SHOULD WE REVISE THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL SELF DETERMINATION? – A REPLY TO MIKE MACNAIR

WHAT IS LENIN’S CONCEPTION OF NATIONAL SELF DETERMINATION?

Mike Macnair has argued in three articles that we should be prepared to make extensive modification of Lenin’s understanding of self-determination. The first two articles will be tackled briefly because of their primarily historical character and instead this reply will concentrate on studying the third.(1) In order that we do not merely respond to Macnair in a reactive manner it is necessary to outline what we consider to be the major aspects of Lenin’s understanding of self-determination. This will enable us to compare and contrast our views with those of Macnair. Lenin’s major articles about self-determination were written during the First World War because it seemed that inter-imperialist conflict had compromised the possibility to realise the principle of emancipation of small nations like Belgium. Consequently, how could Belgium be liberated from German domination without siding with the Allies? These types of complications did not undermine Lenin’s attempt to connect the aim of national self- determination as an integral aspect of the struggle for world socialist revolution. It would not be possible to realise this principle in a progressive manner if it could be argued that this meant the struggle for the demise of imperialism and capitalism was actually being undermined.

Lenin outlined his views in a brief theses: ‘The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination’.(2) Lenin outlines how Marxism should support the right of oppressed nations to secede from dominant imperialist formations and so realise national self-determination. However the aim of self-determination does not imply political support for the isolation of nations and instead we should advocate nations integrating with each other in larger units. Indeed, self-determination may take the form of federation between a formerly dominant nation and oppressed people: “In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, i.e. their freedom to secede.”(3) In other words the aim of self-determination is justified in terms of the principles of political democracy and the overcoming of national domination and oppression but this development should ultimately be an expression of the possibilities for the voluntary unity of nations in terms of the realisation of international socialism. This means that whilst the proletariat of the oppressor nation should strive to bring about the emancipation of all nationally oppressed groups by ‘their’ imperialist nation state, the working class of the oppressed nations should strive to bring about unity with the proletariat of the oppressor nations. An important aspect of this unity is that the process of national self-determination should be about influencing the political development of the oppressor and oppressed nations towards socialism. The bourgeoisie will attempt to utilise the struggle against national oppression in order to uphold their hegemony but this must be challenged by the international struggle of the working class. The working class must become the leadership of the national struggle and in this manner challenge the hegemonic claims of the bourgeoisie.

It could be argued that the national struggle becomes an ideological deception which is to the advantage of the bourgeoisie, but this prospect is denied if the working class upholds its distinctive class demands: “In practice, the proletariat can retain its independence only by subordinating the struggle for all democratic demands, not excluding the demand for a republic, to its revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.”(4) Lenin is not arguing that all national struggles involve the development of struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class, but what he is insisting upon is that the workers uphold their political independence and ability to challenge the hegemony of the capitalists. This expression of political initiative will include the development of unity between the working class of the oppressor and oppressed nations.

The point that Lenin was emphatically making in a world based on the domination of oppressed nations by the imperialist powers was that the national struggle was not a diversion from the struggle for socialism. Instead the aspiration for self-determination was an integral part of the process of the realisation of the undermining of capitalism and the advance of a revolutionary alternative. In this context he was opposing the tendency for Rosa Luxemburg and Bukharin to argue that self-determination had become unrealistic in the era of imperialism. Lenin agrees that in the era of imperialist war the primary task is to develop class struggle against the domination of the imperialist powers, but this does not mean that national wars for self-determination could not develop in the future based on the results of the inter-imperialist conflict. Therefore the situation of inter-imperialist war could generate national wars that become part of the struggle to overcome the domination of imperialism: “Third, even in Europe national wars in the imperialist epoch cannot be regarded as impossible. The “epoch of imperialism” made the present war an imperialist one and it inevitably engenders new imperialist wars (until the triumph of socialism). This “epoch” has made the politics of the great powers thoroughly imperialist, but it by no means precludes national wars on the part of, say, small (annexed or nationally oppressed) countries against the imperialist powers, just as it does not preclude large-scale national movement in Eastern Europe.”(5)

