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**The Immediate task of the Party in the National Question  
Theses for the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.) Endorsed by the Central  
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# I

## **The Capitalist System and National Oppression**

1. Modern nations are the product of a definite epoch—the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations. The British, French, Germans and Italians were formed into nations at the time of the victorious development of capitalism and its triumph over feudal disunity.

2. Where the formation of nations on the whole coincided in time with the formation of centralised states, the nations naturally assumed state forms, they developed into independent bourgeois national states. That is what happened in Britain (excluding Ireland), in France and Italy. In Eastern Europe, on the contrary, the formation of centralised states, accelerated by the needs of self-defence (invasion by Turks, Mongols, etc.), took place before feudalism was liquidated; hence, before the formation of nations. As a consequence, the nations here did not, and could not, develop into national states; instead, several mixed, multi-national bourgeois states were formed, usually consisting of one strong dominant nation and of several weak, subject nations. Examples: Austria, Hungary, Russia.

3. In national states like France and Italy, which at first relied mainly on their own national forces, there was, generally speaking, no national oppression. In contrast to that, the multi-national states that are based on the domination of one nation—more exactly, of the ruling class of that nation—over the other nations are the original home and chief arena of national oppression and of national movements. The contradictions between the interests of the dominant nation and those of the subject nations are contradictions which, unless they are resolved, make the stable existence of a multi-national state impossible. The tragedy of the multi-national bourgeois state lies in that it cannot resolve these contradictions, that every attempt on its part to "equalise" the nations and to "protect" the national minorities, while preserving private property and class inequality, usually ends in another failure, in a further aggravation of national conflicts.

4. The further growth of capitalism in Europe, the need for new markets, the quest for raw materials and fuel, and finally, the development of imperialism, the export of capital and the necessity of securing important sea and railway routes, led, on the one hand, to the seizure of new territories by the old national states and to the transformation of the latter into multi-national (colonial) states, with their inherent national oppression and national conflicts (Britain, France, Germany, Italy); on the other hand, among the dominant nations in the old multi-national states they intensified the striving not only to retain the old state

frontiers, but to expand them, to subjugate new (weak) nationalities at the expense of neighbouring states. This widened the national question and, finally, by the very course of developments merged it with the general question of the colonies; and national oppression was transformed from an intra-state question into an inter-state question, a question of the struggle (and war) between the "great" imperialist powers for the subjugation of weak, unequal nationalities.

5. The imperialist war, which laid bare to the roots the irreconcilable national contradictions and internal bankruptcy of the bourgeois multi-national states, extremely intensified the national conflicts within the victor colonial states (Britain, France, Italy), caused the utter disintegration of the vanquished old multi-national states (Austria, Hungary, Russia in 1917), and finally, as the most "radical" bourgeois solution of the national question, led to the formation of new bourgeois national states (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Finland, Georgia, Armenia, etc.). But the formation of the new independent national states did not, and could not, bring about the peaceful co-existence of nationalities; it did not, and could not, eliminate either national inequality or national oppression, for the new national states, being based on private property and class inequality, cannot exist :

a) without oppressing their national minorities (Poland, which oppresses Byelorussians, Jews, Lithuanians and Ukrainians; Georgia, which oppresses Osse-tians, Abkhazians and Armenians; Yugoslavia, which oppresses Croats, Bosnians, etc.);

b) without enlarging their territories at the expense of their neighbours, which gives rise to conflicts and wars (Poland against Lithuania, the Ukraine and Russia; Yugoslavia against Bulgaria; Georgia against Armenia, Turkey, etc.);

c) without submitting to the financial, economic and military domination of the "great" imperialist powers.

6. Thus, the post-war period reveals a sombre picture of national enmity, inequality, oppression, conflicts, war, and imperialist brutality on the part of the nations of the civilised countries, both towards one another and towards the unequal nations. On the one hand, there are a few "great" powers, which oppress and exploit all the dependent and "independent" (actually totally dependent) national states, and there is a struggle of these powers among themselves in order to monopolise the exploitation of the national states. On the other hand, there is a struggle of the dependent and "independent" national states against the unbearable oppression of the "great" powers; there is a struggle of the national states among themselves in order to enlarge their national territories; there is a struggle of each national state against the national minorities that it is

oppressing. Lastly, there is an intensification of the liberation movement in the colonies against the "great" powers and an aggravation of the national conflicts both within these powers and also within the national states which, as a rule, contain a number of national minorities.

Such is the "picture of the peace" bequeathed by the imperialist war.

Bourgeois society has proved to be utterly incapable of solving the national question.

