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Afghanistan

National Sovereignty and Detente

Without world peace, there is no future for civilisation as we know it today. That is why Communists have always said that nothing is more important than the fight for peace. At the national congresses of individual Communist Parties, including our own, and in meetings of the international communist movement, the principles of peaceful co-existence have been elaborated.

Peaceful co-existence

The main statement of the world conference of Communist Parties held in 1960 summed up these principles by saying that they meant the mobilisation of millions in struggle to impose on the imperialists 'the complete cessation of the cold war, disbandment of military blocs, dismantling of military bases, general and complete disarmament under international control, the settlement of international disputes through negotiation, respect for the equality of states and their territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and extensive development of trade, cultural, and scientific ties between nations'. The world meeting in 1969, and the conference of European Communist Parties in 1976 expressed it in similar terms.

These points make up a concrete programme of class struggle on an international scale. For they are directed against the most powerful section of the big business establishment, the so-called military-industrial complex, which has most to gain in terms of profit and power from the arms race,

the blocking of detente, and the maintenance of imperialist domination throughout the world.

Peaceful co-existence is therefore part of the strategy for revolution throughout the world. It is not some up-dated form of pacifism. Take disarmament for example. That is not only a way of releasing resources for solving the problems of the people. It is not only a way of depriving the capitalists of a rich source of profit. It strikes at the armed forces, a key instrument of repression available to the ruling class for use against its own people and for maintaining its domination over other peoples throughout the world. That illustrates the revolutionary potential of the strategy of peaceful co-existence.

The same goes for the dismantling of military bases and blocs. After the second world war, the imperialists set up NATO and surrounded the socialist world with bases as part of their effort to dictate terms for a post-war settlement to the USSR, to maintain their hold on the rest of the world, and to resist the rising tide of national liberation and socialist advance. Indeed, the whole panoply of the cold war is counter-revolutionary. It helps to whip up an atmosphere of anti-communism, which takes in not just the Communists but all on the Left. It is therefore a political weapon in the hands of the capitalists for isolating the Left from the forces which need to be mobilised around it, if democratic and socialist advance is to be won.

The anti-imperialist front

The seventies saw important victories for the strategy of peaceful co-existence. The agreements reached in the context of detente, as at Helsinki and in the strategic arms talks, gave the sanction of international law to many of its basic principles. Outstanding was the victory of the Vietnamese people, whose struggle against US imperialism became the focus for a massive worldwide movement of solidarity, extending right into the aggressor's den and provoking a serious constitutional crisis there.

This demonstrates a basic concept in the theory of peaceful co-existence. Imperialism may still be able to win victories, but the overall balance of forces in the world is no longer decisively in its favour. The socialist world, the national liberation movement in the third world, and the working class and its allies in the developed capitalist countries, constitute the three arms of a movement which, if mobilised and united, can increasingly decide the course of world events. The economic and military power of the socialist countries is certainly a crucial factor in this world force for peace and

national liberation. This has been seen in Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, and in a host of agreements on aid with the third world. It is a factor which the imperialists have to include in their calculations. But it is by no means the whole story.

'Mass action against imperialism is a *condition* for implementing the policy of peaceful co-existence' (my emphasis — TC) declared the World Communist Conference in June 1969. What we are talking about, therefore, is a total political struggle, waged relentlessly in each country, carried forward into the international arena, developing every form of solidarity with others in struggle, using bodies like the United Nations to the full, mobilising millions of people in a great worldwide democratic movement to impose their will on the imperialists.

The working class has a leading role to play in developing such a movement. Naturally, therefore, a heavy responsibility rests upon the socialist countries where the working class controls state power. But that responsibility can only be effectively discharged if priority is given to the need to maintain, extend, and deepen the unity of the three arms of the anti-imperialist front.

That means that steps to cope with every new development in the international situation have to be considered from the point of view of how to mobilise the widest mass activity of the people so that the imperialists can be isolated and weakened. To do this, world public opinion has to be properly alerted and informed of all the facts of the situation.

If the people are to be won for struggle, then the position adopted by the socialist countries and Communists everywhere must be seen clearly and unambiguously to be based upon strict adherence to every single principle of the strategy of peaceful co-existence.

