

The Integration of the National Liberation
Movement in the Field of International Liberation

by

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One of the great virtues of Amilcar Cabral was that he tried very hard to theorize praxis in order thereby to understand the real historical alternatives before us which might permit us to move in the directions we truly wish to move. Cabral led a struggle for national liberation of a colonized people, and his whole adult life was absorbed as a militant in that struggle. Yet I would contend that the problem that preoccupied him and puzzled him was not how to conduct that struggle (which seemed to him a rather clear and straightforward question) but what to do in the post-independence period.

It is in this connection that he developed one of his most controversial ideas, the prospective or possible "suicide" of the petty bourgeoisie as a class. As he saw it, there was in African colonies only one stratum "capable of taking control of the state apparatus when the colonial power is destroyed," the petty bourgeoisie. It followed that:

The moment national liberation comes and the petty bourgeoisie takes power we enter, or rather return to history, and thus the internal contradictions break out again. (1)

Once these contradictions would "break out again," he argued, this petty bourgeoisie would find itself before an historic choice: becoming more bourgeois, and thus negating the revolution, or strengthening its revolutionary consciousness.

This means that in order to truly fulfill its role in the national liberation struggle, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing suicide as a class in order to be reborn as revolutionary workers, completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which they belong. (2)

It is easy to criticize this concept as faulty and self-contradictory. If a stratum is a conscious class, it is highly unlikely to commit suicide, since its consciousness is defined by the pursuit of its class interests. This being the case, the formulation by Cabral is an unhappy one, and probably an unhelpful one.

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whose dynamic strength has forced each state, no matter what its ideological commitments, to conform (at least up to a point) to the unpleasant imperatives of the law of value.

The various post-revolutionary states reacted in different ways to this discovery, and indeed their internal histories can be said to consist of debates about how one reacts to this discovery. War Communism and NEP, not as temporary tactics but as long-term strategies, are two of the main (but not the only) modes of action in the face of the realities of the world-system.

The reactions to the discovery, and indeed the seesaw of the national policies of post-revolutionary states, thereupon produced the second common element of all the post-revolutionary states. The atmosphere of heightened collective revolutionary consciousness, of politicization, normally so important in all these states at the moment of revolutionary seizure of power, has tended to decline, to dissipate itself, even to disappear. If one reads the statements of the parties, of the governments, and of the leaders of the post-revolutionary states, one sees a constant effort to revivify ideology, to renew enthusiasm, to combat cynicism and fatigue, to maintain the sense of struggle. Disillusionment is widespread, inside these countries and outside them, about them.

If one reflects on why each state seems to go through one or another variety of "depoliticization" of the working classes, one notices that the essential complaint is that the social transformations the working class had hoped for did come about, but not as completely as they had hoped. The old evils of unequal allocations, of corruption, of arbitrariness persist, to degrees that are not acceptable in post-revolutionary states. No doubt, as the parties constantly say, when they acknowledge the complaint, this is because of the first common factor: the insertion of these states

in a world-system they do not control, and whose negative pressures they are feeling. But it is also a reality that the working classes are not readily persuaded that this is the whole explanation. They have become suspicious and have often retreated into *depoliticization*.

It is this depoliticization of post-revolutionary states that has offered the most hope to the defenders of the world capitalist system who have seen in it the crucial weapon with which to deflect the growing strength of world antisystemic forces in the world class struggle. Furthermore, as we know "depoliticization" is never "apoliticism." Rather, it is a tactic of the politically weak, who are biding their time, until the conditions for political explosion arise once again.

Is there something that the world's revolutionary movements can do which makes it more likely that the explosion of angry workers will be directed primarily against the world capitalist system and not be deflected into negative feelings about post-revolutionary states and revolutionary movements? This is the question I think Amilcar Cabral would address today, were he here. Let us do it for him, in his stead, and in his honor.

I think the clue lies in the title of my talk, which was formulated by the organizers of this Symposium: "the integration of the liberation movement in the framework of international liberation."

The capitalist system is a world-system. If we are to understand it, we must start with that fact. If class struggle is to be efficacious, it has to be a world class struggle. It cannot be defined as a series of national struggles, linked by a vague sense of international solidarity. This does not mean that the national liberation struggle is not a meaningful focus of our efforts. It is, but the national liberation struggle is meaningful precisely because it is a form, a modality of world class struggle.