## **II**

### **The Soviet System and National Freedom**

1. Whereas private property and capital inevitably disunite people, foment national strife and intensify national oppression, collective property and labour just as inevitably unite people, strike at the root of national strife and abolish national oppression. The existence of capitalism without national oppression is just as inconceivable as the existence of socialism without the liberation of the oppressed nations, without national freedom. Chauvinism and national strife are inevitable, unavoidable, so long as the peasantry (and the petty bourgeoisie in general), full of nationalist prejudices, follows the bourgeoisie; on the contrary, national peace and national freedom can be regarded as ensured if the peasantry follows the proletariat, i.e., if the proletarian dictatorship is ensured. Hence, the victory of the Soviets and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship are a fundamental condition for abolishing national oppression, establishing national equality and guaranteeing the rights of national minorities.

2. The experience of the Soviet revolution has fully confirmed this thesis. The establishment of the Soviet system in Russia and the proclamation of the right of nations to secede changed completely the relations between the labouring

masses of the different nationalities in Russia, struck at the root of the old national enmity, removed the ground for national oppression and won for the Russian workers the confidence of their brothers of other nationalities not only in Russia, but also in Europe and Asia, and heightened this confidence into enthusiasm, into readiness to fight for the common cause. The establishment of Soviet republics in Azerbaijan and Armenia has led to the same results, for it has eliminated national conflicts and has settled the "age-old" enmity between the Turkish and Armenian, and between the Armenian and Azerbaijanian, labouring masses. The same must be said about the temporary victory of the Soviets in Hungary, Bavaria and Latvia. On the other hand, it can be confidently stated that the Russian workers could not have defeated Kolchak and Denikin, and the Azerbaijanian and Armenian Republics could not have got firmly on their feet, had they not eliminated national enmity and national oppression at home, had they not won the confidence and roused the enthusiasm of the labouring masses of the nationalities in the West and in the East. The strengthening of the Soviet republics and the abolition of national oppression are two sides of one and the same process of liberating the working people from imperialist bondage.

3. But the existence of Soviet republics, even of the smallest dimensions, is a deadly menace to imperialism. The menace lies not only in that by breaking away from imperialism the Soviet republics were transformed from colonies and semi-colonies into really independent states, thereby depriving the imperialists of some extra territory and extra income, but also, and primarily, in that the very existence of the Soviet republics, every step they take in suppressing the bourgeoisie and in strengthening the proletarian dictatorship, constitutes tremendous agitation against capitalism and imperialism, agitation for the liberation of the dependent countries from imperialist bondage, and is an insuperable element in the disintegration and disorganisation of capitalism in all its forms. Hence the inevitable struggle of "great" imperialist powers against the Soviet republics, the endeavour of the "great" powers to destroy these republics. The history of the fight of the "great" powers against Soviet Russia, rousing against her one border-country bourgeois government after another, one group of counter-revolutionary generals after another, closely blockading Soviet Russia and, in general, trying to isolate her economically, eloquently testifies that in the present state of international relations, in the conditions of capitalist encirclement, not a single Soviet republic, standing alone, can regard itself as ensured against economic exhaustion and military defeat by world imperialism.

4. Therefore, the isolated existence of individual Soviet republics is unstable and precarious owing to their existence being threatened by the capitalist states. The common interests of defence of the Soviet republics, in the first place, the task of restoring the productive forces destroyed by the war, in the second place, and the necessary assistance the grain-growing Soviet republics must render those which do not grow grain, in the third place, all imperatively dictate the necessity

of a state union of the individual Soviet republics as the only means of salvation from imperialist bondage and national oppression. The national Soviet republics which have liberated themselves from "their own" and the "foreign" bourgeoisie can maintain their existence and defeat the combined forces of imperialism only by uniting in a close state union, or they will not defeat them at all.

5. A federation of Soviet republics based on common military and economic interests is the general form of the state union that will make it possible :

a) to ensure the integrity and economic development of each individual republic and of the federation as a whole;

b) to embrace all the diversity as regards manner of life, culture and economic condition of the various nations and nationalities, which are at present at different stages of development, and to apply corresponding forms of federation;

c) to arrange the peaceful co-existence and fraternal co-operation of the nations and nationalities which, in one way or another, have linked their fate with that of the federation.

Russia's experience in employing different forms of federation, ranging from federation based on Soviet autonomy (Kirghizia, Bashkiria, Tataria, the Highlands, Daghestan) to federation based on treaty relations with independent Soviet republics (the Ukraine, Azerbaijan), and permitting intermediate stages (Turkestan, Byelorussia), has fully proved the expediency and flexibility of federation as the general form of state union of the Soviet republics.

