

The October Revolution and the National Liberation Struggle

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In the article below, the author examines the effect of the October Revolution on the national liberation struggle in the immediate years after 1917, and draws some conclusions for today.

WITH practically all of Asia and most of Africa now liberated from direct colonial rule and with the 90 independent states of Africa, Asia and Latin America playing an increasingly important role in world affairs, it is important not to overlook the origins of the national liberation movement of the twentieth century, nor fail to appreciate its main characteristics, and understand what has led to the break-up of the old colonial system.

It was mainly in the nineteenth century, especially in its last two decades when the monopoly, imperialist stage of capitalism had matured, that most of Africa, the Middle East and Asia fell under foreign rule. The peoples fought valiantly to prevent themselves falling under the foreign yoke. The Indian Mutiny (1857), the Taiping Uprising in China (1850s), the Matabele wars in Rhodesia (1893 and 1896), the Algerian wars of resistance against the French (up till 1879), the Sumatran war against the Dutch in Indonesia (1873-1908), are only a few of the highlights of these struggles which took place, in one form or another, wherever the Western powers marched in to establish their domination.

Heroic and stubborn as these struggles were, they were doomed to fail. The backward, divided feudal and often tribal character of these societies ill-fitted them to resist successfully the onslaught of ruthless armies equipped with modern arms. Capitalism was advancing as a world force. This was the period of its territorial expansion, resulting by the end of the nineteenth century in the division of the whole world

among the major powers. Even in Latin America, where the peoples won their liberation from Spanish and Portuguese rule during the first half of the nineteenth century, this was to be followed by their succumbing to the power of the Western monopolies, especially that of the United States which, by its policy of the Big Stick and the frequent use of its Marines, installed a succession of obedient tyrants in one Latin American country after another.

The twentieth century ushered in a new epoch, that of the eve of the socialist revolution, but this revolution, by its very character, was destined to be linked to and greatly influenced the national liberation movement. As early as 1853, Marx, with brilliant prevision, had posed the question: "Can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?" (*British Rule in India*). With the same thought in mind he wrote, in that same year, that "the next uprising of the people of Europe" may depend more "on what is now passing" in China "than on any other political cause that now exists". Similarly, in a letter to Kautsky in 1882, Engels remarked that revolution in India, Algeria and Egypt "would certainly be the best thing *for us*" (i.e. for the socialist movement in Europe).

With Russia becoming the vanguard of the world revolution at the end of the nineteenth century (as Marx and Engels had noted already in their 1882 Preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*), it was the socialist movement in Russia that was to become the catalyst of the national

liberation movement, especially in Asia. As early as 1902, in *What is to be Done?*, Lenin stressed that history had confronted the Russian working class with the task of destroying not only the main base of reaction in Europe, but of Asiatic reaction too.

Impact of 1905 Revolution

The 1905 revolution in Russia, defeated though it was, certainly spurred on the democratic revolution in Persia, Turkey, India and China. In Persia, wrote Edward Browne¹, "The Russian Revolution has had a most astounding effect. . . . A new spirit would seem to have come over the people. They are tired of their rulers, and, taking example of Russia, have come to think that it is possible to have another and better form of government." The revolution in Persia began in December 1905, starting with a general strike in the capital, Teheran. Most significant was the formation of the Persian version of Soviets—the Endzhumene, which sprang up in 1906. They "virtually became a government within a government. Local units were organised independently of the Shah's Government, on the basis of popular elections. They had all the earmarks of a people's autonomous regime existing side by side with autocracy. . . . During the Revolution, the Endzhumene took over the local administration of justice, assumed police powers in order to ensure the safety of the population and to maintain order, and controlled the price and distribution of bread."² In August 1906 the Shah was compelled to concede a constitution which provided for the calling of the first Majlis (Parliament) in October of the same year. But, with the aid of the Russian Tsar and later of England, the Shah was able by 1911 to crush the revolution. It was significant that the Persian people were aided at that time by Russian revolutionaries; Baku Social-Democrats sent armed workers to help defend Tabriz, and other revolutionaries came from Transcaucasia.

In Turkey the impact of 1905 was equally vigorous. Sultan Abdul Hamid became greatly concerned over the future of his empire. Spector writes: "What disturbed the Sultan even more than Bloody Sunday, according to his private secretary, Tahsin Pasha, was the mutiny of the crew of the Russian warship, Potemkin."³ The Sultan tried desperately to "isolate Turkey from the revolutionary virus that had attacked Russia" and "assigned spies to follow all persons entering the Ottoman Empire from Russia". All news about the Russian revolution was censored;

papers were forbidden to describe the events in Russia and even the term *Russian* was banned. The sale of Russian language papers was stopped, and the Tsar was requested to prevent the export to Turkey of Baku newspapers in the Azerbaijanian language. It has been said that even Muslim students arriving from Russia were excluded from colleges in the Ottoman capital.

All these frantic measures were of no avail. The Young Turk movement, in which the young Mustafa Kemal was an active member, made great headway—in Damascus, Salonika, Cairo and Erzerum. In Cairo, the newspaper, *Turk*, made frequent references to events in Russia (and Persia) and urged its readers to implement "the sublime ideas of the Russian Revolution". Some indication of the impact of the Russian 1905 Revolution on the Turkish people was provided by the letter sent by Turkish intellectuals and officers to the family of Lieut. Pyotr Schmidt, the leader of the Sebastopol uprising of December 1905.

