

THE SECOND WEEK

IV. The readings for the second weeka. Lenin's Imperialism, chapters IV-VII

The initial reading for this week is the next four chapters of Imperialism. In last week's selection from this work, Lenin dealt mainly with the source of imperialism in the advanced countries; in this selection he shifts his focus to the world arena. In other words, Lenin now addresses what we have been calling the "second facet of imperialism," international relations.

The major points to concentrate on when studying this selection are:

- * "the export of capital"--what it means (this is not as obvious as it seems at first), why it occurs, why it is so significant, how it affects the overall development of the world, how it relates to the "export of commodities";
- * the distinction and relationship between the two types of "division of the world": division by "capitalist combines" and by "great powers";
- * the role of the search for raw materials.

One final but necessary remark should be made about Lenin's Imperialism. Marxist-Leninists have too often made the economic error of believing that imperialism is simply an economic system. Those who hold this position frequently attempt to substantiate it by pointing out that Lenin's essay focuses principally on economics. However, in the "Preface" to Imperialism Lenin agonized over the fact that tsarist censorship "not only forced [me] to confine myself strictly to an exclusively theoretical, particularly economic analysis of the facts, but to formulate the few necessary observations on politics with extreme caution, by hints, in an allegorical language--in that accursed Aesopian language...." We suggest that people look closely for Lenin's "hints" and "allegories" in order to uncover some of his ideas on the function of politics and ideology in the imperialist system, and in order to avoid economic misunderstandings.

b. Mao's "Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society"

By studying both of our selections from Imperialism, we will have considered the questions of the imperialist stage as manifested in the advanced capitalist countries, and in the world arena. Mao's essay (and Cabral's as well) completes the picture by addressing the effects of imperialism on the social structure of dominated and dependent societies--our "third facet."

Mao's essay, written in 1926 (and revised prior to its publication in his Selected Works in 1951), analyses the relationship of imperialism to the classes and class fractions present in China of that era. His purpose is indicated in the essay's famous first lines: "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?" In essence Mao was broadly analyzing the system of class alliances that corresponded to the general strategy for revolution in China--which is also the general strategy for revolution in dependent societies--the national liberation struggle. However the type of national liberation strategy that is implicit in this essay is not one of simply throwing the foreign imperialists out.

It is a strategy calculated to lead from national liberation directly to the struggle for socialism. The Chinese Communist Party conceptualized this strategy as the New Democratic Revolution.

A caution: the social structures of dependent societies--characterized by extreme unevenness and complexity due to the distortions imposed by imperialism--are various. They can differ greatly from that depicted in Mao's essay depending on a large number of factors such as the natural resources of the area, the nature of the societies that preceded imperialism, the manner in which imperialism penetrated these societies, the length, depth and character of imperialist domination, the types and successes of indigeneous resistance to imperialism, etc. There is, therefore, no reason to assume that the social forces that Mao observed in China will appear in other dependent societies in the same form, or with the same social weight. In fact, some of these forces may be entirely absent, and others, not present in China, may exist (such as a mass of pre-class, lineage-based societies). Thus Mao's essay can give us no more than one example of the basic social structure of one dependent society--and a methodological guide to investigate others.

c. Amilcar Cabral's "The role of Culture in the Liberation Struggle"

Amilcar Cabral, though still little-known in this country, has been the most influential Marxist theorist in Africa for some time. Cabral was the principal leader and organizer of the African Independence Party of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC)--the party that led the national liberation struggle in these countries to victory over Portuguese imperialism.

Despite the small size and marginality of "Portuguese" Guinea to the world imperialist system, the experience of the national liberation in this country is of crucial importance because it is exemplary. In a continent where national liberation has almost invariably led to new forms of domination by imperialism ("neo-colonialism"), Cabral and the PAIGC have the distinction of leading a successful revolutionary national liberation struggle--one that takes the road to socialism after gaining State power. In 1973, only a year or so prior to the victory over Portuguese imperialism, a Portuguese agent assassinated Cabral, and the world revolutionary movement lost one of its greatest leaders.

