

Why Socialists oppose the Vietcong

Vietnam is the latest of the leftwingers' adopted fatherlands. Before Vietnam it was Algeria, before that it was Cuba, and so on back to Russia. This support for the Vietcong does not depend on what is actually going on in Vietnam, but is rather an expression of the leftwingers' dissatisfaction with certain aspects of modern society. To that extent it is irrational.

Nevertheless those who support the Vietcong imagine that they are Marxists and it is in pseudo-Marxist terms that they rationalise their support for this nationalist movement whose aim is to set up a state capitalist regime in the South similar to that in the North. The Vietcong is not a socialist movement, and by no stretch of the imagination can it be said to have anything to do with Socialism. But since those who shout for "Victory for the Vietcong" have dragged in Marx and Socialism, we must at least refute their arguments and state why Socialists do not support the Vietcong. Leftwingers use two basic arguments. First, that socialists should support any movement, even if it is not socialist, that weakens "American imperialism" which they say is the main threat to social revolution throughout the world, just as Marx supported moves against Tsarist Russia. Second, and this comes from Lenin, the Vietcong and workers in the West are fighting the same enemy—imperialism—and so we should support each other.

It is true that in the middle of the nineteenth century Marx saw Tsarist Russia, the "gendarme of Europe", as a great threat to the further social progress of mankind. He felt that if Russia overran western Europe it would crush the democratic movement and put the social revolution back for years. Therefore, he was ready to support any moves that might weaken the power of Tsarist Russia. He supported Britain, France and Turkey in the Crimean war. He stood for an independent Polish state, to be a buffer between Russia and the rest of Europe. He did all he could to expose the pro-Russia policies and intrigues of Lord Palmerston. These may seem odd activities for a socialist—and, indeed, we have criticised Marx for them. Marx argued that before Socialism is possible society must pass through the capitalist stage. But this is no automatic process; it depends on the outcome of human struggles. Russia was "reactionary" in the proper sense of the word in that it was a threat to the development even of capitalism. Marx opposed Tsarist Russia, not because it was the strongest capitalist power, but because it was the strongest anti-capitalist power.

Looking back now we can see that Marx was over-optimistic as to the prospects of a socialist revolution in Europe. In time the capitalist states of western Europe grew stronger and the Tsarist Empire weaker, finally to be destroyed along with Austro-Hungary and Imperial Germany in the first world war. Before that even, Russia in a bid to keep its armed forces up to date had become indebted to the capitalists of France and Belgium. Well before the turn of the century we can say that conditions had changed since Marx's day. Capitalism was firmly established as the new world order. Russia was no longer a threat. The task of socialists was even clearer: to oppose all wars and nationalist movements and to work to build up a world-wide workers' movement with Socialism as its aim. This has always been the policy of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

Today capitalism quite clearly dominates the world, in Russia and China as well as in the West. To talk of "American imperialism" as the main threat is to play the game of state capitalist Russia and China. Every up-and-coming capitalist power finds the world already carved up by the established powers. If it is to expand its influence it must clash with these powers, as Germany, Japan, Italy and Russia have found and as China is now finding. All of them, in their time, have beaten the "anti-imperialist" drum, that is, have opposed the domination of the world by Britain and France and later America. Mussolini talked of Italy as a "proletarian nation" in a class war against the "bourgeois nations". Nazi Germany stirred up Arab and Latin American nationalism. Japan advanced the slogan of "Asia for the Asians". Russia, too, and now China, like Germany before, vociferously denounce Anglo-French-American imperialism.

Naturally socialists, wittingly or unwittingly, do not allow themselves to be used as tools of some capitalist state, as most of those who shout for the Vietcong are (some know full well what they are doing). Socialists are opposed to world capitalism and to governments everywhere.

Lenin could not believe it when he learnt that the German Social Democrats had voted for the war credits in 1914. Later he worked out a theory to try to explain it, his theory of imperialism. Basically, he argued that as profits were greater in the undeveloped parts of the world capitalists were eager to invest there; this brought the capitalist states into continual conflict over the division of the world. Part of the "super-profits" of this imperialist exploitation were used to pay higher wages and provide social reforms for sections of the workers at home. They were thus led away from revolutionary socialism towards opportunism.

This theory is mistaken on nearly all counts. It has not been proved that the rate of profit was higher in the colonial territories. There is a much simpler explanation for capitalist expansion into the undeveloped world in the forty or so years before the first world war: the need to secure sources of raw material for the expanding industries at home, and then to secure strategic points to protect these sources and the trade routes to and from them. As for Lenin's explanation of reformism it is the purest nonsense. To suggest that workers share in the proceeds of colonial exploitation is to reject the Marxian theory of wages which says that wages are the price of labour-power. But this argument was an essential part of Lenin's theory. For on it he based his strategy of support for anti-imperialist nationalist movements. If they succeeded, he believed, they would deprive the imperialist state concerned of its super-profits and so also of its ability to buy off its workers. Deprived of their share the workers' standard of living would drop and they would once again become revolutionary, affording a chance for a Bolshevik-type vanguard to seize power.

This is typical of Lenin's thinking, to rely on some factor outside of the development of the working class itself to create the conditions for social revolution. It fits in well with his contempt for the abilities of workers and his view that they should be manipulated by a self-appointed vanguard. Needless to say this short-cut to Socialism is just as much a dead-end as all the others.

Of course defeat in Vietnam, and the whole of South East Asia, would have serious consequences for American capitalism. That is why they are fighting. It would

deprive them of access to many raw materials, but more important it would shift the balance of power around the Pacific in favour of Chinese state capitalism. It is not true that the Vietcong and workers are fighting the same enemy. The Vietcong are fighting American capitalism. The interests of workers are opposed not only to American capitalism but to capitalism everywhere including Russia and China. Victory for the Vietcong, as we have already explained, would shift the world balance of power from America to other capitalist powers. This is not something that is in the interests of workers, or something that they should support. There is no issue at stake in Vietnam worth a single worker's life.

The Socialist Party, then, is opposed to the Vietnam war, as to all wars. We do not take sides. Nor are we hypocrites like those who cynically use all normal people's abhorrence of the burning of women and children (as if the Vietcong did not use flame-throwers) to get them to support one side in this war. Such people do not really want an end to the killing; they want it to go on till the side they support has won. Let them at least be honest and stop trying to fool people with their phoney anti-war sentiments.

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