"We make a vow over his corpse", they declared, "which is dear to us and to the Russian people. We swear that we will fight to the last drop of blood for sacred, civic freedom, for which cause many of our great citizens have perished. We vow that we will exert all our strength and means to acquaint the Turkish people with events in Russia, so that by our common effort we may achieve the right for ourselves to live as human beings".

Inspired by the Russian example, the Young Turks rose in revolt. In 1908 the Ottoman Empire was given a constitutional government. And in April 1909 Abdul Hamid was deposed.

China and India after 1905

China, too, was greatly influenced by the 1905 Revolution in Russia. Strikes in 1906 and 1907 were organised on the Chinese Eastern Railroad with the help of Chinese returning to Manchuria from Russia, and on January 9th-22nd, 1907, Chinese and Russian workers in Manchuria organised a joint political strike to commemorate the second anniversary of Bloody Sunday. In 1905, the Chinese democratic and national leader, Sun Yat-sen, returned to his exile in Japan where he set up a united organisation of the Chinese anti-Manchu movements. The organisation was known as T'ung-meng Hui, and its constituent congress was held in Tokyo on September 18th, 1905. The press organ of the organisation, *Min-pao*, first appeared on November 26th, 1905. It clearly revealed the deep influence of the Russian 1905 Revolution on Sun Yat-sen and his followers. "Practically every issue" writes Spector⁴ "included articles, pictures and references to events

¹ Browne, Edward: *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909*: New York, 1910.

² Spector, Ivar: *The First Russian Revolution—Its Impact on Asia*: Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962, pp.44-5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 86-7.

in revolutionary Russia, including frequent admonitions to the Chinese to profit by the Russian experience." In the third issue Sun Yat-sen himself wrote an article on "The Russian Revolution of 1905". In the fourth issue Feng Tzu-yu wrote:

"The revolutionary storm in Russia has profoundly shaken the entire world. . . . Although the peoples of Russia have not yet received freedom, the domestic policy has changed, and this in turn has exercised a great influence on the reform movement in China."

In this period a series of uprisings took place against the Manchu rulers. Though defeated again and again, success was finally achieved in October 1911, and Sun Yat-sen returned in December 1911 to become provisional president of the Chinese Republic.

In India, too, the period immediately following 1905 was one of great unrest. Significantly enough, the British Viceroy, Lord Curzon, wrote a state paper in 1905 in which he "drew a parallel between the dangers confronting tsardom in Russia and those threatening British domination of India."⁵ An Indian historian has commented: "In India there began in 1905 a movement towards liberation of a kind never known before."⁶ He added that the Russian Revolution of 1905, despite its defeat, "opened the floodgates of the people's movement" and produced a great awakening in the East. The leader of the Indian national movement at this time, Bal Ganadhar Tilak, was greatly influenced by the events in Russia, calling on the Indian people to "imitate, at least in part, the methods of the Russian people". Tilak's newspaper, *Kesari*, wrote constantly about the need for Indians to model their activities against British rule on those of the Russian revolutionaries. One important result of Tilak's study of the 1905 Revolution was his turning to the task of organising the workers in Bombay and other centres. Tilak's arrest in 1908 and subsequent trial led to a series of strikes. In his great trial speech, which lasted for twenty-one hours, Tilak referred specifically to the Russian revolutionary movement in order to illustrate the justice of the Indian cause.

Asia Awakes

Thus, the Russian Revolution of 1905 had a profound effect on the national liberation movements in Asia. "In the life of the Asian peoples", wrote Pavlovitch,⁷ "the Russian Revolution played the same tremendous role as the great French Revolution formerly played in the lives of the

Europeans." Analysing the influence of the general strike in Russia in 1905, the armed revolt of the workers in Moscow, and the workers' struggle in general, on the movement of the people in Persia, Turkey, China and India, he pointed out:

"These two mighty streams of the revolutionary movement among the proletarian masses of Russia and the peasant masses of the East were undoubtedly the factors which lay at the basis of the brilliant theory of Lenin about the necessity for the creation of a united front of the industrial proletariat of the advanced industrial states with the enslaved masses of the colonial and semi-colonial countries for the struggle against capitalism."

Writing in 1913, Lenin himself characterised the significance of 1905 in relation to Asia in this way:

"World capitalism and the 1905 movement in Russia have finally awakened Asia. Hundreds of millions of the downtrodden and benighted have awakened from medieval stagnation to a new life and are rising to fight for elementary human rights and democracy. The workers of the advanced countries follow with interest and inspiration this powerful growth of the liberation movement, in all its various forms, in every part of the world. The bourgeoisie of Europe, fearing the might of the labour movement, is looking for assistance from the forces of reaction, militarism, clericalism and obscurantism. But the proletariat of the European countries and the young democracy of Asia, fully confident of its strength and with abiding faith in the masses, are advancing to take the place of this decadent and moribund bourgeoisie. *The awakening of Asia and the beginning of the struggle for power by the advanced proletariat of Europe are a symbol of the new phase in world history that began early this century*".⁸ (Own italics—J.W.)

Lenin returned to this theme again in his Address to the Second All-Russian Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, on November 22nd, 1919, when he referred to the role of the 1905 revolution and the peoples of the East who were rising "as independent actors", as "builders of a new life", whereas previously they had been "objects of international imperialist policy, and which for capitalist culture and civilisation existed only as manure".

Lenin's words in 1913 sum up his all-round understanding of the significance of the movement of the oppressed peoples. He recognised first that it was "world capitalism" which had helped to awaken Asia, for it had weakened the fabric of the old society and, at the same time, given birth to new modern classes—workers, capitalists, and an intelligentsia—classes which were able to organise modern, national mass movements. Secondly, the example of the Russian workers had inspired and encouraged the millions of Asia who were laying

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶ Mukerjee, Hirendranath: *India Struggles for Freedom*, Bombay, 1948.

