

Marxism and the National Question in Latin America

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The development of capitalism presupposes the destruction of the fetters of feudalism and the creation of a national bourgeoisie, an internal market and state. During the last century the great European nations achieved their unification on the basis of wars in which the bourgeoisie played an historically revolutionary role. This enabled them subsequently to develop as modern imperialist powers. The western European nations and North America were constructed as oppressor nations which would go on to enrich themselves by the plunder and oppression of other nations.

In Latin America it has not been possible to resolve the tasks of national unification in the same way that other democratic tasks (agrarian reform, national sovereignty, full democracy) have not been able to be fully completed.

While the thirteen former British colonies in North America managed to ward off the danger of fragmentation and expand into a territory several times larger, the former Spanish colonies fell apart. Some fragments, such as Gran Colombia and Central America, split up into many new states.

The Portuguese colonies did not split up and were the origin of present day Brazil which would go on to expand at the cost of the majority of its neighbours. Nevertheless, the Brazilian colossus could not overcome its semi-colonial existence.

Currently, there are nineteen Spanish-speaking countries in America. One of these, Puerto Rico, is a US neo-colony. These countries, like Brazil, have many cultural and linguistic similarities. By the same token they have all fallen under the regional domination of the USA and remain under the religious aegis of the same papacy that divided the Indian lands between the two Iberian powers that colonised them.

More than 460 million people live to the south of the Rio Grande. Spanish is the official language for about 300 million and Portuguese for 150 million. There are possibly as many 25 and 33 million people who speak Indian languages. Those who have French or its Creole variant as their mother tongue number some 6.5 million; English speakers count for less than 6 million and Dutch less than half a million.

Caribbeans who speak non-Iberian languages have generally introduced various dialects.

Latin America presents much more of a cultural, linguistic and national homogenisation than some other large states. The former USSR and Yugoslavia are composed of people that are differentiated by origin, language, alphabet, religion (Islam, Orthodoxy, Catholicism). China, even with its broad ethnic homogeneity, now has a large part of its territory populated by other minorities. India's constitution recognises sixteen official languages (on top of 4,000 other dialects and local languages) and is divided by various religions. Latin America has a population the size of half that of the USSR, twenty times that of Yugoslavia and its land is bigger than that of China and India combined.

The greater part of the African continent is composed of countries with numerous nationalities. The artificial boundaries drawn by the colonizers have left dozens of nationalities split between different states. The

various groups of ethnic Africans are divided by language, origin and creed. Confrontation between these have caused bloody civil wars in Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia, Chad, Zaire, Angola, Rwanda.

Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Burma are also states which have witnessed strong inter-ethnic clashes and powerful separatist movements based on peoples divided by language, culture and opposing creeds.

The Caribbean

The majority of Latin America is composed of semi-colonial states. A small proportion of territory south of the Rio Grande remains colonised. This is an area of less than a quarter of a million square kilometres and contains a population of less than six million.

Almost all the colonies are in the Caribbean, Britain remaining in control of the Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos, Montserrat, Virgin Islands and Anguilla, in the same way as it controls Bermuda and the Malvinas. France continues to occupy Guadeloupe, Martinique and San Barthelemy although its biggest colony is in the Guianas and its smallest in the islands of St Peter on the west coast of Canada. Holland maintains possession of the islands of Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, San Eustaquio, Saba and St Martin.

The USA controls parts of the Virgin Islands, Santa Cruz and Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico is a 'free state associated with the USA'. The majority of the population supports the continuation of this semi-colonial status although there is a significant separatist movement. The biggest colony is French Guiana with scarcely 90,000 inhabitants within its 91,000 sq kms. The Panama canal is the main colonial enclave. It is the principal maritime connection between the two American coasts and is also the main organising centre for military operations in the south.

The islands in the Antilles have always been the focus of numerous ambitions. Almost all its previous indigenous population has been annihilated. Millions of black slaves were brought over. Some of these islands have passed through the hands of successive rulers (Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Dutch and of pirates). Most of the inhabitants of this area speak Spanish although a small minority have another first language.