6. But federation can be stable and the results of federation effective only if it is based on mutual confidence and the voluntary consent of the federating countries. If the R.S.F.S.R. is the only country in the world where the experiment in the peaceful co-existence and fraternal co-operation of a number of nations and nationalities has been successful, it is because there are here neither dominant nor subject nations, neither metropolises nor colonies, neither imperialism nor national oppression; federation here rests on mutual confidence and the voluntary striving of the labouring masses of the different nations towards union. This voluntary character of the federation must be preserved without fail, for only such a federation can serve as the transitional stage to that higher unity of the toilers of all countries in a single world economic system, the necessity for which is becoming increasingly apparent.

### III

#### **The Immediate Task of the R.C.P.**

1. The R.S.F.S.R. and the Soviet republics associated with it have a population of about 140,000,000. Of these non-Great-Russians number about 65,000,000 (Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Kirghiz, Uzbeks, Turkme-nians, Tajiks, Azerbaijanians, Volga Tatars, Crimean Tatars, Bukharans, Khivans, Bashkirs, Armenians, Chechens, Kabardinians, Ossetians, Cherkesses, Ingushes, Karachais, Balkarians,<sup>2</sup> Kalmyks, Karelians, Avars, Darghinians, Kasi-kumukhians, Kyurinians, Kumyks, <sup>3</sup> Mari, Chuvashes, Votyaks, Volga Germans, Buryats, Yakuts, etc.).

The policy of tsarism, the policy of the landlords and the bourgeoisie towards these peoples, was to kill whatever germs of statehood existed among them, to mutilate their culture, to restrict their languages, to keep them in ignorance, and lastly, as far as possible to Russify them. The result of this policy was the underdevelopment and political backwardness of these peoples.

Now that the landlords and the bourgeoisie have been overthrown and Soviet power has been proclaimed by the masses of the people in these countries too, the Party's task is to help the labouring masses of the non-Great-Russian peoples to catch up with central Russia, which has forged ahead, to help them:

a) to develop and strengthen their Soviet statehood in forms corresponding to the national complexion of these peoples;

b) to set up their courts, administration, economic organisations and organs of power, functioning in the native languages and staffed with local people familiar with the manner of life and the mentality of the local population;

c) to develop their press, schools, theatres, recreation clubs, and cultural and educational institutions generally, functioning in the native languages.

2. If from the 65,000,000 non-Great-Russian population we exclude the Ukraine, Byelorussia, a small part of Azerbaijan, and Armenia, which in some degree have been through the period of industrial capitalism, there remains a population of about 25,000,000, mainly Tyurks (Turkestan, the greater part of Azerbaijan, Da-ghestan, the Highlanders, Tatars, Bashkirs, Kirghiz, etc.), who have not gone through any capitalist development, have little or no industrial proletariat, and in

most cases have retained their pastoral economy and patriarchal-tribal manner of life (Kirghizia, Bashkiria, North Caucasus), or who have not gone beyond the primitive forms of a semi-patriarchal, semi-feudal manner of life (Azerbaijan, the Crimea, etc.) but have already been drawn into the common channel of Soviet development.

The Party's task in relation to the labouring masses of these peoples (in addition to the task indicated in Point 1) is to help them to eliminate the survivals of patriarchal-feudal relations and to draw them into the work of building a Soviet economy on the basis of Soviets of toiling peasants, by creating among these peoples strong communist organisations capable of utilising the experience of the Russian workers and peasants in Soviet-economic construction and, at the same time, capable of taking into account in their construction work all the specific features of the economic situation, the class structure, culture and manner of life of each nationality concerned, while refraining from mechanically transplanting from central Russia economic measures that are suitable only for a different, higher stage of economic development.

3. If from the 25,000,000, mainly Tyurk, population we exclude Azerbaijan, the greater part of Turkestan, the Tatars (Volga and Crimean), Bukhara, Khiva, Daghestan, part of the Highlanders (Kabardinians, Cherkesses and Balkarians) and several other nomad nationalities who have already become settled and have firmly established themselves in a definite territory, there remain about 6,000,000 Kirghiz, Bashkirs, Chechens, Ossetians and Ingushes, whose lands had until recently served as objects of colonisation by Russian settlers, who have managed to take from them the best arable land and are steadily pushing them into the barren desert.

The policy of tsarism, the policy of the landlords and the bourgeoisie, was to colonise these districts as much as possible with kulak elements from among Russian peasants and Cossacks, converting the latter into a reliable support for dominant-nation strivings. The result of this policy was the gradual extinction of the native population (Kirghiz, Bashkirs) who had been driven into the wilderness.

The Party's task in relation to the labouring masses of these nationalities (apart from the tasks mentioned in Points 1 and 2) is to unite their efforts with those of the labouring masses of the local Russian population in the struggle for liberation from the kulaks in general, and from the rapacious Great-Russian kulaks in particular, to help them by every possible means to throw off the yoke of the kulak colonisers and in this way supply them with arable land necessary for a human existence.