In other words it is dogmatic to consider that because the dominant tendency is for inter-imperialist conflict to occur we should then conclude that the possibility of national wars for self-determination are not possible. Instead the very outcome of the present inter-imperialist war could be the development of new national struggles. It is true that genuine national war during the period of inter-imperialist war is difficult to develop but this does not mean that the era of struggles to realise self-determination are over. Hence national conflicts could be part of the very process of international revolution. Furthermore, we have to remember that the colonies have not been liberated from imperialist domination this will mean that these countries will become an important aspect of the struggle for self-determination. Consequently, it is dogmatic to assume that the international class struggle has replaced the significance of national conflicts. Specifically, Russia is a country that represses many nations, and the demise of Tsarism will generate the demand for self-determination. The same point could be made about the British and French colonial empires. Hence the strategic task of Marxists is to connect these repressed national aspirations to the struggle for world socialist revolution. In contrast it would be dogmatic and ineffective to deny the continued importance of national struggles.

Lenin emphasises his standpoint in the article: “The Discussion On Self-determination Summed Up”.(6) Lenin contends that the Polish comrades led by Rosa Luxemburg have argued that the economic tasks of developing socialism means that political questions like self-determination has become irrelevant. He rejects what he considers to be an expression of imperialist Economism and instead contends: “There is every sign that imperialism will leave its successor, socialism, a heritage of less democratic frontiers, a number of annexations in Europe and in other parts of the world. Is it to be supposed that victorious socialism, restoring and implementing full democracy all along the line, will refrain from democratically demarcating state frontiers and ignore the “sympathies” of the population?”(7) However, it could be argued that the civil war after the October revolution led to the effective rejection of this democratic policy in favour of the bureaucratic assimilation of the various oppressed nations of the Russian empire into the newly formed Soviet Union. Indeed, Lenin became concerned about the repressive process involved in relation to the incorporation of Georgia into the USSR. Consequently, the original Leninist national policy had not been realised, and instead the following approach of Lenin concerning the voluntary unity of the nations was rejected. Lenin argued in 1915 that the frontiers of the democratic state of socialism will be organised on the following basis: “In actual fact its frontiers will be delineated democratically, ie, in accordance with the will and “sympathies” of the population. Capitalism rides roughshod over these sympathies, adding more obstacles to the rapprochement of nations. Socialism by organising production without class oppression, by ensuring the well-being of all members of the state, gives full play to the “sympathies” of the population, thereby promoting and greatly accelerating the drawing together and fusion of the nations.”(8) However this admirable programme was not realised in the conditions of the civil war. This meant there was not a genuine democratic process of the coming together of nations in relation the formation of the Soviet Union. Instead coercion and military control was utilised in order to facilitate the development of a unitary state. Furthermore, Lenin’s ultimate criteria for the formation of a democratic state, the right to secede and self-determination, was effectively diluted and repudiated. Hence the USSR was a unitary state that denied the right of national separation. The original principles of Lenin’s conception of self-determination were rejected as the result of the outcome of the civil war.

Lenin outlines important arguments refuting the apparent indifference of the Polish Social Democrats with regards to the question of annexation: “If we do not want to betray socialism we must support every revolt against our chief enemy, the bourgeoisie of the big states, provided it is not the revolt of reactionary class. By refusing to support the revolt of annexed regions we become, objectively, annexationists. It is precisely in the “era of imperialism”, which is the era of nascent social revolution, that the proletariat will today give especially vigorous support to any revolt of the annexed regions so that tomorrow, or simultaneously, it may attack the bourgeoisie of the “great” power that is weakened by the revolt.”(9) Lenin is rejecting the purist and dogmatic view that the inter-imperialist war has ended the prospect of national wars. He is outlining in concrete terms how the very areas annexed by expansionist imperialist powers can become the basis of national tensions and the impetus for struggle to alter the unjust status quo. Furthermore, in order to unite the international working class it is necessary to support the attempts of the people of the annexed areas to realise self-determination. Passive acceptance of the status quo will only mean the working class of the dominant power is supporting annexation. Consequently the working class will be split in national terms if there is a general refusal to support the national aims of the annexed areas. This discontent will become the very basis to generate the international class struggle.

