

SEIZE THE TIME on

The Principal Contradiction



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SEIZE THE TIME ON THE PRINCIPAL CONTRADICTION

"There are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions."

-Mao Tse Tung "On Contradiction"

Seize the Time (STT) believes that the principal contradiction in the United States is between workers of oppressed nationalities** and the U.S. Imperialist Bourgeoisie. This has been our position since late 1976. Comrades have raised a number of questions concerning why and how we reached this position. We will briefly try to answer these questions.

Between 1973-76 we held that the principal contradiction was between the bourgeoisie and oppressed nationalities. There are several reasons why we held this formulation. We saw the principal contradiction as being "the sharpest, most intense contradiction within a process or society." This was an incorrect characterization. Mao states that it is the most influential contradiction, not necessarily the sharpest. Even though we had an incorrect understanding, our formulation held true for the post-WWII period. The struggles of the oppressed nationalities from the late fifties and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement to Wounded Knee '73 profoundly shook the entire country. During this period, the world witnesses Selma, Watts, the uprising around King's assassination, the Chicano Moratorium, Tierra Amarilla, Attica, Alcatraz and the Trail of Broken Treaties. Organizations such as Brown Berets, Black Berets, Red Guard, African Liberation Support Committee, La Raza Unida, Congress of African Peoples, Republic of New Africa, American Indian Movement, League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Kokua Hawaii, Young Lords Party, Los Siete and the Soledad Brothers were born of this period. Many of these forces took leadership and/or were united with the Black Panther Party, which until 1971 played a vanguard role within the U.S. revolutionary movement. These organizations were the basis of the most progressive communist organizations today. Even more importantly, events such as the urban rebellions; ethnic studies struggles; Farmworkers; ALD activities that united over a hundred thousand Afro-Americans in support of African Liberation and anti-imperialist demands; Seattle trade union struggles and Wounded Knee all showed that the entire masses of oppressed nationality people were taking up the revolutionary struggle for equality, democratic rights and often self-determination. The East Wind Organization sums up the period as follows:

"The revolutionary national movements of the 60's directly involved literally millions of Blacks, Chicanos, Puertorriquenos, Indians, and Pacific and Asian-American peoples in anti-imperialist--revolutionary motions; it constituted a gigantic mass movement open to and embracing concepts such as liberation, freedom, overthrowing imperialism, armed struggle, etc. The revolutionary national movements, through wave upon wave of ever intensifying and spreading offensives, over a period of 15 years exposed the nature of imperialism in the US almost as fully as the struggles of the

**The term "nationalities" includes nations and national minorities.

fifteen years exposed the nature of imperialism in the US almost as fully as the struggle of the Vietnamese and Indochinese peoples, (with which our national movements were closely allied, subjectively and objectively). It shook up all the major institutional arrangements of this society from the bottom up: politics, culture, economy, military, health, human services, education, etc. It was a key factor in incapacitating US imperialism's ability to wage war in Indochina, accelerating its historic defeat which, in turn, ushered in a new period of decisive decline of imperialism within the US society; inspiring anti-imperialist movements among whites, women's movement for equality, clandestine armed struggle, a new revolutionary workers movement, and, most importantly, the new anti-imperialist communist movement in the US.

"Mao summed up Black people's struggle in 1968 as 'a storm such as has never taken place in the history of that country. It showed that an extremely powerful revolutionary force is latent in the more than twenty million Black people.'

"How about in the 1970's? While the national movements, faced with repression, cooptation, disorganizing reformist tactics of the imperialist bourgeoisie, as well as internal weaknesses and betrayals on the part of its bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois leadership, have entered a period of regrouping, consolidation, and search for a winning strategy and a correct ideology. National movements are and will remain a powerful basic motive force for US revolution.

"The national struggle for oppressed nationality peoples and the proletarian struggle of oppressed nationality (TW) workers are playing a key, cutting-edge role within the overall struggle. The movement for Puerto Rican independence; the struggle of Indians for sovereignty; the fight to free Black political prisoners, for solidarity with African liberation, for the right of political secession, equality and land in the Black Belt South; the Chicano struggle; the intensified waves of fighting movements among the Pacific and Asian American national minorities (International Hotel, Chinatown Childcare, Resthaven, Marcos, Asian studies, Little Tokyo, etc.). All of these struggles, under anti-imperialist or communist leadership to a significant degree, show the vitality and the revolutionary significance of the revolutionary national movements in the United States."