There are four big islands in the Antilles. Jamaica is the main English-speaking one south of the Rio Grande. Cuba is the only degenerated workers' state in the continent and in the western hemisphere. Puerto Rico is the most important non-independent country in the Americas. The island of Dominica is divided between French-speaking Haiti and Spanish-speaking Santo Domingo. In addition, there are dozens of small islands under some twenty distinct administrations.

The Bahamas, St Lucia, St Kitts-Nevis, Antigua, Bermuda, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada and the Commonwealth countries of Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines are parliamentary states associated with the British crown.

The Bahamas covers a mere 13,930 sq kms. Nevertheless, this area is much greater than the whole of the dozen independent states in the Lesser Antilles. Despite the whole of the Antilles having an area and population less than that of Lima in Peru, they have not been able to achieve a single unified state. Neither have those colonies that were under the same empire been able to unify themselves. Distinct ruling classes run these island states as private concerns given over to tourism, money laundering, free ports, drug trafficking and exporting fruit. In the previous decade leftist pro-Cuban governments came to power in Grenada, St Lucia and Jamaica. None of them could overcome their small, divided semi-colonial status.

The enemies of unification

That Latin American unity has been constantly frustrated is a direct consequence of the senility of the

native ruling class and of imperialism.

The attempts at unification into a 'Great Fatherland', which Bolivar and San Martin dreamed of, failed due to the absence of a powerful ruling bourgeoisie capable of bringing it about. The old vice-royalties split up according to the localised desires of the criollo (ruling class of Iberian origin) elites. Disputes between chieftains, clans and states characterised the first century of our republican history.

The bourgeoisie in our countries accepted the division and took great pains to ingratiate themselves with imperialism. Attempts at economic unification of the continent (SELA, the Andean Pact, the Central American Market) have not greatly prospered. Imperialism and its lackeys pressed for us to remain divided and oriented towards the market outside our continent.

The latest fashion consists of abandoning any show of hostility towards the US imperialists and seeking to be the USA's bootlickers.

Washington has launched the idea of forming a single American market (NAFTA). This trade association aims to be a counterweight to the EC and Japan. Its realisation would mean our conversion into a market place for US industrial products and a source of raw material and cheap labour for the USA. The Party of the Institutional Revolution in Mexico (PRI) is creating a common North American market with Canada and the USA in January 1994.

A strong pan-Latin American and anti-imperialist sentiment arose after the Russian and Mexican revolutions. Stalin's Comintern initially supported the Popular Alliance for the American Revolution (APRA) in Peru which aspired to be the criollo version of the Chinese Kuomintang. Originally, APRA's main aim was the unification of 'Indo-America' into a single anti-imperialist state. Its flag was coloured red with the map of the 'continental fatherland' at its centre.

However, the 'Indo-Americanist' petit-bourgeoisie would finally abandon this banner. The Aprista parties ended up joining the local 'oligarchic' regimes, the overthrow of which they had earlier called for, becoming the major agents of imperialism and justifying the division of 'Indo-America'. The Peruvian and Venezuelan Apristas (Accion Democratica) defend their respective countries in territorial disputes with their neighbours.

The 1960s saw the spread of Castroism. The Cuban revolution (1959) gave momentum to a series of popular guerilla movements which revitalised anti-imperialist pan-Latin Americanism. The symbol of this process was the figure of Che Guevara who, despite being Argentinian, went to fight in Cuba (where he became a minister) and then in Bolivia where he was killed.

Castroism is now a spent force as an ideology promoting continental unity. The Cuban bureaucracy merely seeks acceptance in a reactionary accord with Latin American countries. 'Fidelism' has never called for the building of workers' parties and still less that they should launch a revolution of workers' councils. On the contrary, it has always proposed legalist or armed popular fronts, populist movements and military and cross-class strategies. Whenever possible, it sought to ingratiate itself with ruling bourgeoisies. When it tried to reduce the hostility of a regime, Cuba would promote guerilla 'focos'. Nevertheless, when diplomatic relations bore good fruit, Havana would press its followers to reconcile themselves with the system.