In other words, Lenin is making the point that in relation to the context of the inter-imperialist war any national struggles that undermines annexation can promote the development of opposition to imperialism and capitalism. The result can be the generation of world revolution. In contrast the ultra-left comrades who reject the prospect of national war actually accept the status quo and the existing forms of imperialist domination such as the continuation of annexed areas. Only if we recognise every aspect of the revolutionary potential of the national struggle can it be possible to develop a strategy that promotes international class struggle: “We say: in order that we may have the strength to accomplish the socialist revolution and overthrow the bourgeoisie, the workers must unite more closely and this close union is promoted by the struggle for self-determination, ie, the struggle against annexations. We are consistent. But the Polish comrades who say that European annexations are “non-annullable” and national wars “impossible”, defeat themselves by contending against “annexations” with the use of arguments about national wars. These arguments are to the effect that annexations hamper the drawing together and fusion of workers of different nations!”(10)

Therefore the argument that is being utilised by Lenin is that the supporters of Rosa Luxemburg and Pytakov lack a strategy to unite the working class of the oppressed and oppressor nations. This strategic connection is the aim of national self-determination which promotes international solidarity and unity against imperialism. Instead Luxemburg defends dogmatic views that lack any practical content except effective justification for the continuation of the status quo established by the war. This passivity undermines the possibility of mobilisation against annexation and the related justification of national wars against imperialist expansion. The views of Luxemburg defend the ultimatistic stance of ‘proletarian revolution or nothing’. Instead of this rigid view we can uphold the transitional view that the struggle against annexation could become the prelude to international class struggle against imperialism. However, Lenin glosses over the problem that national struggles in a period of imperialist war could become subordinated to the aims of a particular imperialist power. For example, Belgium’s attempt to realise national emancipation could be subordinated to the aims of the Allied Powers. (This point is recognised by Lenin in previous polemics) Hence it would be more principled to connect national struggles with conditional aspects such as the prospect to establish independence from any imperialist powers. This principle was applied by Lenin in relation to the national struggle in Ireland.

In his polemics with the Polish Social Democrats, Lenin makes the crucial important point: “The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a small part of the general-democratic (now: general-socialist) world movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected.”(11) For example, it is possible that the aim of forming a republic may be undermined by reactionary forces, but Lenin is also making the general argument that the aspiration for national self-determination should be compatible with the perspective of world socialist revolution and should not be to the advantage of any imperialist power. This conditional aspect is not strict because in the overwhelming majority of instances the struggle for democracy and national emancipation corresponds to the interests of the international class struggle. The aspiration for secession or self-determination will generally undermine imperialism and so promote the aim of socialism. This perspective is the alternative to the view of some Marxists who suggest that national wars are no longer possible, and the aim of self-determination can only become subordinated to the interests of imperialism or a particular imperialist power.

In the time of Marx and Engels it could be argued that some national struggles had become an instrument of reactionary Tsarism, but this perspective has to be changed in the contemporary period: “Hence the concrete change in the application of the same socialist principles: formerly the main thing was to fight “against tsarism” (and against certain small nation movements that it was using for undemocratic ends), and for the greater revolutionary peoples of the West; the main thing today is to stand against the united, aligned front of the imperialist powers, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the social-imperialists, and for the utilisation of all national movement against imperialism for the purpose of socialist revolution. The more purely proletarian the struggle against the general imperialist front now is, the more vital, obviously, is the internationalist principle: “No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations”.”(12)