⁷ Pavlovitch, M.: *The Revolution of 1905 and the East*, Moscow, 1925.

⁸ Lenin, V. I.: *Pravda*, May 7th, 1913.

aside their former passivity. Thirdly, the key to the future world advance to socialism lay in the unity of the "advanced proletariat of Europe" and the "liberation movement, in all its various forms, in every part of the world".

All this Lenin could already detect in the aftermath of 1905. How much more true it all became after the October Revolution of 1917 can be readily imagined. The struggle of 1905 had given an impulse to the people's struggle in Asia; but the *defeat* of 1905 provided an opportunity for a counter-offensive by world imperialism, since the peoples of Asia found themselves under attack both from the flank by the Western powers, as well as from the rear by tsarist Russia. The new Persia was attacked by Russia and Britain and partitioned into spheres of influence; the Balkan states were armed by Britain, Russia and France, and hurled against Turkey to prevent her rebirth; the victory of Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese Republic in 1911 was followed a few months later by the *coup d'état* of Yuan Shih-kai, backed by US imperialism.

October Revolution

The victory of the Russian workers in 1917, however, opened a new phase of offensive by the national liberation movements. 1905 had not only been a "dress rehearsal" for the Russian workers. It had been no less a "dress rehearsal" for the national liberation movements, whose struggles underwent a profound change after 1917.

"The October Revolution", wrote Stalin in 1918, "... has broken the sleep of centuries of the toiling masses of the oppressed nations of the East and drawn them into struggle against world imperialism."⁹

"The triumph of the Russian Revolution", declared Ho Chi Minh,¹⁰ "awakened the oppressed peoples and opened the way of liberation to the peoples of colonial and dependent countries, among which was our own Viet Nam." The October Revolution, he wrote, "has shattered the fetters of imperialism, destroyed its foundation and inflicted on it a deadly blow. Like a thunderbolt, it has stirred up the Asian peoples from their centuries-old slumbers. It has opened up for them the revolutionary anti-imperialist era, the era of national liberation."¹¹

Why the Impact?

No objective examination of the reactions of the people in the "Third World" in the period following 1917 can fail to recognise the powerful impact which

the October Revolution had on the national liberation struggle.

There were a number of reasons why this was so. In 1914 the big imperialist powers dominated the whole world. In 1917, as a result of the October Revolution, they lost one-sixth of the earth's surface and ten per cent of its population. This meant an immense weakening of world imperialism, especially as it had relied on tsarist Russia to act as its gendarme and ally in Asia.

Secondly, the October Revolution ushered in a new epoch, the epoch of socialism. Capitalism, as a system of society, had received a mortal blow. The ability of the Russian workers and peasants to overthrow their landlords and factory owners could not but inspire and encourage millions throughout the world to advance their own struggle against their oppressors, domestic and foreign. Socialism, as the future form of world society, began to have an immense attraction for the colonial and semi-colonial peoples who constituted the majority of the world's population.

Thirdly, the victory of the Russian workers and peasants over their capitalists at the same time liberated thirty-three millions of non-Russian peoples including millions of Moslems, from their former "prison-house of nations". These non-Russian peoples, moreover, had fought alongside their Russian brothers in the revolution and in the conflict against the imperialist armies of intervention. The young Soviet State took immediate steps to ensure full national rights for the formerly oppressed nationalities within its boundaries.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, adopted in the first days of the Revolution on November 16th, called for the emancipation of the peoples of the former tsarist empire and "for a policy of voluntary and honest union of the peoples". It stipulated that the Soviet state was guided by the following principles: "1. Equality and sovereignty of all the peoples of Russia. 2. The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, including secession and the formation of an independent state. 3. The repeal of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions. 4. Free development of the national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting Russia." In line with these aims, the Soviet Government recognised the independence of Finland (December 1917) and Poland (August 1918). The act of liberating these formerly oppressed nationalities had a profound effect on the peoples throughout the colonial and semi-colonial world.

The new Soviet state unreservedly came out against anti-Semitism, and when, in 1919, the counter-revolutionaries tried to stir up anti-Semitic feeling again, the Soviet Government issued a special decree in which one can read the following sentiments:

⁹ Stalin, J. V.: *The October Revolution and the National Question: Pravda*, November 6th and 19th, 1918.

¹⁰ Ho Chi Minh: *Selected Works*, Vol. 4, Hanoi, 1962, p. 147.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 265.

"In the Russian Federation, where the principle of self-determination of all nations has been proclaimed, there is no place for national oppression. Persecution of any nation in any form is impermissible and disgraceful. The Soviet of People's Commissars declares the anti-Semitic movement and pogroms a menace to the cause of the workers' and peasants' revolution, and calls on the working people of all nations of socialist Russia to fight this evil."

Lenin himself added some final sections to the draft decree including the following:

"The Soviet of Commissars orders all Soviets of Deputies to take drastic measures to cut short the anti-Semitic movement. Organisers and participants in pogroms and those conducting agitation for pogroms are to be outlawed."

In March, 1919, Lenin made a speech which was widely reproduced and which ended with these words: "Shame on those who spread enmity towards the Jews, on those who sow hatred of other nations."