Castro has loftily betrayed revolutions in Nicaragua, El Salvador; and Guatemala. It constantly sought to prevent the Sandinistas going so far as to expropriate capitalism and instilled in them the need to follow the road of an understanding with imperialism and the Contras, which ended in them being thrown out of government. It has restricted Central American guerrillas to the goal of negotiations, all the better to incorporate themselves into the system with its genocidal armed forces.

Pressure from Gorbachev made Castro even more conciliatory in his foreign policy towards reactionary bourgeois parties in Latin America and towards imperialism.

His support for the US-led bloc against Iraq in the Gulf War and his backing for the abandonment of the armed struggle by guerrilla groups (such as M-19) were soon mirrored in Cuba itself with the introduction of pro-market reforms.

Nationalism and Stalinism have stolen the banner of Latin American national unity. Peronists, Apristas, MIRists, PRI-ists?all vie in the acceptance of pro-IMF measures which lead to increasing division and dependency in the continent.

Stalinists continue to accept liberal proposals. The Latin American left restricts itself to narrow nationalism. In Peru the most radical of the lefts (such as the PUM, UDP, MRTA and Sendero Luminoso) do not aspire to the formation of a Latin American state or party. On the contrary, they all call for the creation of a Peruvian nation, defence of national boundaries and the honouring of national heroes, that is, capitulation to the bourgeois nation state.

The collapse of nationalism

In the current imperialist epoch it is impossible for large semi colonial nations, Balkanised by imperialism, to achieve unity against the latter and establish themselves as a powerful and united bourgeois nation states. We are not in the epoch of Garibaldi, but that of Clinton, which is inimical to any would-be Bismarcks.

The Latin American situation reminds us of the Arab world. The Arabs from Morocco and Mauritania to Iraq and Oman are united by the same language, culture and geographical region. The sixteen states of the Arab League have frontiers that in general have been drawn artificially by the imperialist powers that have subjugated them. Successive attempts to build unified pan-Arab states have met with disaster. Imperialism and the USSR are opposed to the emergence of a new power. The local bourgeoisies are tempted to keep their own business going with specific relationships with particular powers. The richest bourgeoisies (the oil monarchies) are economically tied into the multi-nationals where they have deposits and investments.

Pan-Arab and pan-Latin American nationalism have always posed national unification on top of states created by borders drawn by colonialists, and the creation of a strong bourgeois class, internal market and national armed forces. This goal is utopian in the midst of the death agony of capitalism. The most daring nationalists have always ended up prostrate before imperialism and respecting its frontiers, in search of capital and allies against the proletariat.

The struggle to unify Latin America can take on a clear anti-imperialist aspect. But we would not be able to accept annexationist policies under a unifying pretext. Any movement, even if it were bourgeois, which proposes to struggle for Latin American unity against imperialism or its agents must merit on our part a series of united front actions.

It is impossible to think of the creation of a united Latin America under capitalism. Only the working class will be capable of uniting this continent as a nation, at the same time as expropriating capital and promoting revolutionary unity across the planet.

National and regional identity

The majority of Latin American republics have maintained a separate existence for at least one and a half centuries. At the beginning of the last century various attempts at national unification met with disaster (the Peruvian-Bolivian confederation, the integration of Uruguay and Brazil and the Argentine Federation, Central American unity, Gran Colombia). There exists a sense of differentiated national identity in the Latin countries of America. In the majority of cases we cannot speak of fully constituted nations. This is due to undefined aspects of cultural differentiation in relation to neighbouring countries, the huge oppression of

imperialism and the possession of, in many cases, mixed languages and nationalities.

This feeling is seen in the frequent stirring up of revanchism or spurning of neighbouring peoples. To give some examples; in order to be a true Equadorian you have to say that the Amazon country belongs to you and the jungle in the north of Peru has to be regained, and in order to be a Bolivian you have to struggle for the coastline taken by Chile.

