the masses and revolutionary political forces, to prevent them from expressing their aspirations in the struggle against imperialism, Zionism and reaction, in order to achieve their rights and freedom.

The ruling bourgeoisie that led the national democratic revolution in several Arab countries, with the help of the working class movement, achieved national independence. It took economic and social measures that met its own selfish class interests and facilitated capitalist development. Furthermore, this class acquired common interests with the world capitalist system. Therefore, it shifted to conservative and retrograde positions. This means that the ruling national bourgeoisie is no longer capable of continuing to lead the national democratic revolution, much less of moving it into the socialist stage. This national bourgeoisie is no longer a dynamic force in the revolutionary process, because advancing the revolution does not meet the interests of the bourgeoisie as an exploiting class. This development assigns to the working class first and foremost, and to the toiling masses, the task of leading the revolution, not only to fulfill all the tasks of the national democratic revolution, but to transform this revolution in favor of all the exploited, working people, and to achieve socialist revolution.

The national democratic revolution in South Yemen - a vanguard experience

In several Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq and others), the representatives of the petit and middle bourgeoisie made outstanding accomplishments in the struggle against imperialism and colonialism, after seizing state power by various means. These accomplishments were seen in the defeat of the tripartite aggression against Egypt, the adjustment of the Arab countries' share in oil production, the nationalization of the Suez Canal and many other big foreign and national (local) institutions; agrarian reform was implemented to varying degrees. This created the impression among broad circles in the world and the Arab revolutionary movement, that the ruling representatives of the petit bourgeoisie are not only capable of achieving the tasks of the national democratic revolution, but of taking more decisive socioeconomic measures towards socialism as well. Nevertheless, the experience of the revolutions in these countries proves without a doubt the impotence of the petit bourgeois leadership to totally achieve the tasks of the national democratic revolution, much less the transition towards socialism. That is because the national democratic revolution led by the petit bourgeoisie occurred in conditions of relative capitalist development; the bourgeoisie had crystallized to a certain extent as a class in society. The petit bourgeoisie, as a party, political authority or leadership, possessed a desire to monopolize the political work, while depriv-

ing the working class and its vanguard parties of democratic liberties. Overt and covert attacks on communism were launched. There were the prevailing petit bourgeois illusions concerning what is termed «the unity of the working people», «social harmony» and different modes of «national and local socialism».

In contrast, the revolutionary experience in Democratic Yemen represents a different model, which shows the possibility of petit bourgeois, revolutionary democratic forces leading the national democratic revolution towards the socialist perspective. This is because this experience occurred in distinct economic, social and political conditions related to the specific balance of class forces in South Yemen.

Besides British colonial domination, the economic situation in South Yemen was characterized by the domination of feudal and semi-feudal relations of production, manifest in the sultanate system. Capitalist relations of production were insufficiently developed, and the bourgeoisie had not crystallized as a class. Meanwhile, the other exploiting strata, such as merchants, comprador and the agents of foreign companies, were subordinate to international monopoly capital; their economic and political interests were intertwined with international monopoly capitalism. They were thus a class force hostile to the dynamic classes and strata in the national democratic revolution.

The Yemeni working class, however, had achieved a certain level of growth and acquired class and national experience while fighting the capitalist exploitation in the British installations. The class alignment in South Yemen before the victory of the national democratic revolution had a unique character, not present in many countries prone to national democratic liberation: The emergence of a working class possessing class and national experience, while its class opponent, «the Yemeni bourgeoisie», was not definitively constituted. This created one of the objectives for the accumulating role of the Yemeni working class, and its immense influence on the subsequent development of the revolution in a progressive direction. This enabled the achievement of the tasks of the national democratic revolution and created economic, social and ideological prerequisites for developing the revolution towards its socialist perspective.

There is another characteristic which distinguishes the development in Democratic Yemen from the other Arab countries where the national democratic revolution was led by the petit and middle bourgeoisie: The revolutionary democratic elements that led the revolution were from the toiling social strata, more closely connected with the masses. They were removed from the influence of bourgeois ideology, which was and remains to be the prevailing ideology in Arab societies. For the leadership of the revolution, this simplified the gradual transition, without great obstacles, towards Marxist-Leninist thought and the relatively rapid break with bourgeois ideology.

The victory of the national revolution, and the declaration of independence on November 30, 1967, put the southern part

of Yemen at a crossroads between capitalism and socialism; between limiting the revolution to the bourgeois domain, or unleashing its consequent development. Achieving political independence and directing a blow against feudalism is nothing other than the beginning of the achievement of the tasks of the national democratic revolution. The question was now posed how to develop it. This question led to a hard struggle between the revolutionary and the conservative forces, and between the most revolutionary elements and the reformist leadership. The revolutionary democratic leadership was able to decide this question in favor of the revolution and the toiling masses in the Corrective Move of June 1969. This set the country on the path of achieving the tasks of the national democratic revolution with a socialist perspective.

Instead of slackness, letting the revolution develop spontaneously, the leadership of the revolution and the state aimed at laying an overall plan for developing the country, overstepping capitalism and creating the economic, social and ideological prerequisites for moving towards socialist development. An organic part of this plan was restricting the growth of the emerging national bourgeoisie, i.e. securing the required conditions for preventing capitalist elements from becoming a class, and their institutions from becoming economically independent structures. Thus, the revolution neither allowed the automatic growth of the capitalist elements, nor made concessions to them.

Through the first three-year and five-year plans for development, the revolutionary government created progressive economic models in the different sectors of production. After a radical agrarian reform to the benefit of the toiling peasants, state and cooperative sectors emerged alongside the private and mixed sectors, all operating under the supervision of the state. Moreover, blows were dealt to the comprador and big land owners; foreign enterprises were nationalized, in particular the oil refinery. The revolution aimed to follow the principle of scientific economic planning, which played a big role in resolving many economic, social and cultural tasks.

The following measures were enacted: a comprehensive program for the development of national industry and for rebuilding agriculture, free of the exploitative relations of feudalism and capitalism; spreading cooperative production in the rural areas; the state's establishment of a national system of trade and finance in order to provide funding for investment in the productive sectors; the advancement of national culture and educational programs.

These measures dealt a gigantic blow to the economic and political influence of the exploiting classes and strata. They thus created conditions conducive to the formation and growth of new social forces with deep interests in furthering the revolution: the national working class, agricultural laborers and peasants of the cooperatives, side by side with a broad strata of revolutionary intellectuals. Together, they form the base for the transition to socialism.