Sieze the Time no longer holds that our previous formulation covers the period after the Wounded Knee uprising. Beginning with the Nixon regime, the State greatly intensified its effort to smash mass movements and their revolutionary leadership. While every sector was subject to repression, the State focused on the Black Liberation

movement and in particular, the Black Panther Party. The assassination of Fred Hampton and the attack on the Los Angeles Chapter introduced the national campaign to arrest, imprison, exile or assassinate all Black revolutionaries, leaving especially the BPP subject to its internal weaknesses as well as defenseless to attack. This situation led to the eventual disintegration of the BPP in 1971. The campaign extended to Chicano and Puerto Rican revolutionaries as well, setting up a period of strategic retreat by the mass movements and their revolutionary leadership. With Wounded Knee '73, the State turned its vicious police machinery against the American Indian Movement in particular, but also to all surviving revolutionary nationalist and progressive groups, finalizing the retreat by disrupting white radical and women's groups, TW groups like RNA, Crusade for Justice, Survival of American Indians, La Raza Unida, League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Brown and Black Berets. All of these either split, disintegrated or became seriously weakened by state repression in the form of legal battles, surveillance, exile and assassination.

With one revolutionary movement so weakened and the mass movements temporarily subdued, the wavering elements within the masses rapidly dropped out of the national movements. The "lumpen" so glorified by the BPP quickly resumed its role as the "bourgeoisie from below" pimping, pushing dope and ripping off youth and workers. The opportunist petit-bourgeoisie, frightened by the repression, denied and denounced the revolutionary movement and were either shut up or bought off.

As a result of this desertion and our forced retreat, the burden of struggle has fallen on the working people of the oppressed nationalities. Whether it is the struggle to prevent the elimination of vital social services such as childcare for working mothers, against police brutality, for the maintenance of affirmative action programs or for land reform, it has been the TW working masses that have taken the lead. At the same time, workers from oppressed nationalities are not only providing leadership in affirmative action struggles at the workplaces, but are also taking leadership in workplace struggles not directly connected with the national struggles, such as those for union democracy and health/safety. The East Wind Organization analyzes this situation well:

"The proletarian struggle of TW workers has intensified qualitatively in the 70's. Numerous examples such as Farah, Major Safe, Oneita, Molders, Jung Sai, Farmworkers, Gouverneur, Martin Luther King and Resthaven hospitals, etc., show the beginnings of a mass workers' movement that is not only staunch and militant, but also has clear links with the national movement, and has raised political demands and shown openness to ML ideas and leadership. In these and many other struggles we see a substantial beginning of a mass revolutionary workers movement under ML leadership--something we cannot say for the struggle of the proletariat as a whole.

"This qualitative intensification of the proletarian struggle of oppressed nationality workers is of strategic importance, for they are an integral part of both of the basic motive forces for the US revolution: the proletarian struggle of the multinational working class, and the revolutionary national struggle of the colonies, oppressed nations, and oppressed national minorities. As such, their struggle under ML leadership can move us closer to achieving unity within the working class, and building of the strategic alliance of the proletarian and national movements."

Sieze the Time unites with East Wind's analysis, but would add that: In addition to the strategic role that TW workers play in the national and labor movements, TW WORKERS ALSO HOLD THAT STRATEGIC ROLE WITHIN THE WOMENS MOVEMENT. Besides struggling against male supremacy, a critical role of communists is to bring proletarian leadership to the womens movement. TW women facing triple jeopardy have played a leading role in linking all of the three great movements through their struggles. The struggles at workplaces such as Jung Sai, Oneita, Farah and within the electronic industry all point to this critical area of organizing. Communists must take a strong stand in organizing such basic industries as electronics and food processing where TW women are the critical force. We recognize that, as in the national movements, the demands of the women's movement cut across different classes. Given the history of the women's movement within the US, it is even more important to struggle to give it proletarian and ML leadership. Oppressed nationality workers are increasingly bringing proletarian consciousness, internationalism and strengthening fusion between communists and the three great movements.

In all sectors, workers from oppressed nationalities are leading, building and participating in the rising mass movements. Often it is these workers who are infusing these struggles with revolutionary anti-imperialist and ML consciousness. This is the case within the Butchers Union, International Association of Machinists, UAW, USW and the SEIU for example. These workers steeled in struggle in the national, womens and labor movements see the importance of strong working class leadership in all progressive movements. They clearly are the interpenetration of all three movements and that, in fact, recognize that the three movements are all active fronts of revolutionary class struggle within the US. Oppressed nationality workers in the Southwest are taking up the land struggle (Chilili, Tierra Amarilla). Workers in California and elsewhere are beginning to take the struggle to defeat the "Bakke decision" which would pave the way for the loss of affirmative action, special admissions and community controlled social services. The united front against US imperialism in South Africa is drawing in needed support from the working class.