Despite relative stability of frontiers within Latin America, there exist a number of disputes between countries. Both Peru and Bolivia have designs on northern Chile. Argentina and Chile dispute ownership of the Beagle Channel. Paraguay has lost territory to Brazil and Argentina. In the 1930s and 1940s there were wars between Bolivia and Paraguay, Peru and Colombia, Peru and Equador. The majority of Spanish-speaking countries in the Amazon have lost territory to Brazilian expansionism. There is constant friction on the frontiers between Colombia and Venezuela over the oil deposits on the rich coastline. Venezuela claims almost half the current state of Guyana. Panama was separated from Colombia due to pressure from the USA, which for its part has split the country in two with its corridor along the canal. Until recently Guatemala demanded the return of Belize. There is constant litigation between the Central American countries.

Our position on these conflicts is to reject any type of territorial dispute between bourgeoisies. In the case of wars between semi-colonial states, we propose the revolutionary overthrow of both parties, the revolutionary fraternisation of the workers of both countries and the transformation of the war between bourgeois states into a civil war in each country of the exploited against their exploiters. The posing of the socialist unity of Latin America is the only way to avoid frontier wars and to finish with oppression, backwardness and imperialist plunder.

The only situations in which we could possibly take a different position is when a semi-colony invades another on behalf of imperialism in order to smash the movement of the masses. In the case of a confrontation between the degenerated workers' state of Cuba and any reactionary state we side unconditionally with Cuba. In a clash between any Latin American country and an imperialist nation, we would always align ourselves critically with the former.

We cannot play games with nationalism. In Bolivia, where there exists one of the most militant workers' movements, trade unions tend to have the colours of the flag on their banners and their declarations constantly call for the restitution of the coastal areas. In the war over the Condor mountain range on the Peru-Ecuador border the wretched trade union leaders of both countries call for the support of their respective bourgeoisies.

Within many countries of the continent regionalist movements have sprung up. They are motivated by resentment towards the over-centralised powers of the capital and they are stung by the lack of resources made available to them. This has given rise to a series of mass regionalist movements which demand privileges for the produce extracted from or grown on their soil, investment and autonomy. In general, the local 'worthies' and bourgeoisie tend to control these movements where the workers, peasants and students are the most militant sectors.

Some of the movements espouse openly reactionary demands such as the transformation of their region into a 'free zone' where the multi-nationals would be given complete freedom and labour rights would be restricted or abolished. Often the bourgeoisie in a particular zone (such as that of Moquegua Tacna, opposed to remaining part of the Region Mariategui) can demand separation from a region in which the left predominates, or because it considers too great a part of the taxes it contributes go to deprived areas and are not used for its own needs. In Santa Cruz (Bolivia) the bourgeoisie promotes a regional nationalism which fosters hostility towards the so-called 'chollas', or those who live on the altiplano, and its militant

proletariat.

We must support the struggle of any genuine regional movement which expresses rejection of oppression and marginalisation. During this process we may undertake joint actions with the bourgeoisie but our objective must always remain to bring about the construction of peasants' and workers' councils where there would be no employers and all delegates would be elected, subject to recall by mass meetings. We are opposed to flirting with regionalist demands which are only raised demagogically by the bourgeoisie and have no popular echo. We reject any attempt to provoke confrontations between people over territorial disputes. We are opposed to the forced transfer of a people into this or that region, province, district or country in opposition to the will of the working people. We are opposed to reactionary regionalist movements and we try to destroy their influence by raising regional and social demands that are democratic and progressive.

If a region seeks independence, or integration into a new country and this feeling enjoys mass support from its working population, we must support its right to self determination, at the same time raising the only genuinely, lasting progressive outcome of the exercise of that right—the United Socialist States of Latin America.

The Latin American left has always tended to flirt with regionalism and has called for regional parliaments, police and constitutions. In Peru these assemblies are of the corporatist type. We will tend to support the most democratic demands at the same time as calling for the alternative of workers' and peasants' councils as the highest authority, and the creation of patrols and militias for self-defence controlled by workers' assemblies.

The question of the nationalities

What is to be done with the dozens or hundreds of America's native nationalities? In this respect it is essential that we review the revolutionary experience of Lenin and Trotsky.