The essay that we are reading by Cabral, "The Role of Culture in the Liberation Struggle", was a speech that he delivered at a UNESCO conference not long before his death. In it he addresses the same general facet of the world imperialist system as Mao addressed in "Analysis of Classes...": imperialism within "underdeveloped" societies. However, Cabral's essay has a different focus than Mao's. Cabral directly discusses the national liberation struggle, whereas Mao emphasizes dependent social structure. Also Cabral concentrates on the particular role of culture and ideology, while Mao addresses the overall question of class formation. Furthermore Cabral, in discussing general theory, draws on a situation that was very particular to "Portuguese" Guinea--a situation very different from that of dependent China and of many other dependent societies (although it does have strong similarities with other dependent African countries). To aid the reader in better understanding Cabral, and in gaining perspective of what is general and what is particular in his analysis, we want to take some space here to sketch out the social structure of "Portuguese" Guinea.

The first point to be made in this regard is that the penetration of imperialism into Guinea was neither as deep, nor as disruptive, as it was (and is) in many other dependent countries. Portugal itself has always been a relatively weak imperialist power. Partially because of this it neither flooded Guinea with huge masses of capital (therefore very little capitalist enterprise developed there), nor drastically reordered traditional social structures. Moreover, in its pre-imperialist phase, Portugal did not appropriate the land and property of the indigeneous peoples, nor did it exterminate a large portion of them. (All of this contrasts sharply with the experiences of many Latin American dependent societies). In the main, Portuguese imperialism exploited Guinea by indirect means: by forcing a section of the people to produce certain agricultural products for export (especially peanuts) from within their traditional economic systems, by taxes and forced tribute-in-kind, and by creating a forced market for over-priced Portuguese exports. A symbol of the relative shallowness of Portuguese imperialist penetration is the fact that, under Portuguese influence, only a few tiny cities developed.

While the economic penetration of Guinea was thus largely indirect in character, the political domination of Portuguese imperialism was of the most direct type. Portuguese imperialism took the political form of colonialism, the direct organization and domination of State power in the dependent society by the metropole. The coincidence of the stage of imperialism with colonialism is the general case for Africa. However, it is not the case everywhere. In Latin America colonialism was largely ended through the Wars of Independence in the early 19th century, long before the rise of the imperialist stage. There, direct colonial rule was replaced, under imperialism, by relatively indirect "neo-colonialist" forms of rule (this has also happened in Africa since the beginnings of "de-colonization" in the late 1950s). Contrastingly, China was never really colonized. It must be added that, while the Portuguese were present on the Guinean coastline from the mid-1400s, and while they procured slaves from the mid-1600s, their attempt to politically subsume Guinea as a whole only began with the imperialist "scramble" of the late 19th century, and was only complete in any sense by the late 1930s. Portuguese colonialism in Guinea was therefore relatively recent.

To the above review of the economic and political character of Portuguese imperialism in Guinea, we must add a brief sketch of the nature and fate of pre-imperialist social structure. Before the Portuguese, Guinea was not a social-territorial unit (which is the usual case for dependent societies--though China, for example, was an exception). It was comprised of a large number of ethnic groups, based on different forms of localized agricultural production. None of these groups knew private property in land, none had fully-formed class structures, and none had a distinct State. In fact, the majority of the population lived in societies that even lacked customary "chieftanships" and separate priesthoods. However, a large minority of the population were members of ethnic groups which had come under Muslim influence and had very embryonic forms of class, private property in land, and the State. Portuguese imperialism made use of these embryonic forms. But the main point to be made here is that, while Portuguese imperialism distorted the structures of the pre-existing Guinean societies, these societies maintained themselves in essence to the day of liberation.

All of the above-mentioned factors explain the very particular answers that the Guinean national liberation movement gave to the question of who are our friends and who are our enemies? Imperialism

had not developed an ally in Guinea similar to the "comprador bourgeoisie" of China, nor did a potential ally like the large semi-feudal landlords of China exist. Likewise, equivalents of the Chinese "middle bourgeoisie" and "national bourgeoisie" were absent.