4. In addition to the above-mentioned nations and nationalities which have a definite class structure and occupy a definite territory, there still exist in the R.S.F.S.R. floating national groups, national minorities, interspersed among compact majorities of other nationalities, and in most cases having neither a definite class structure nor a definite territory (Letts, Estonians, Poles, Jews and other national minorities). The policy of tsarism was to obliterate these minorities by every possible means, even by pogroms (the anti-Jewish pogroms).

Now that national privileges have been abolished, that equality of rights for nations has been put into effect, and that the right of national minorities to free national development is guaranteed by the very character of the Soviet system, the Party's task in relation to the labouring masses of these national groups is to help them to make the fullest use of their guaranteed right to free development.

5. The communist organisations in the border regions are developing under somewhat peculiar conditions which retard the normal growth of the Party in these regions. On the one hand, the Great-Russian Communists who are working-in the border regions and who grew up during the existence of a "dominant" nation and did not suffer national oppression, often underrate the importance of specific national features in their Party work, or completely ignore them; they do not, in their work, take into account the specific features of the class structure, culture, manner of life and past history of the nationality concerned, and thus vulgarise and distort the Party's policy on the national question. This leads to a deviation from communism to a dominant-nation and colonialist outlook, to Great-Russian chauvinism. On the other hand, the Communists from the local native population who experienced the harsh period of national oppression, and who have not yet fully freed themselves from the haunting memories of that period, often exaggerate the importance of specific national features in their Party work, leave the class interests of the working people in the shade, or simply confuse the interests of the working people of the nation concerned with the "national" interests of that nation; they are unable to separate the former from the latter and base their Party work on them. That, in its turn, leads to a deviation from communism towards bourgeois-democratic nationalism, which sometimes assumes the form of Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism 4 (in the East).

This congress, emphatically condemning both these deviations as harmful and dangerous to the cause of communism, considers it necessary to point out the special danger and special harmfulness of the first-mentioned deviation, the deviation towards a dominant nation, colonialist outlook. The congress reminds the Party that unless colonialist and nationalist survivals in its ranks are overcome it will be impossible to build up in the border regions strong,

genuinely communist organisations which are linked with the masses and which unite in their ranks the proletarian elements of the local native and Russian populations on the basis of internationalism. The congress therefore considers that the elimination of nationalist and, primarily, of colonialist vacillations in communism is one of the Party's most important tasks in the border regions.

6. As a result of the successes achieved on the war fronts, particularly after the liquidation of Wrangel, in some of the backward border regions where there is little or no industrial proletariat, there has been an increased influx of petty-bourgeois nationalist elements into the Party for the sake of a career. Taking into consideration the Party's position as the actual ruling force, these elements usually disguise themselves in communist colours and often pour into the Party in entire groups, carrying with them a spirit of thinly disguised chauvinism and disintegration, while the generally weak Party organisations in the border regions are not always able to resist the temptation to "expand" the Party by accepting new members.

Calling for a resolute struggle against all pseudo-communist elements that attach themselves to the Party of the proletariat, the congress warns the Party against "expansion" through accepting intellectual, petty-bourgeois nationalist elements. The congress considers that the ranks of the Party in the border regions should be reinforced chiefly from the proletarians, the poor, and the labouring peasants of these regions, and that at the same time work should be conducted to strengthen the Party organisations in the border regions by improving the quality of their membership.

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**Note**

1. The theses: "The Immediate Tasks of the Party in the National Question" were discussed at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the R.C.P.(B.) on February 5, 1921, and a commission headed by V. I. Lenin and J. V. Stalin was appointed to make the final draft. The theses were published in Pravda, No. 29, of February 10, 1921; they were also published as a separate pamphlet in the same year.
2. The last seven nationalities are united in the "Highland" group.
3. The last five nationalities are united in the "Daghestan-ian" group.
4. Pan-Islamism — a reactionary religious and political ideology which arose in the second half of the XIX century in Sultan Turkey among the Turkish landlords, bourgeoisie, and clergy. Later on it spread among the propertied classes of the other Moslem peoples. Pan-Islamism professed the unification in one whole of all the peoples who worship Islam (Moslem religion). With the help of Pan-Islamism the ruling classes of the Moslem peoples were striving to strengthen their positions and to stifle the revolutionary movement of the toiling peoples of the East.

The aim of Pan-Turkism is to subject all the Turkish peoples to Turkish rule. It arose during the Balkan wars of 1912-13. During the war of 1914-18 it developed into an extremely aggressive and chauvinistic ideology. In Russia, after the October Socialist Revolution, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism were utilised by counter-revolutionary elements for the purpose of combating the Soviet power.

Subsequently the Anglo-American imperialists utilised Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism as their agency in the preparation for an imperialist war against the U.S.S.R. and the People's Democracies and for the purpose of suppressing the national liberation movement.