During the Soviet revolution the Bolsheviks supported the principle of national self-determination in the Russian empire. In the non-Russian nations Communists called for the creation of republics under the control of workers' councils in which there would be no employers. These soviet republics would have to be part of a grand socialist federation.

This demand was made even in the case of nations which knew nothing of capitalism or a modern proletariat. At the 1920 Communist Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku, it was resolved:

‘Comrades, our congress in Moscow discussed the question whether the socialist revolution could take place in the countries of the Far East before these countries have passed through the stage of capitalism. You know that for a long time the view existed that, first of all, each country must pass through the capitalist stage, creating big factories and large-scale property owners; it was indispensable for the workers to be massed together in cities, and only then could there be any question of socialism. We now think that this is not so. From the moment that even just one country has broken away from the chain of capitalism, as Russia has done, from the moment that the workers have put the question of the proletarian revolution on the agenda, from that moment we can say that in China, India, Turkey, Persia and Armenia it is possible and necessary to begin fighting directly for a Soviet system.

. . . Since this is so, such countries can and must prepare now for a Soviet revolution, can and must prepare to put an end within their boundaries to the division between rich and poor, so as to create a state of the working people and conclude a close alliance with the organised workers of the whole world . . . what will be the form of the state, of the organisation of the East? We have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to set up Soviets even where there are no urban workers. In such cases we can create a state

of Soviets of the working peasants. Not toy ?Soviets? such as they now sometimes palm off on you in Turkey, but real ones, for which every working peasant has the right to vote.

. . . Whoever possesses cattle, horned or otherwise, in greater numbers than are needed to work his holding and keep his family in comfort, and who profits by others? need, must be denied access to our peasant soviets.?

Under these guidelines the Communists created dozens of Soviet national republics in central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga. Some of these countries were completely agrarian and others were even made up mostly of nomads. Thanks to this policy, peoples of Mongolian, Turkish, Iranian, Finnish, Siberian and Caucasian origin were able to avoid the pains of capitalist exploitation and achieve progress by means of planned economies. Most of these nations formed the initial support for the maintenance of the USSR. In the case of the native nationalities of central America, the Andes and the Amazon, or that of the descendants of Caribbean slaves, we support their right to self-determination. This not only implies defence of their right to have their own official language and full cultural freedom, but also the right to autonomy and the constitution of their own republic.

We defend the right of the Quechua people to form republics or autonomous regions, or even, should they so desire it, a single Quechua republic. The Aymaras as a nation are divided between two states (Peru and Bolivia). If there existed mass support for the unification of the Aymaras from both states into a single republic, then as communists we would be the most daring fighters for such a demand.

There is great instability in the case of the Amazonian nationalities. Currently, their land is being indiscriminately exploited by timber, rubber, oil and mining conglomerates. The ruling class seeks to foster colonisation of their land. It is in the Amazon that we find the worst social relations in the whole of the continent, with slavery and the hunting and constant slaughter of Indians.

At the end of 1990 there took place a ?March for Land and Dignity? from Beni to La Paz in Bolivia. The native peoples of Beni were demanding an end to indiscriminate tree felling in their forests, their right to royalties, and equal negotiating rights between their chiefs and the Bolivian state. This march was massively supported by the population of the altiplano.

Our position is to call for the native Amazonian peoples to have the right to administer their own historic territories, and to form their own soviet republics.

The cutting of wood, extraction of natural resources and mineral energy must not be done so as to endanger the flora and fauna and without consent and royalties paid to its native workers. This means that we fight for communal assemblies as the highest political authority. In those areas where there are also wage labourers, day labourers and agricultural poor who originate elsewhere, we would demand that they also participate in the local soviet governments.

Capitalism is rapidly advancing in the Amazon. With it comes industry, the market, roads and modern means of communication and other forms of progress. But the advance of capital is accompanied by the most brutal forms of exploitation of both man and nature. The people of the Amazon cannot ignore the future. It is reactionary utopianism to try to stop historical progress or to preserve these rich territories as a living ethnological museum or untouchable nature reserve.