Yet, STT will claim no easy victories for the movement. Fusion is advancing slowly among workers and activists of all nationalities. While it is most advanced among TW workers, struggles like Bakke and in support of Azanian liberation lack sufficient proletarian leadership and participation. In these struggle, students are again beginning to play

a leading role in mass movements. This is a good sign. However, one of the weaknesses of the 60's was that many of the national and anti-imperialist struggles were student led along with non-working class strata and other class elements. Because of this leadership, these struggles faltered at critical points. Communists need to intensify their efforts to have workers take up and give leadership to such struggles as Bakke, South Africa, Chilili and political prisoners. We do not envision the revisionist and racist "Worker-Student Alliance" put forth by the PL during the final days of SDS, but the militant alliance formed by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers where students, and community under revolutionary working class leadership fought for both national and labor demands against Henry Ford and the entire imperialist bourgeoisie of Detroit.

Given the vacillation of the non-proletarian classes of most of the national movements, the lower level of consciousness and struggle of oppressor nation workers, the strategic position of oppressed nationality workers in all three movements and their leading role in the mass movements and advancing fusion between communism and the mass movements, we strongly believe that our position on the principal contradiction is correct. Our position is not perfect. It does not adequately deal with the fact that the Indian National Liberation struggle is at the leading edge of revolution within the U.S. but it is at this time largely a struggle waged by non-working class forces. Our formulation does not attempt to deny the strategic role of the Indian struggle for independence. The question of Indian Peoples is too often batted back and forth among communist circles who, because of their own ignorance and chauvinism might apply any sort of formula to Indian Peoples. The status of Indian Peoples is a special question of: colonialism under imperialism; qualitatively different forms of national oppression within the U.S. (genocide, puppet governments, treaties, jurisdiction for instance); military strategy; fusion with the Indian struggle; objective (anti-imperialist) versus subjective (bourgeois democratic) character of the Indian struggle; total spectrum of Indian peoples i.e. oppressed nations, colonies, rudimentary nations, national minority, dispersion etc.

While we will not mechanically subordinate Indian Peoples to our analysis of the principal contradiction in the U.S., we will give our support to the Indian demand for independence as we do to the demand for independence of the Puerto Rican people. Presently, we see our job as carrying out those demands to communists and to the three great movements regardless of whether whether either peoples choose to become directly involved with socialist revolution in the U.S.

In general, we think that our position accurately reflects the objective conditions, points to what tactical direction we must undertake in implementing our central task of party building and identifying the single contradiction which most influences all other

contradictions. We strongly reaffirm the position that we took in the November '76 issue of STT that the principal contradiction within the U.S. is that which exists between the workers of oppressed nationalities and the bourgeoisie of U.S. imperialism.

In this next section Seize the Time wishes to respond to the following criticisms of our formulation:

1. Seize the Time liquidates the National Question.
2. STT liquidates the Class Question.
3. The principal contradiction does not shift with time and circumstances but remains a constant.

We hold that these positions are fundamentally incorrect.

Those who hold to the first position usually focus on Lenin's position in "Report on the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions" that the "characteristic feature of imperialism consists in the whole world as we now see, being divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations." This quote is used to support the contention that the principal contradiction anywhere in the world is between oppressed and oppressor nations. This is an un-Marxist, thoroughly idealist viewpoint.

Lenin states in the "Right of Nations to Self Determination" that "the categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within definite historical limits and if it refers to a particular country (eg. the national program for a given country) that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others in the same historical epoch." The error of blindly applying formulas to a specific situation without examining the concrete conditions has occurred far too frequently during the history of our revolutionary movement.

Society and conditions must be viewed dynamically, when analyzing the principal contradiction within a society. It must be done within a given time period. We fully recognize the leading role of national movements from the end of WWII to the present. However, objectively, the national movements of today are qualitatively different from those national struggles of the 60's and before. The alignment of class forces within those movements is qualitatively different. Ever increasing numbers of communists are emerging to take leadership of the present struggles and workers from those movements are increasingly taking the lead in tying the different mass movements together into a powerful movement against imperialism in all its aspects. To mechanically apply Lenin's formula is to see the world as something frozen, liquidating the differences between countries of the Three Worlds and seeing countries within the imperialist sphere as being the same. Is the principal contradiction in China, Viet Nam, Mozambique, France and Sweden the contradiction between oppressed and oppressor nations? We must not be lazy but must analyze each situation within the given time period and come to whatever conclusions that period demands.

"Unwilling to carry on systematic and thorough investigation and study of the specific condition inside and outside the country, the province, county or district, they issue orders on no other basis than their scanty knowledge and 'it must be so because it seems so to me.' Does not this subjectivist style exist among a great many comrades?" Mao, Reform Our Study, SWMTT, Vol. III, p. 19

This polemic is clearly not directed at comrades who have made the concrete analysis of conditions and still hold that the principal contradiction in the U.S. is between oppressed nationalities and the bourgeoisie of U.S. imperialism. We disagree with these comrades, given our understanding of the social forces within the U.S., but respect their position and realize that the correct line will be found through struggle around it and its test in practice.