Lenin is maintaining that the most right wing forces claiming to be socialist are the various social chauvinists who support imperialism and its aim to dominate other nations. Hence the struggle for socialism involves rejection of this standpoint and support for all genuine struggles against imperialism and for national self-determination. In contrast he contends that the Polish Social Democrats effective indifference towards national struggles means that they accommodate to the standpoint of the Social Chauvinists. The point being made by Lenin is that the Bolsheviks have not accommodated to national separatism by their support for the right of secession. Instead they have upheld the only democratic and principled basis to connect the aims of socialism with national self-determination: “People who have not gone into the question thoroughly think that it is “contradictory” for the Social Democrats of the oppressor nation insist on the “freedom to secede”, while Social Democrats of oppressed nations insist on the “freedom to integrate”. However, a little reflection will show that there is not, and cannot be, any other road to internationalism and the amalgamation of nations, any other road from the given situation to this goal.”(13)

Thus Lenin is not suggesting that national self-determination is the absolute and ultimate aim of a Marxist perspective. Instead he is trying to indicate how and why national self-determination is the democratic resolution of the national question that creates the political basis for the voluntary unification of nations. The aim of the creation of a socialist multi-national state can only be politically possible and valid if formerly oppressed nations have the right of secession. Only with this democratic context does the argument in favour of the unification of diverse nations become principled and voluntary. In contrast, the Polish Social Democrats assumption that the national question is no longer relevant because of the effects of imperialism cannot provide a principled democratic programme for the unification of nations in socialist terms. Ultimately, the Polish Social Democrats have to accept the approach of the Bolsheviks or justify the multi-national state in terms of the role of coercion. Ironically it was the Bolsheviks who effectively repudiated their democratic approach and upheld the forcible amalgamation of nations.

Lenin makes it apparent that he does not favour the struggle for national independence under any conditions. Thus he is against the intensification of the inter-imperialist war in order to promote the national aims of Poland. This means he makes the important point that it would be the advance of class struggle in Europe which could enable the struggle to develop for Polish independence.(This point was vindicated in terms of the October revolution enabling Poland to acquire its national freedom from Russia) However, he can also indicate that the national rising in Ireland in 1916 was empirical proof that the national struggle has not been undermined by the domination of imperialism. Instead he argues that the very continuation of imperialism will encourage the continual development of national uprisings. Furthermore, he suggests that they will become an integral part of the struggle for world socialist revolution: “To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc, - to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution.”(14)

In other words it is dogmatic to envisage in the era of imperialism that ‘pure’ proletarian revolutions will occur without a connection to the national dimension. Hence the struggle against imperialist oppression will begin as an aspiration for secession but it is entirely possible that the process of conflict will culminate in a social revolution. The assumption is that the various oppressed classes of the dominated nation will recognise the strategic superiority of the political role of the proletariat. This point would seem to be vindicated by the important trade union participation in the Irish uprising. Furthermore, the continuation of inter-imperialist war would suggest that people would increasingly conclude that the only manner in which imperialist domination can be ended is by combining the national struggle with the socialist revolution. Lenin is implying that the strategic conclusion of his approach towards national self-determination is to consider this aim within the context of the development of world socialist revolution. In contrast the Polish Social Democrats only contribute to the undermining of this perspective with their pessimistic conclusion that the era of national wars is over.