There are only two ways in which the Amazon may progress; the capitalist or the soviet socialist. Only the triumph of the proletarian revolution is capable of preventing genocide and attacks on the native people and settlers. A workers? soviet state will know how to make reasonable use of resources and take advantage of the communal and native forms of organisation to enable the development of the productive

forces by egalitarian and rational progress in favour of workers and natives.

The peasant communities

Indigenists speak of the great advantages of the ejidos, ayllus (both forms of communal land ownership) and communities, and that these social forms could be the basis for an 'original and native' socialism. Communities originating from pre-capitalist modes of production (and even pre-class society) have never been the motor of a socialist revolution.

By their nature such communities are restricted to very rudimentary forms of production. Their advance has always required the a ruling classes and a state which enables them to defend and dispose of resources based on irrigation, warehouses, communications, and even including the plunder of conquered peoples. The ayllu and ejidos served as the basis for native American despotism.

Many of these Indian communities supported the Spanish against the ancient Amerindian empires and thus against independence. Reactionaries have used many of these communities against revolutions and against guerrilla movements. Imperialism encouraged the Miskitos against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. In Peru the army used the Ashaninka community against the guerillas in 1965 and again in the 1980s. The Iquichanos who were one of the poorest ethnic groups in Ayacucho (Peru) were used by the Spanish against the liberators and are being used by the armed forces against Sendero Luminoso.

The communities so admired by the PUM and CCP in Peru are the product of colonial realignment or toleration. Thanks to these circumstances they were able to obtain a series of advantages. The Guarani communities, exploited by the Jesuits, provided huge harvests and revenue for the Crown and prepared the way for later exploitation by large-scale private agriculture.

When Marx was asked his opinion of the Russian communities such as the Mir, he answered that the advance of capitalism was going to force them to change completely or disappear. An early proletarian victory would enable them to avoid this fate and use their collectivism as a lever for socialist education.

In our particular case, the communities and ayllus are increasingly undergoing an internal social differentiation. Development of production for the market means enrichment for some peasants and impoverishment for others. The richest sectors linked to the local or national state are targeted by the most impoverished in the community.

? For the democratic redistribution of land. Land must be nationalised and its use stimulated by means of voluntary social organisations. The modern mechanised collective farm must replace the unproductive small peasant farms and landed estates. The progressive collectivist aspects of the communities must be rescued for this purpose.

We reject indigenist demands because they split Indian workers from other races, tie the Indian exploited to the Indian bourgeoisie, promote an Indian capitalism disguised by millenarist mysticism and utopias and, far from guaranteeing national self-determination for the indigenous peoples, are accomplices in the system that oppresses them.

Indigenism, so dependent on funds from centres financed by imperialism and a dark-skinned bourgeoisie, is not capable even if it wished to do so, of daring to change the world system. By their very class nature they resist demands for the right of Quechuas or Aymaras to unify across boundaries drawn up by the oligarchies and imperialist nations, and the power to build their own workers' republics.

Our demand also clashes with those of the Latin American left who demand the preservation of their respective states or (in the better variants), the creation of pluralistic nations. Apparently radical

movements such as Sendero Luminoso, Like the good Maoist-Stalinists that they are, refuse to demand the right to self-determination for the Quechuas, Aymaras and Amazon people. On the contrary, they are authoritarian towards these nationalities and cultures in Peru and their official language.

For the United Socialist States of Latin America and the Caribbean!

We have to raise this demand high on our banner. We have to oppose any attempt by the USA, Spain or other imperialisms to promote a further subordination of our continent. We have to oppose Indian or criollo nationalism which try to prevent proletarian internationalism, so that we end up in tow behind national bourgeoisies and bourgeois utopias.

The United Socialist States of Latin America is not an ideal goal for the construction of socialism but a lever to stimulate this, and the workers' revolution in the rest of America and the world, which is the only way to put an end to a society of class exploitation. We defend the right of self-determination for any nationality or region and we would propose its incorporation into a free and voluntary federation of continent-wide soviet republics.

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