Let me suggest a number of controversial propositions about this world class struggle, which I offer not as a finished analysis but as a basis of discussion among us.

- 1) We are presently in the transition from the still-existing capitalist world-economy to the socialist world order which does not yet exist. We have been in this transition for more than 50 years already and we shall be in it for at least a 100 more. We are all in this transition, not merely those living in post-revolutionary states. The transition is a phenomenon of the whole world-system, which is in structural crisis.
- 2) The world class struggle has never been more intense than now, during this transition. We are all involved in this world class struggle, which is going on in every geographical corner of the world. No country is outside this struggle, or beyond it.
- 3) The forms this world class struggle takes are varied, since the modes of appropriating surplus-value are various. This is because the composition of the world's bourgeoisie and proletariat have become complex and disparate and can in no meaningful sense be reduced to the early nineteenth-century English model of the private industrialist versus the male wage-earning factory worker.
- 4) The world class struggle is conducted by the various elements of the world proletariat organized in movements. It is these movements and never the states which conduct class struggle. Class struggle involves politicized movements with active militants. It is in the struggle of the movements that political power is achieved.
- 5) The organizing issues of these multiple movements have been many--national oppression, oppression in the workplace, the oppression of socially weaker groups (women, the aged and the young, ethnic and racial "minorities"). The themes have varied and will continue to vary in different concrete circumstances. The decisive factor is whether a particular struggle is in fact anti-systemic; that is, the particular movement in fact constrains the real power of the world bourgeoisie and augments the real power of the world proletariat.

6) The control of state machineries is a tactic in the world class struggle, and never an end in itself. It is only one tactic among many, and not always necessarily the one that deserves priority.

7) The most urgent political need for the movements individually, whether the movements are located in post-revolutionary states, or in other states, is to create a truly trans-state alliance of the multiple forms of movements, which would be based on a clear distinction between the movements and the states.

8) "Economic development" is a double-edged sword. As long as a capitalist world-economy exists, and we are part of it, the "economic development" of all zones simultaneously is inherently impossible, since the operation of the law of value requires that surplus be unequally distributed over the globe. The development of any one zone is therefore always at the expense of some other. World socialism cannot be defined by the phenomenon of less "developed" zones "catching up" or by the universalization of the law of value under the claim of the development of the forces of production. It involves rather the construction of a radically-different mode of production, centering on production for use in an egalitarian, planned world, in which the states individually and the system of states collectively have both "withered away."

9) The measure of the construction of a world socialist order is the steady increase during this transition in the real effective power of the working classes to direct their own lives at the workplace, in their homes, and in their communities. Self-direction is not direction by the representatives of the working classes but by the working classes in their own right. It is this last issue which Cabral was talking about when he envisaged the "suicide" of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie, in Africa as elsewhere. Only of course, as we know, they will not commit suicide. The workers must impose it on their representatives in social reality.

10) The crisis of the capitalist world-economy is also the crisis of the world's antisystemic movements, which are--let us remember--children of the present system and not of the future. We need to rethink our strategy, our mode of organization, and our categories of thought, all of which were molded in the nineteenth-century period of a capitalist system at its most self-confident. We need to reflect on whether our present strategy, mode of organization, and categories of thought serve us well for this period of crisis, of intensified class struggle, and above all of clever adjustment by the world's bourgeoisie who are seeking to survive as privileged strata under entirely new guises. The real danger is that, thirty years from now, everyone may call himself a Marxist or a socialist, and private property may be reduced to a minor role in world production. We will still then be in the midst of the transition and the world class struggle. Such an "ideological triumph" may itself serve as one of the most serious impediments for the achievement of a world socialist order.

Let us remember that nothing is inevitable. We are before an historical choice. The existing capitalist world-system is surely doomed. But a socialist world order is only one possible outcome. A second is the creation of a new class-based (but noncapitalist) system. A third is nuclear destruction. And there may be still others we are incapable of imagining. A luta continua is not a mere slogan; it is an analysis that we must bear in mind precisely when we look at post-revolutionary states and at antisystemic, revolutionary movements.

Footnotes

(1) "Brief Analysis of the Social Structure in Guinea," in Amilcar Cabral, Revolution in Guinea (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1969), p. 69.

(2) "The Weapon of Theory" in ibid., 110.