The Decree on Peace, November 8th, 1917, was also a tocsin to the peoples suffering under foreign domination. It called for "a just, democratic peace" and defined such a peace as "an immediate peace without annexations (i.e. without the seizure of foreign lands, without the forcible incorporation of foreign nations) and without indemnities." The call for "no annexations" became a powerful rallying cry for all opponents of imperialist aggression and territorial aggrandisement.

Solidarity with Asian Struggle

From the very beginning, too, the young Socialist State took a number of steps to assist and co-operate with neighbouring countries striving to throw off foreign rule. The Soviet State was itself beset with immense difficulties. Its economy was in ruins as a result of the first world war. It was facing hostility and every form of sabotage and resistance from the dispossessed classes. It was compelled to fight for two years against the armies of fourteen capitalist states which at one time had reduced Soviet power to but one-sixteenth of the terrain of the Soviet republic.

Yet despite all this, and lacking resources as she did, the young socialist country held out its helping hand to its struggling neighbours. As early as January 1918, it adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Working and Exploited People which announced a complete break with "the barbarous policy of bourgeois civilisation, which has built the prosperity of the exploiters belonging to a few chosen nations on the enslavement of hundreds of millions of working people in Asia, in the colonies in general and in the small countries".

To the best of its ability, the Soviet State immediately began to put these principles into practice. Thus, it was the first to recognise the independence

of Afghanistan in 1919, of Turkey in 1920, and of Mongolia in 1921. It concluded treaties based on equality and respect for mutual interests with Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan in 1921, and openly renounced the concessions which the tsarist governments had forced from other states, as in the case of China. It gave direct help to peoples engaged in military struggles against domestic and foreign reaction, sending military advisers to assist Dr. Sun Yat-sen in China, and Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, as well as troops to assist the people of Mongolia. Its publication of the tsarist government's secret treaties, and especially the Sykes-Picot documents exposing Anglo-French intrigues over Palestine and the Middle East, further undermined the prestige and positions of the colonial powers.

India after 1917

All this had a profound effect on the national liberation movements throughout the world, on the thinking of the leaders of the national liberation movements, on the development of national organisations, on the growth of the peoples' movements.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, states K. M. Panikkar, was "an explosive statement and all the nations of Asia, struggling for freedom, heard it with new hope."¹² It had "an immense effect in shaping opinion in Asia during the next quarter of a century", and all national liberation movements in Asia "gained moral strength by the mere existence of a Revolutionary Russia". Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in similar vein of the influence of the October Revolution on India. It had lit, he declared, a bright flame that no one could extinguish.¹³

Indian understanding of the significance of the October Revolution was underlined at the conference of the Indian National Congress which opened on December 26, 1917. Attended by four thousand delegates, this conference adopted a resolution which declared: "India will no longer go down on her knees to beg for her rights. We greet the new Petrograd government, the first in history to demand that all nations be granted their legitimate rights and which itself proceeded to carry this demand into effect." On November 23, 1918, Lenin received a delegation from India. The Indian delegation presented a memorandum to the Soviet President, Sverdlov, describing the repression of India by British imperialism and expressing the hope that "our brothers in the great and free Russia will stretch out their hand to us in liberating India and the whole world".

Panikkar makes the significant point that "even

¹² Panikkar, K. M.: *Asia and Western Dominance*, London, 1953, p. 250.

¹³ Nehru, Jawaharlal: *The Discovery of India*, London,

more important than the added strength that the nationalist movements received" from the impact of the October Revolution "was the change in the character of nationalism itself". "Before the October Revolution" he writes, the national liberation movements in Asia were "liberal and exclusively political", aimed solely at "freedom from foreign domination", and based on "parliamentary liberalism". The movements had "neither a defined social nor an economic objective, and were in that sense vague and Utopian. The Russian Revolution changed all this".¹⁴

After 1917 social and economic demands became a central feature of the national liberation movements. It would, in fact, be true to define most of the movements before 1917 as being simply nationalist. They only acquired the full character of national liberation movements, in the sense in which we use the term today, after the October Revolution, when the example of Russia led to a fusion of the struggle for national independence with the peasant struggle against feudalism and for land, and the workers' struggle for trade union rights, the shorter working day, better wages and conditions, and far-reaching social change.

The impact in India was shown in the great upsurge of the movement for independence after 1917. In a characteristic attempt to head off the anticipated storm, the British Government, a few months before October 1917, issued the Montagu Declaration proclaiming its intention to ensure "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India". Leaders of the Indian National Congress were prepared to continue co-operating with British imperialism, but the masses were not so easily to be kept in line. The year 1919 witnessed a huge wave of mass unrest in India. By January 125,000 textile workers were out on strike in Bombay. Throughout March and April the struggle mounted—demonstrations, strikes, physical resistance to violent repression despite heavy casualties, hartals. "The official Government Report for the year", writes R. P. Dutt, "speaks with alarmed amazement of the new-found unity of the people and the breakdown of all official conceptions of Hindu-Moslem antagonism."¹⁵

The Government struck back with brutal ferocity. At Amritsar troops under General Dyer fired 1,600 rounds of ammunition into an unarmed crowd in an enclosed place without exit, killing (according to official figures), 379 and leaving 1,200 wounded. But still the struggle rose in all parts of the country, as shown by the Assam-Bengal railway strike, the Midnapore No-Tax campaign, the Moplah rebellion

in the South, and the 'December Boycott' in Burma." A highlight was the monster demonstrations of protest in November 1921 when the Prince of Wales arrived in India. Again the Government struck, and by the beginning of 1922 some 30,000 political prisoners were in jail.