These principles include non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The consequences of violating this in Afghanistan are now to be seen in the advances which the imperialists have undoubtedly been able to make over the last few weeks.

Deterioration in international climate

The campaign by the more reactionary elements in the US establishment against the process of detente had already been gathering momentum during last year. In this they were helped by the return of the Thatcher government in Britain. A prime objective was to prevent the ratification of Salt 2 and to secure the installation of the cruise missile in Western Europe.

With Thatcher's aid, the cruise missile decision was railroaded through NATO.

President Brezhnev's initiatives in withdrawing troops and tanks unilaterally from Central Europe, and in offering talks on missile reductions were brushed aside. Once again, the cold war cry was raised about 'negotiating from positions of strength'. At the same time, the pressure was on President Carter over the embassy hostages in Iran, and in response, he was busy reinforcing the US naval presence in the Gulf.

Of course, there were differences within the US establishment. But the more bellicose elements were obviously gaining ground, securing successes which were clearly posing a threat to the gains made for detente in the seventies. A deterioration in the international climate was beginning to set in.

The key fact to note is that all this was happening *before* the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Undoubtedly the Soviet action was a defensive response to the threats it saw developing in the international situation, and was aimed at securing greater stability in a country on its borders where a revolutionary government was facing serious difficulties.

This has to be recognised. Any attempt to explain what happened in terms of 'expansionism', 'aggression', or 'Soviet imperialism', bears no relation to the political and social realities of a socialist society like the USSR. The same goes for those who seek refuge behind the theory of the so-called 'super-powers', explaining events in a way which puts both the US and the USSR on the same level.

However, whatever the motive for the Soviet action, the end result is plain to see. The position of the more bellicose elements in the US establishment has been strengthened. The US has been able to exploit the intervention to step up the cold war and strengthen imperialist influence in the Middle East and the Far East. Using the Soviet intervention as an excuse, the US has set in motion plans to strengthen its links with reactionary regimes like those in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and also with China. Nor can the situation in the UN and amongst the non-aligned states be ignored or dismissed as unimportant. The non-aligned countries are a vital part of the forces for peace and national liberation. But most of them opposed the intervention. Only 18 countries voted in support of the intervention at the UN. Romania, Algeria, India, and others abstained or absented themselves. 104 voted against.

The developing imperialist offensive needed to be countered by uniting together the socialist world, the national liberation movement in the third world, and the working class and its allies in the capitalist countries. Instead, the Soviet intervention

created disunity.

The harm done arose from the violation of one of the basic principles in the strategy of peaceful co-existence, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign state.

Was it violated?

Before discussing the implications of the principle of non-interference, and why it is so fundamental, it is necessary, however briefly, to examine whether it is reasonable to assert that it was violated in this case. As Marxists, it is absolutely legitimate and correct for us to make our own judgement on this in the light of all the facts we can accumulate.

In seeking to form a judgement on what actually happened in Afghanistan, three factors need to be taken into account.

First, no clear explanation was given at the time of the entry of the Soviet troops which said in unambiguous terms precisely who it was that asked for the Soviet troops to enter the country on the scale they did and at the time they did. Yet this is a crucial fact which needs to be known in forming a judgement about what happened. Leaving it to contradictory press reports which alternate between Amin, Karmal, and the revolutionary council minus Amin as the source of the invitation, can only reinforce the suspicion that there is something to hide.

Second, there was the coincidence between the build up of the Soviet troops and the unfolding of the coup which toppled Amin. It is asking too much to accept that there was no connection between the coup and the arrival of the troops.

As for the trial and execution of Amin, there is no information whatsoever. This certainly makes it difficult to accept without demur the validity of the many allegations made about Amin's treachery, and it raises questions about the precise way in which he met his end.

Third, there is the question of an external threat. No one denies that internal reaction and counter-reaction were able to mobilise opposition to the revolutionary government, nor that this found ready allies across the borders in Pakistan and Iran, nor that the US and the Chinese were involved.

However, that is not the same thing as an external threat requiring the despatch of troops. The Soviet Union seems to have recognised this. For it is accepted by all that counter-revolutionaries were infiltrating the border from the summer of 1978 onwards after receiving training and arms. Yet in all this time the Soviet Union did not respond to the repeated requests apparently made by both Taraki and Amin for military aid, beyond sending advisers and equipment.