Comrades who hold the second criticism base their analysis on Mao's position in "On Contradiction" that "in capitalist society the two forces in contradiction, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, form the principal contradiction." The U.S. is demonstrably a capitalist country. It is also an extremely complex imperialist country with complex interpenetration of struggles, forces and classes. As stated earlier, we attempt to utilize Lenin's approach and look at the principal contradiction dynamically and within a given time frame. This is the method that Mao used to analyze the changing of the principal contradiction within the changing condition of China. We have tried to re-emphasize that it is easy to use this or that formulation given us by past leaders but fail to seriously apply the lessons behind the formulation. Mao and Lenin succeeded in revolution because they studied well the conditions and forces in their nations; analyzed them; summarized their analysis into theory and, most importantly, tested their theories in practice. This is the method of revolutionary science.

The claim is made that our formulation liquidates the Class Question. Far from liquidating, however, we uphold the position that the U.S. working class will be the leading revolutionary class in the struggle to make revolution in this society. The revolutionary potential of the working class was amply expressed during the '30's when there existed a revolutionary communist party to lead it. The principal contradiction between 1930 and WWII was that of the U.S. working class and the U.S. imperialist bourgeoisie, because it was in fact the contradiction that most influenced all other contradictions.

In order for the working class to again express its revolutionary potential, STT feels that, in this period, the subjective factor is critical. In concrete terms this means that communists must have success in fusing with and leading substantial elements of the white working class. Currently the white working class is the sector of the working class where fusion is advancing the slowest. That white workers also constitute the largest sector better not get by any of us. But we cannot hold the pessimist view that white workers are predominantly reactionary. We have witnessed too many examples

of white workers fighting for real democracy in the unions and practicing internationalism with peoples of the Third World (Zimbabwe, Chile, South Africa). We do, however, fully recognize the deep roots of white and male supremacy and their material base within the white sector and, therefore, the extremely critical work that communists must accomplish in order to win that sector over to revolutionary, anti-imperialist consciousness. To abandon white workers or to make little of real divisions within the working class is to invite fascism and open the door for the most reactionary section of the imperialist bourgeoisie to thoroughly "liquidate the class question."

The final criticism is that the principal contradiction does not shift with changing conditions. We believe that this is clearly not the case and to think thusly is to deny history, not merely of the past fifty years but the entire history of the U.S. from when the principal contradiction was between U.S. settler colonists and British imperialism through the Civil War period when it became Northern bourgeoisie vs Southern bourgeoisie, through the consolidation of monopoly capitalism when it was U.S. colonialism vs indigenous peoples and oppressed nationalities and so on until the present where the most influential contradiction of this period that affects all other contradictions is that of oppressed nationality workers vs. imperialist bourgeoisie of the U.S.

Mao: "The relationship between the principal contradiction and the non-principal contradictions presents a complicated picture...In another situation, the contradictions change position."

It is critical to grasp, at any time, what the principal contradiction is. Mao again:

"Therefore, in studying any complex process in which there are two or more contradictions, we must devote every effort to finding its principal contradiction. Once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can readily be solved. This is the method Marx taught us in his study of capitalist society. Likewise Lenin and Stalin taught us when they studied imperialism and the general crisis of capitalism and when they studied Soviet economy. There are thousands of scholars and men of action who do not understand it, and the result is that, lost in a fog, they are unable to get to the heart of a problem and naturally cannot find a way to resolve its contradictions."

CONCLUSION

Seize the Time believes that in analyzing the principal contradiction it is important to begin by studying objective conditions. Voluntarism (the error of making what you want, what is) is a frequent error committed when analysing contradictions within a society. We believe that we are at a critical point in history where revolution

could go either in the direction of a number of secession struggles or an overall movement toward socialist revolution. We have no crystal ball and it is conceivable that within the next few years the principal contradiction within the U.S. will change. The Comintern in 1930 faced a similar situation when it analyzed the Black National Question and the role of the CPUSA:

"Whether the rebellion of the Negroes is to be the outcome of a general revolutionary situation in the United States, whether it is to originate in the whirlpool of decisive fights for power by the working class, for proletarian dictatorship or whether, on the contrary, the Negro Rebellion will be the prelude of gigantic struggles for power by the American proletariat, cannot be foretold now."

The same could be said today when looking at the revolutionary national movements as a whole. What is clear is that by correctly grasping the principal contradiction, by uniting ML's around correct ideology and political line, by winning over the advanced and by building the new fighting communist party, we will lead the revolutionary masses of the three great movements to liberation. The future is bright, the road is tortuous.
La luta continua. Hasta la victoria siempre. HAU!!

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