China after 1917

In China, the October Revolution was a turning point in the people's struggle. Sun Yat-sen declared that "with the success of the Russian Revolution, a new hope for mankind is born". His widow, Mme. Soong Ching Ling, asserted that "The October Revolution . . . gave new life to the cause of the Chinese people's revolution, and enabled us to apply the correct orientation of relying on the masses of workers and peasants."¹⁶

Describing the influence of the October Revolution in China, Hu Sheng wrote:

"The great victory of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, in spite of imperialist black-out, had immediate repercussions in China. It so effectively breached the world imperialist front, and aroused such hatred and consternation on the part of all the imperialist powers, that it could not but capture the attention of the Chinese people who were writhing under the iron heel of imperialist powers. Its repercussions were first felt in China in the ideological field. Almost all the intellectuals who were seriously concerned with the destiny of the nation began to watch the development of the revolution in Russia and eagerly sought acquaintance with the socialist ideology—Marxism-Leninism—by which this revolution was guided".¹⁷

In the November 1918 issue of *The New Youth*, Li Ta-chao (one of China's earliest Marxists and a founder of the Communist Party of China, who later died a martyr's death in 1927), hailed the triumph of the October Revolution as "the new day that has dawned for all mankind." In 1918 Li Ta-chao published two works on the October Revolution—"The Victory of the Common People" and "The Victory of Bolshevism". "The Russian Revolution of 1917", he wrote, "is the harbinger of the world revolution of the twentieth century . . . Behold the world of the future! It will be the world of the Red Flag!"

The Chinese people were influenced not only by the example of the October Revolution itself, but by the strikingly new policy adopted by the young socialist republic towards China, which was in such stark contrast to her previous treatment at the hands of the imperialists. The Soviet government renounced unconditionally all privileges previously enjoyed by

¹⁴ Panikkar, K. M.: op. cit., p. 252.

¹⁵ Dutt, R. P.: *India Today and Tomorrow*, London, 1955 edition, p. 135-6.

¹⁶ Soong Ching Ling: *The Struggle for New China*, Peking, 1952, p. 197.

¹⁷ Hu Sheng: *Imperialism and Chinese Politics*, Peking, 1955, p. 241.

tsarist Russia on Chinese soil; it gave up every exaction of the unequal treaties—extraterritorial rights, concessions, indemnities, “most favoured nation treatment”.

The character of the Chinese struggle also underwent a fundamental change under the influence of the Russian Revolution. Mass actions, based on the workers and peasants, began to dominate the political scene. In 1919 the historic “May 4th” movement developed. It began with a mass demonstration of three thousand students in Peking, demanding that the government denounce the Versailles Treaty clauses relating to China and punish the traitors who were prepared to capitulate to Japanese imperialism. A number of students were arrested, but this only had the effect of spreading the movement throughout the country. A further demonstration of the students on June 3rd resulted in over one thousand being thrown into jail.

The students called a general strike, which met with an immediate response from every corner of the country, and from workers and merchants as well as students. A movement to boycott Japanese goods and oppose the Versailles decisions swept the country. Between 60,000 and 70,000 workers in Shanghai came out on strike. Railwaymen on the Peking-Shanghai line followed suit. Metal workers, machinists, printers and tramwaymen came out too. Further big actions continued for the next two years. In 1920 May Day was celebrated in China for the first time. In 1921 the Shanghai General Labour Union was formed. It was as a result of this patriotic and working class activity that the first Marxist groups came together and, in 1921, formed the Communist Party of China.

Explaining these events, Hu Sheng writes:

“In this connection, we must once again refer to the great influence of the October Socialist Revolution. The emancipation of the Russian people stirred and stimulated the Chinese people to make exertions for their own emancipation. The fact that the Soviet Government, born in the Revolution, proposed to abolish the unequal treaties with China further inspired the Chinese people who had long suffered from imperialist oppression and treachery”.¹⁸

In fact, notes Hu Sheng, the campaign in 1922 for the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Soviet Union “became one of the main slogans in the struggle waged by the masses in China.”

Korea and Indonesia

In Korea, which had been annexed by Japanese imperialism in 1910, the Russian Revolution had a profound effect. Inspired by the actions of the Russian workers and peasants, the Korean people

threw themselves into bitter struggle against the Japanese occupation. This culminated in the historic “March First Uprising” in 1919. On March 1st, 1919, a mammoth demonstration of 300,000 people took place in Seoul, following the reading of a “declaration of independence”. The crowds surged through the streets shouting “Korea belongs to the Koreans!” “Long live freedom and equality!” The Japanese troops fired on the demonstrators, killing many of them. In response the movement spread throughout the length and breadth of the country, and became a nation-wide uprising of the people. From strikes and demonstrations the movement advanced to higher forms of struggle. Armed with axes, picks, shovels and clubs, the workers and peasants stormed the county and local offices of the Japanese police and administrative centres. In the period from March to May, 1919, over two million Koreans took part in the various mass actions, and by the end of the year 3,200 demonstrations and uprisings had taken place in 217 counties out of a total of 218. Over 7,500 Koreans were killed, 16,000 wounded, and nearly 47,000 arrested. The March First movement marked an important turning point. The struggle against Japanese imperialism was henceforward no longer confined to the character of a bourgeois national movement but had become a truly national liberation struggle, based on the mass actions of the workers and peasants, and led by the working class.