Nor did the Soviet Union seem to think that the threat of external intervention was escalating to such a point that it warranted the matter being raised publicly in a big way, say through the United Nations, as a means of alerting and mobilising world opinion.

What happened then, to justify the entry of the troops at the end of December? No evidence whatsoever has been advanced to demonstrate a sudden build up of the external threat. Could this possibly have been so rapid that there was no time to alert public opinion? It hardly seems likely.

Taking all these factors into account, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that there was interference by the Soviet Union in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and that this involved the change of government which coincided with the entry of the troops

The principle must apply

Some comrades have sought to justify the Soviet action by questioning the validity of the principle of non-intervention. In one way or another, all these arguments implicitly accept that there was some form of Soviet interference in Afghan affairs. They then seek to justify this. It must be clearly understood that this is not the Soviet position. Soviet statements have all pointed to the external threat as the reason for the Soviet action.

Similarly, those who question the validity of the principle of non-intervention, are at odds with the international communist movement, including the Soviet communists. Repeatedly, in the documents of the international communist movement and of the Soviet Communist Party, this principle has been reiterated as an absolute and inviolable part of the strategy of peaceful co-existence.

Lenin made this crystal clear.

Some comrades suggest that this crucial principle in the strategy of peaceful co-existence only applies to relations between countries of different social systems. They therefore assert that Soviet interference in another socialist country, or one undergoing radical revolutionary changes, far from being a violation of principle would actually be an expression of proletarian internationalism. This takes us back to the theory of 'limited sovereignty', contemptuously dismissed by Leonid Brezhnev at the 1969 World Communist Conference when he declared that 'bourgeois propaganda goes out of its way to malign the principle of proletarian internationalism and to oppose it artificially to the principles of the independence, sovereignty and equality of the national contingents of the working class and communist movement. That is the purpose for which imperialist propagandists have

fabricated and put into circulation the notorious theory of 'limited sovereignty'.

Working class solidarity actually excludes interference, because it must be based on the fundamental equality of status of all working people. No one section of workers can take decisions for another. Everyone knows that this is true within a particular country. It is just as true internationally. Nations have equality of status. That principle itself excludes interference. The export of revolution cannot be used either to justify interference, for Marxism specifically rejects the concept of the export of revolution.

Lenin remonstrated in 1918 with those who wanted to give the revolution elsewhere 'a push'. 'Such a "theory", he wrote, 'would be completely at variance with Marxism which has always opposed "pushing" revolutions, which develop with the growing acuteness of the class antagonisms which engender them' (in *Strange and Monstrous*).

Internal support — the key

Lenin insisted that there were no short cuts to revolution.

Naturally, there are many differences between countries. A backward country like Afghanistan is vastly different from an industrialised western country. The apparatus of state is less highly developed, and so it may be easier for a group of revolutionary officers to seize power. But the basic principle remains. Unless the masses have been mobilised to back them up, the revolutionary power is insecure. As Jack Woddis pointed out in his report to the Communist Party Executive Committee (*Comment*, Feb 2, 1980), there did appear to be strong putschist and elitist trends in Afghanistan which did not pay sufficient attention to the role of the masses.

There are those who accuse the critics of the Soviet intervention of being prepared to see the Afghan revolution collapse. But if that were the real alternative to the Soviet action, it could only mean that the balance suddenly tipped decisively in favour of the foreign supported counter-revolution at the end of December. That would have to mean a sudden escalation of the external threat or a sudden collapse of internal support for the revolution, or maybe a combination of both. But there is no evidence for any of those possibilities.

Further, if the Afghan revolution can only be sustained by Soviet *interference*, then the situation is indeed serious. For we would be back with the export of revolution, an impossible position for Marxists. The future of the Afghan revolution can only be decided by the mass movement within the country, and the solidarity with it of millions

throughout the world.

What is involved here is a fundamental concept in Marxism. This is that the whole development of socialism requires the conscious and active participation of the people in accomplishing all the revolutionary tasks which are posed. *They* have to do the job. No one else can do it for them. That is why any interference from outside, *even if dictated by the best of intentions*, is harmful to building socialism in a given country. By offending national sentiments, it can actually play into the hands of internal reaction.