Portuguese imperialism relied most directly on a small (3000 people) white settler community, which occupied all the top positions in the colonial economic and political structures. Beyond this the main indigeneous allies of imperialism were, first of all, the aristocratic stratum of the minority Muslimized communities, and the Muslim "chiefs" that were colonially-imposed on the non-Muslim, pre-class ethnic groups. The other main ally of imperialism was the urban "petty bourgeoisie" or "lower middle class" (Cabral uses these two terms alternatively) comprised of African middle or lower bureaucratic functionaries, clerks, and small traders. This group was small (ca. 1.5% of the population) but for Portuguese colonialism, crucial. However the indigeneous petty bourgeoisie was a very unstable ally, given the apartheid-like restrictions under which it lived. Moreover its links with international culture (and thus its exposure to the world revolutionary movement) added to this instability. In Cabral's analysis, a sector of this class becomes key to the revolution.

The popular masses or "people" of Guinea were, like China, made up of a small proletariat, a "lumpenproletariat", and a proportionally gigantic peasantry. Somewhat similarly to China (but unlike many places in contemporary Latin America) the Guinean proletariat was small, was located primarily in transport and commerce, and though extremely combative, was a secondary element in the revolution. The lumpenproletariat, again as in China, showed some tendency to struggle, but was erratic and deeply penetrated by colonialism (especially by the PIDE--the secret police). However the peasantry, unlike that of China, was not divided into a number of semi-feudal classes, but was atomized into numerous social units that maintained real autonomy from each other, and into several culturally- and linguistically-distinct ethnic groups. Because the peasantry was necessarily the major force for the revolution, the specific nature of this group presented special problems to Cabral and the PAIGC.

These then were the contours of the social system from which Cabral and his comrades organized the national liberation alliance that defeated imperialism. In addition to providing general background to Cabral's essay, this review of the situation in Guinea may suggest why Cabral so emphasizes certain themes: for example, that indigeneous cultures are important reservoirs of anti-imperialist resistance; that the search for African identity is a phenomenon restricted to the urban groups--particularly the petty bourgeoisie; that the revolutionary sector of the petty bourgeoisie holds the key to developing the anti-imperialist resistance far beyond the latter's organic potentialities, if this sector immerses itself in the masses and wins a vanguard position (and, as Cabral says elsewhere, if it "commits suicide" as a class); that the national liberation struggle must transform and unify its base--that is, it must literally build the nation, economically, politically, and culturally, in the very act of liberation. These are the main themes for the reader to consider.

But, all of the peculiarities of "Portuguese" Guinea aside, it should be remembered that Cabral felt that his major argument could be applied generally to understand--and to lead--national liberation struggles in other dependent societies.

V. The discussion for the second week

The obvious problem with our discussion this week is that we have a lot of relatively diverse material to cover in a fairly short time. It is important for us all to remember that this study group is designed to be introductory. It is our feeling that it is better for us to discuss collectively all of the main arguments of the readings and sacrifice discussion of the more secondary (but still very important) points, than to only cover part of the reading in great depth. This of course is easy to say and hard to do. Here are some suggested guidelines for this week,

First we should deal with Lenin's analysis of the world-wide facet of the stage of imperialism, hitting the points suggested above in this study guide. After this we should sum up our discussion of Lenin by reviewing his "five basic features" of imperialism (third paragraph of chapter VII of his essay). Finally the last part of Magdoff's essay can be the basis for a short discussion of world-wide imperialism since Lenin's writing. This phase of our discussion should be limited to about an hour.

Secondly, we should review Mao's essay by concentrating on how Mao defines each of the main social groups (classes and class fractions) of dependent China and their varying relationship to imperialism, how he conceives of the class alliance for national liberation constructed from certain of these social groups, and how his methodology can be used for dependent societies in general. Here we should be careful not to get sidetracked on to long discussions of the Chinese revolution, unless they relate directly to the questions at hand.

Thirdly, we should summarize Cabral's main arguments on culture and national liberation, relating these both to the particularity of "Portuguese" Guinea, and to the general question of national liberation in the "Third World." For sum up questions on imperialism and dependent societies, we might discuss how national liberation itself is a part of a "nation building" process, and how it is possible for a national liberation movement to struggle toward socialism, given the structure of dependent societies (especially given the weakness of the proletariat in many such societies).

Finally we should not neglect to evaluate the study group during criticism/self criticism.