In Indonesia, the national movement which had first found expression through the formation of the Budi Utomo in 1908, and even more so through the Sarekat Islam (Islamic Association) formed in 1911/12, took on a new lease of life after the October Revolution. A Marxist group had been formed in 1914; it set up the Indies Social Democratic Association. Lenin had already noted in 1913¹⁹ the significance of “the spread of the revolutionary democratic movement to the Dutch Indies” which was being carried forward “by the popular masses” and “by an intelligentsia brought into being by the development of capitalism.” Referring to the formation of a “National Native Union” in Java with a membership of 80,000, he commented “There is no stopping the growth of the democratic movement.” The following years certainly saw a great expansion of the democratic movement in Indonesia, especially after the October Revolution.

“The Great October Russian Revolution of 1917”²⁰ wrote D. N. Aidit, “had a great influence on the

¹⁹ Lenin, V. I.: *Pravda*, May 7th, 1913. Reproduced in *The National-Liberation Movement in the East* (compilation of writings by Lenin), Moscow/London, 1962, pp. 59-60.

²⁰ Aidit, D. N.: *Indonesian Society and the Indonesian Revolution*, Djakarta, 1958, p. 45.

¹⁸ Hu Sheng: *ibid.*, p. 255.

Indonesian proletariat and especially on the ISDA." Professor Barraclough, too, has stressed the influence of the Russian Revolution on the Indonesian national movement which, he writes, was from its very beginning "involved in the ideological conflict unleashed by the Russian revolution of 1917."²¹ One result of the post-1917 upsurge in Indonesia was the transformation of the Sarekat Islam. At its 1917 Congress in Sourabaya it came out with a clear demand for independence "and opposition to capitalism".²² Under its leadership uprisings took place in 1918 in Toli-Toli (central Celebes), and in Tjimareme (west Java). Its membership, which had reached 360,000 by 1916, soared to two and a half million by 1919.²³ Meanwhile, in the middle of 1918, a united national front was set up in the form of the Radicale Concentratie, the members of which consisted of the Sarekat Islam, the Budi Utomo, the Insulinde, the Pasundan, and the Indies Social Democratic Association, which on May 23rd, 1920, became the Communist Party of Indonesia.

Mongolia

In Mongolia, the national movement was greatly inspired by the Russian Revolution. The Mongolian leader, Y. Tsendenbal has written:

"The victory of the great October Socialist Revolution gave a mighty impact to the national liberation movement in Mongolia and left a decisive imprint upon the entire subsequent course of its development."

Representatives of all sections of the people—apart from the working class which did not yet exist as a class—joined together in the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, a form of national front, created by Mongolia's revolutionary leader, Sukhé Bator. The Mongolian people's liberation struggle was directed both against White Russians who had intruded as well as Chinese forces which had moved in to control large parts of the country after the October Revolution. The First Congress of the MPRP was held in March, 1921. It created a Provisional Revolutionary Government and a Revolutionary Army, and decided to appeal to the Soviet Republic for assistance in driving out both the Chinese and White Russians. The Congress declared that, in its struggle for national freedom and independence, the Mongolian people could rely only on the help of the Soviet Union and the support of the world labour movement and the national

liberation movement. The influence of the Russian Revolution on Mongolia was indicated in the programme drawn up by the MPRP Congress, which proclaimed the aim of liberating the country from the foreign invaders, placing political power in the hands of the Arats—the nomadic shepherds. Pre-revolutionary Mongolia was still in a stage of a nomadic, feudal society, which had not yet reached the stage of agriculture, let alone industry.

With the help of the Soviet Red Army, the Mongolian people drove out the White Russian bands as well as the Chinese invaders, and the victory of the people's revolution was officially proclaimed on July 11th, 1921. On November 6th, 1924, the Mongolian People's Republic was declared by the first People's Khoural—National Assembly.

Moslem Peoples

In North Africa and the Middle East, the October Revolution had an important impact. The liberation of millions of Moslems in tsarist Russia could not but arouse great interest in these Moslem countries. Already, as we have noticed above, the 1905 revolution had greatly influenced the Moslem people of the Near and Middle East. Lenin, writing in 1913, had also noticed in Java the growth of "an Islamic nationalist movement". Shortly after the October Revolution, the Council of People's Commissars addressed an appeal to all working Moslems of Russia and the East, appealing to the people to throw off imperialist rule and become independent. "Our banners carry liberation to the oppressed peoples of the globe. Moslems of Russia, Moslems of the East, we expect your sympathy and support on this our road towards the renovation of the world."

At the time of the October Revolution Russian soldiers were facing Turkish troops on the Caucasian front. Fraternalism immediately took place. Throughout the country people demonstrated their sympathy with the Soviet people. When, in 1918, the nomination of a candidate for the Nobel Prize was discussed at Constantinople University, the Turkish students decided to nominate Lenin. In February 1918, the first Communist newspaper, *New World*, began to appear, edited by Mustapha Subhi who helped to create the Communist Party of Turkey of the same year. Soviet Russia found Turkey anxious to establish diplomatic relations and build friendship with the new socialist state as a means of safeguarding its new-found freedom.

Kemal Ataturk had a high regard for Lenin who showed a great willingness to help Turkey withstand imperialist pressure and intervention. In May 1920, a Turkish delegation left for Moscow to establish diplomatic relations. In March 1921, a Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood was signed

²¹ Barraclough, G.: *An Introduction to Contemporary History*, London, 1964, p. 181.

²² *Indonesia Fights for National Independence, Democracy and Peace*: Indonesian Youth and Student Delegation, Budapest, 1949, p. 17.