The East European experience

The harmful effects of interference from outside by a socialist country were seen in the post-war years in Eastern Europe during Stalin's time. Beyond any doubt, Soviet aid and assistance was of enormous help to those countries in overcoming the ravages of war. But under Stalin's leadership, there was an attempt to impose a line of development based on the Soviet model, which ignored the individual characteristics of the East European countries.

Conflict was the inevitable result. With Yugoslavia, which refused point blank to tolerate any interference, there was a total break, creating a split which seriously weakened the anti-imperialist front. It was accompanied by the most unprincipled campaign of slander against the Yugoslav leadership and any other Communist elsewhere who questioned Soviet policy.

This led to widespread persecution of Communists and others, including show trials and executions like those of Rajk in Hungary, Kostov in Bulgaria, and Slansky and others in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet security organs were involved in all this, the evidence was fabricated, and torture was used to force the accused to make obedient confessions of monstrous non-existent crimes. The ultimate consequences of such interference and outright lawlessness were seen in Hungary in October 1956. They were also apparent in the process of rectification under Dubcek in Czechoslovakia, unfortunately cut short by the intervention of the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact states in August 1968.

What these post-war years in Eastern Europe underline is that the principle of non-intervention has to apply just as much between socialist states as it does between states having different social systems.

Containing the imperialists

The principles of non-intervention and sovereignty, like the rest of the programme for peaceful co-existence, are working class principles, weapons of class struggle. Why?

Because they are aimed at the heart of imperialist strategy. It is the very nature of imperialism to intervene in other peoples' affairs and violate their sovereignty.

The more the principle of non-interference enters people's minds as a fundamental part of any civilised code of behaviour, the more they will be outraged by imperialism's activities, and the easier will it be to mobilise them for the anti-imperialist struggle. Indeed, following the victory in Vietnam, this factor has played an important part in restricting the ability of US imperialism to intervene against the peoples of Angola, Iran, Grenada and Nicaragua.



One problem with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan is that it has undermined the moral force built up behind this principle. It has therefore loosened the constraints within which world public opinion was obliging US imperialism to operate. The crucial point is this. Imposing the principle of non-intervention on the imperialists creates the best possible conditions for every nation to choose and follow its own course of development, its own road to socialism.

The concept of different roads to socialism dependent on the specific circumstances in each country and its traditions, but within that, carrying through the fundamental changes in class power characteristic of socialism, is now firmly accepted throughout the international communist movement.

Those which map out a relatively peaceful process of change presuppose that world pressure would be able to isolate the ruling class from military assistance from overseas, so that counter-revolutionary resistance could be overcome without war. *The British Road to Socialism* adopts this position. This underlines how crucial the principle of non-intervention is for the British revolution, just as much as it is for liberation struggles and revolution elsewhere.

Non-interference and solidarity

It must however be understood that respect

for the principle of non-intervention in no way conflicts with the duty to organise every form of solidarity with peoples struggling for national liberation and social progress. Solidarity is a fundamental class principle for working people everywhere, in a national scale and internationally. It expresses the community of interests between them.

Indeed the fight for the principle of non-intervention is an expression of solidarity. For it is a means of asserting the right of working people everywhere, on a national scale and internationally. It expresses the slogan around which the world's peoples can be mobilised to put an end to imperialist plots and wars against the liberation movement. That is what it became in Vietnam.

The solidarity shown by the socialist world, and particularly the Soviet Union, towards the national liberation movement in many countries has been tremendous. They have provided economic aid, trained scientific and other cadres, given military assistance, and provided political and diplomatic backing.

It is when military assistance goes beyond the provision of equipment and advisers to include the sending of regular contingents of the socialist countries' own armed forces that problems can arise.

This means adhering to certain very definite criteria for the use of armed forces when their help is requested.

First, those asking for military assistance in the form of the regular troops of a socialist country must have a clearly established right to do so. In other words, they must be demonstrably in a position of recognised governmental power. For only an independent government has the right to ask for the troops of another state to come to its assistance, and then only if it considers itself in danger from an external threat. In that case, the state being asked for assistance has the right to respond. It is important to stress that this is only acceptable if the reason for the appeal for military assistance is to counter an external threat. But even there, it must be a clearly demonstrable threat and of such a character as to warrant the despatch of troops. Otherwise foreign troops could be used to deal with internal problems. This is unacceptable. It is interference. If any concession were made on this question, the imperialists would have *carte blanche* in international law to use military force to prop up reactionary regimes faced with a rising tide of popular opposition.