²³ Kahin, G. M.: *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, Ithaca, 1952, p. 65-6.

between the two countries. Yusuf Kemal-bey, who was Foreign Minister under Ataturk on two occasions, and who signed the Treaty on behalf of Turkey, has recently recalled that, following the signing of the Treaty "Soviet Russia gave us all the arms she could then. Also important financial assistance—several million gold roubles".²⁴ And this at a time, as the 87-year-old Yusuf Kemal-bey remembers, when "Moscow was starving".

In Syria, in an appreciation of the October Revolution, a document of the Committee of Arab Unity declared: "The Government of Lenin and his associates and the great revolution inspired by them for the liberation of the East from the yoke of the European tyrants are regarded by the Arabs as a great force capable of granting them happiness and prosperity. The happiness and peace of the entire world depend on an alliance between the Arabs and Bolsheviks."²⁵ In Tunisia, the people were encouraged to launch a wide-scale movement for national liberation. In 1920, under the impetus of this movement, a coherent organisation was set up, bearing the name of the 1856 reform group, Destour (meaning constitution). Fourteen years later this movement was to be transformed into the neo-Destour which organised the Tunisian people's struggle for independence.

In Egypt, the October Revolution was greeted by demonstrations of dockers in several Egyptian ports on December 18th, 1917. A meeting in Alexandria demanded the liberation of Egypt from British rule and the establishment of an independent state, referring to the declaration of the "new Petrograd government". Port employees at Port Said sent a congratulatory telegram to the Soviet Government, declaring that the Russian people were the hope of all living under colonialism. A meeting of Cairo schoolteachers adopted a resolution which stated: "The statement of the Petrograd government concerning self-determination of nations opens up new prospects for Egypt's struggle for deliverance from colonial dependence. . . . The victory of the Russian people is a beacon illuminating our path to liberation."²⁶ It was under the impetus of this movement that the Wafd party was set up in 1918, and a great movement began to end British rule, winning Egypt's formal independence in 1922.

Persia, at the time of the October Revolution, was facing great difficulties. Teheran and other

towns were controlled by British occupation forces. From Northern Persia British troops had invaded the Soviet Trans-Caucasus, committing many outrages which culminated in the execution of the 26 Baku Commissars in September 1918. A national liberation struggle began in the Persian province of Golan, led by Kutchek Khan who took a very positive attitude towards the new Soviet State. At the same time, the Persian authorities began negotiations with the young Soviet State, counting on their help against the British who were acting as if they were in a conquered country. In 1920, Persia and Soviet Russia agreed to exchange ambassadors. The Soviet Ambassador to Persia was Fyodor Rothstein who, while in exile in Britain, had been one of the founders of the British Communist Party. On February 26th, 1921, a Soviet Persian Treaty was signed. The Soviet Government renounced all the unequal treaties imposed on Persia by tsarist Russia. Article 6 provided for the entry of Soviet troops in the event of any third power seeking to utilise Persian territory as a base for military action against Soviet Russia. The Treaty specifically underscored "the right of each nation freely and without hindrance to order its own political destinies".

Africa and Latin America

In Africa, too, though the direct influence of the October Revolution was considerably less than in Asia and the Near and Middle East, owing to the earlier stage of developments in that continent, nevertheless its impact could be felt. This was particularly so in South Africa where there was a substantial working class. Marxists here had their own journal, *The International*. In November 1917, immediately after the Russian Revolution, D. Ivon Jones, the editor of this journal, greeted the victory of the Russian workers and wrote: "Our task in South Africa is a great one. We must educate the people in the principles of the Russian Revolution as we have never done before. We have to prepare the workers against any attempt to mobilise them against their Russian comrades, and in preparing to spread the flames of the most glorious and most peaceful of all times."

The International Socialist League was among the first parties to affiliate to the Communist International in 1919; and on July 29th, 1921, a meeting was held in Cape Town to celebrate the inauguration of the Communist Party of South Africa whose founding conference began the next day. In other parts of Africa, mass movements were initiated in different forms. In 1920, the West African Congress was born; and in 1921 a big movement of protests and strikes shook Kenya.

In Latin America, too, the October Revolution made its influence felt. "The cause for which revolu-

²⁴ Andronov, I: "Soviet Russia and Turkey": *New Times*, September 29th, 1967.

²⁵ Cited in *History of the October Revolution*: Moscow, 1966, p. 420.

²⁶ Amort, Cestmir: "The October Revolution and the European Scene" (an examination of the Paris file papers of the Czechoslovak National Council in 1917-18). See *New Times*, July 26th, 1967.

tionary Mexico and newly-emancipated Russia are fighting is the common cause of all mankind", declared Mexico's revolutionary peasant leader, Emiliano Zapata, a few months after October 1917. In Argentina the news of the victory of the socialist revolution was greeted with enthusiasm. In January 1918, the inaugural congress in Buenos Aires of the International Socialist Party declared in its Manifesto: "Freedom has swept the earth like a gust of hot wind. It originated in Russia and is spreading in all parts of the globe. Here, in this part of America, we want to be really active participants in the most profound revolutionary changes." In Cuba, a meeting of Havana workers on May 1st, 1918, adopted a resolution of protest against the imperialist landings at Vladivostok. Between 1919 and 1922 Communist parties were formed in a number of Latin American countries; and one of the influences that led advanced sections of the Latin American people to embrace Marxist ideas and the goal of socialism was undoubtedly the October Revolution.

Alliance in Struggle

From the above brief survey it is possible to gain some idea of the effect of the Russian Revolution on the people's national liberation movements which, in the very process of drawing inspiration and strength from the victory of socialism, were themselves swept into the vortex of the great tide of mankind, away from capitalism and towards socialism. In the autumn of 1916, on what one might term the "eve" of October 1917, Lenin wrote:

"We have always stood, we stand and will continue to stand for the closest drawing together and merging of the class-conscious workers in the advanced countries with the workers, the peasants and the slaves in *all* the oppressed countries . . . We shall bend every effort to draw closer to and merge with the Mongols, Persians, Indians and Egyptians; we consider it our duty and *in our interests* to do this, for otherwise socialism in Europe will not be *strong*. We shall endeavour to render these peoples, who are more backward and oppressed than we are, 'selfless cultural aid', to quote the splendid expression used by the Polish Social-Democrats; in other words, we shall try to help them to go over to the employment of machines, to making work easier, to democracy and socialism."

Certainly, if one looks dispassionately at the record of the Soviet Union in the past fifty years as regards its assisting the national liberation movement, helping it "to go over to the employment of machines"—seen so vividly in the giant structures of the Aswan High Dam in the UAR, and the Bilhai steelworks in India, and in countless other examples—and helping it diplomatically, politically

and even militarily, one cannot overestimate what the Soviet Union has done for the peoples struggling against imperialism. Those who are building the new progressive states, as well as those who are currently fighting arms in hand to defend their independence or to gain it, fully appreciate what the existence of the Soviet Union has meant to them. Ho Chi Minh, Nasser, Castro, Modibo Keita, Sékou Touré and many other national leaders have more than once expressed such understanding in the warmest of terms.

But Lenin and the Soviet Government have not been concerned solely to assist the national liberation movements. They have always understood that the struggle for socialism demands an alliance between the forces of the working class and socialism on the one hand, and the national liberation movements on the other. And they understood, as well, that such an alliance became inevitable in the twentieth century as a consequence of the rise of imperialism and its subsequent breach by the October Revolution. Addressing the Second All-Russian Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, on November 22nd, 1919, Lenin stressed:

"It is self-evident that this revolutionary movement of the peoples of the East can now develop effectively, can reach a successful issue only in direct association with the revolutionary struggle of our Soviet Republic against international imperialism . . . The socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their bourgeoisie—no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries against international imperialism . . . It is self-evident that final victory can be won only by the proletariat of all the advanced countries of the world, and we, the Russians, are beginning the work which the British, the French or the German proletariat will seal. But we see that they will not be victorious without the aid of the toiling masses of all the oppressed colonial people . . . The international proletariat is the only ally of all the hundreds of millions of toiling and exploited peoples of the East."

At the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, a special examination was made of the experience of the national liberation struggle. A Commission was established for this purpose, and its conclusions embodied after intense discussion in the famous Theses on the National and Colonial Questions. Giving the report of the Commission on July 26th, 1920, Lenin emphasised the significance of the new possibilities opening up for the oppressed nations as a result of the Soviet victory:

"This is how the question has been posed: is the capitalist stage of development inevitable for those backward nations which are now winning liberation

and in which progressive trends are to be observed since the war? We replied in the negative. If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, while the Soviet governments come to their assistance with all the means at their command—in that event, it would be wrong to assume that the capitalist stage of development is inevitable for the backward nationalities . . . the Communist International should advance and theoretically substantiate the proposition that these backward countries can, with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, pass over to the Soviet system (i.e. socialism—J.W.) and, through definite stages of development, to communism, without having to go through the capitalist stage.”

“Workers of all Countries and Oppressed Nations, Unite!”

At the end of 1920, on December 6th, in a speech to Communist Party members in Moscow, Lenin recalled that at the Congress of the Communist International in Moscow he had said that the whole world was divided into oppressed and oppressing nations—the former comprising 70 per cent of the world’s population. “We are really acting now”, he said, “not only as representatives of the proletarians of all countries, but also as representatives of the oppressed peoples”. He then referred to the new journal, and drew attention to its new slogan: “Workers of all countries and oppressed nations, unite!”

He revealed that one comrade had asked: “When did the Executive Committee decide on a change of slogans?” Lenin commented: “Indeed, I cannot remember any such decision. And, of course, from the standpoint of the *Communist Manifesto* this is wrong, but then the *Communist Manifesto* was written under totally different conditions. From the standpoint of present-day politics, this slogan is correct”. And he went on to explain how, throughout the world, hatred of the *entente* powers had become intense. Thus, he said, the result has been “to make Russia the direct spokesman of all the oppressed of the world”.

Today, we have not only Russia, not only the Soviet Union, but a mighty group of socialist countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America, embracing 1,000 million people—a third of mankind. This socialist force has become a powerful champion and supporter “of all the oppressed of the world”, providing consistent help to the peoples

struggling to be free, aid to those building new social and economic structures, and massive assistance to those who have had to defend their new-won freedom—as in the case of Cuba, Vietnam and the UAR.

In retrospect one can see more clearly how historic was the action taken by the Russian workers on October 25th (November 7th), 1917, when they took power into their own strong hands and opened the epoch of socialism and national liberation. In 1917 the majority of mankind lived under colonial oppression. Now only 1 per cent of mankind still languish under direct foreign rule; and the 90 independent countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America now have the opportunity to enter the mainstream of a world in transition to socialism, without having to go through the long and painful path to fully developed capitalism.

Marx and Engels, the pioneers of scientific socialism, did not live to see the October Revolution nor the great changes that have taken place in the last fifty years. But if they were alive today, they would have fully endorsed Lenin’s extension of their famous slogan, and proclaimed with him:

“*Workers of all countries and oppressed nations, unite!*”

This above all, is the lesson of the October Revolution.

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