Even when there is a demonstrable threat from outside warranting the despatch of the troops requested, it would still be a matter of judgement as to whether this was the correct course of action to be taken. For there are

alternatives which could be tried first eg, recourse to the United Nations.

Some specific cases

In Afghanistan none of the criteria referred to here were satisfied. As a result, world opinion was alienated and the imperialists were able to exploit the situation.

No such problems arose in the case of Angola. Here there was a clear demonstrable threat from South Africa and Zaire. The South African army actually invaded. Further MPLA was clearly in governmental authority and could legitimately speak for the Angolan people. Similarly with Ethiopia. The Mengistu government obviously had the authority to ask for assistance, and there was a clear threat from Somalia culminating in an actual invasion. However, the use of Cuban troops in Eritrea would not fall in the same category. For there the situation is more complex, and has at its heart the issue of self-determination for the Eritreans.

The conflicts between Vietnam and Kampuchea and between Tanzania and Uganda highlight another type of problem.

Consider the first of these conflicts. Despite Vietnam's repeated attempts to reach a settlement of the border question by negotiation, Vietnam was subjected to one invasion after another from Kampuchea. These were not small scale incidents, but substantial incursions producing death and destruction on a big scale plus thousands of Vietnamese and Kampuchean refugees.

There was in fact a war situation between Vietnam and Kampuchea. The principle of non-intervention breaks down in these circumstances. Indeed, such a war situation is the concrete manifestation that intervention is already in full swing. In this case, Kampuchea was doing the intervening, egged on by the Chinese. What else were the repeated invasions from Kampuchea if they were not interventions in Vietnam?

Under these conditions, after all efforts at a solution by negotiation had come to naught, the Vietnamese decided to take military action in self-defence.

There was a similar situation between Tanzania and Uganda. A sizable portion of Tanzanian territory was occupied by Idi Amin's troops, who refused to withdraw. The Tanzanian counter-attack and the support given to the anti-Amin Ugandan forces followed from that fact.

A country facing armed attacks from a determined and unrepentant aggressor is placed in a cruel dilemma. In the absence of firm action by the international community to bring the aggressor to book, it has the right of self-defence if all else fails. Depending on the circumstances, the exercise of that right

may lead the victim of aggression to go to the limit of removing the aggressor government if it sees no other way of guaranteeing an end to the armed attacks.

What the peace forces must learn from situations like the Vietnam/Kampuchea and Tanzania/Uganda conflicts is this. They need to be ever vigilant and exert their influence on any state which adopts the sort of aggressive stance adopted by Kampuchea and Uganda, which included armed attacks across their frontiers. For once a state begins armed attacks against another, counter-action follows, and this can produce a still bigger reply. Soon there is the danger of a major conflagration between the two states concerned. Border incidents cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

The real lesson to be drawn from recent events throughout the world is the crucial importance of mobilising the mass struggle on an international scale for peace and in support of every people in struggle against imperialism.

With Afghanistan, there was hardly any attempt to generate an international movement of solidarity. True, there was an international solidarity conference in Kabul last August. Whilst this conference issued a declaration referring to cross-frontier raids and called for solidarity, its tone was muted and it expressed the view that 'the people of Afghanistan have the power, the strength and the determination to defeat the manoeuvres of imperialism and international reaction'. This can hardly be called sounding the alarm about a serious danger to the Afghan revolution threatening it with total destruction. If, despite this, the Soviet and Afghan leaders felt that such a danger did exist, or subsequently developed, world opinion should have been galvanised into action. Raising the matter at the United Nations could have helped to do that.

A return in a very serious way to this emphasis on mass political struggle internationally is still the only way out of the situation — not only in Afghanistan, but in Europe, indeed everywhere that the imperialists are seeking to reverse the gains of the last decade or so. The world's Communist Parties have a special responsibility here, whether they are in government or not. They have mapped out the strategy of peaceful co-existence. It is now up to them to implement the principles on which it is based. But one thing is sure. In doing this, nothing will be able to take the place of the action of millions of working people in the world. In the end, that is what the strategy of peaceful co-existence is all about. •