We can conclude this section by suggesting that Lenin has made a thoughtful contribution to the understanding of the relationship of the national question to world revolution. It is this connection which provided the right to secession with principled significance. However, it is also necessary to connect his approach with his conception of imperialism, as one commentator outlined: “The concept that the creation and destruction of nation states was a matter of specific economic and political power relations, of wars and struggles involving many political and economic factors, derived from his social analysis. And this is true, even though in the age of imperialism, the fights and schisms of the great powers and corporations are a determining factor in the formation, and ultimately, the fate, of smaller nation states. The demand for the right of self-determination of nations as a basic political doctrine derives, almost automatically from this anti-imperialist theory.”(15) Lenin indicated in the most effective manner that the domination of imperialism undermined the ability and capacity to exercise the right of national self-determination. Only the ending of the hegemony of imperialism would enable national freedom to be realised. This realisation was not a call for national struggle under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. (Although he did not reject this possibility) Instead he argued it was with proletarian revolutionary leadership that the prospect of the success of the struggle for national freedom could be most effectively realised. Such a perspective would promote the formation of multi-national states with formerly oppressed nations having the right to secede. However, if national struggles did not contribute to the undermining of imperialism, Lenin was quite prepared to suggest they should not take place until more favourable conditions were created.

ANALYSIS OF THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION SINCE WORLD WAR TWO

The period of colonial empires came to an end in the 1950’s. This was caused by generalised national revolt against imperialist domination and the fact that America considered that the interests of world capitalism were more compatible with what became considered to be informal empire.(16) The dynamics of world capitalism were upheld by international institutions and the overall domination of the USA within the world economy. Lenin’s view that national self-determination would be related to the struggle for world socialism was effectively falsified and instead the bourgeoisie were the effective leadership and beneficiaries of the process of national liberation. The result of this situation is that the world economy has been divided into some core and dominant economic powers, together with intermediate countries like South Korea and a periphery of under-developed nation states, which in extreme terms has included what have been called failed states.(17) Some Marxist groups have attempted to understand developments in terms of continued inter-imperialist rivalries, such as that between the USA and Russia, and have predicted the possibilities of future military conflicts.(18) It is argued that Leninism is still valid in terms of explaining inter-imperialist contradictions and the necessity to defend oppressed nations against imperialist aggression. However what is difficult to explain is the relationship of national struggle to world revolution. Instead the national struggle, whether in Scotland or Palestine, seems to be led by political elites that lack sympathy for the goals of Leninism.

But what primarily calls into question the continued significance of the Leninist approach is the apparent evolution of imperialism into globalisation. The situation of inter-imperialist conflict is replaced by political cooperation between the major powers under the uni-polar hegemony of the USA, and the international development of the productive forces occurs under the supervision of institutions like the IMF. Karl Kautsky, Lenin’s major antagonist after 1914 provides convincing reasons as to why imperialism has been replaced by new forms of capitalism: “Imperialism is digging its own grave. Instead of developing capitalism it has become a means of hindering it. But this is not equivalent to saying that capitalism is at the end of its tether. So long as it is possible for the capitalism of the old countries to provide a sufficient expansion of the agricultural domain it can go on developing. It may, to be sure, be shattered by an uprising of the working class. But until it has exhausted the resources of the agricultural regions which it can make subsidiary to its activities it will not necessarily perish in an economic cataclysm.”(19)

In terms of reconstructing this argument in relation to the situation after 1945 it could be argued that the economic domination of the USA provided the basis for the revival of world capitalism. This situation indicated that traditional imperialism could be replaced by globalisation and the consolidation of the inter-connected character of the world economy. The longevity of capitalism has been based on economic growth, increased trade and the end of the destructive role of inter-imperialist conflicts. Indeed, even the cold war provided a stimulus to post-war economic development via the creation of the military-industrial complex. Increasingly peaceful co-existence replaced superpower rivalry and the demise of the USSR seemed to suggest that there was no alternative to the domination of the USA. Joseph Nye describes the situation in the following terms: “In a world of economic globalization, all countries are to some extent dependent on market forces beyond their direct control…..But markets constrain different countries to different degrees. Because the United States constitutes such a large part of the market in trade and finance, it is better able to set its own terms than is Argentina or Thailand.”(20)

 It would seem that there is little relevance for Leninism in this world of globalisation. The national question, apart from the problems of the failed states, seems to have been resolved by the economic and political activity of capitalism. Hence the major military and political issue seems to be terrorism which cannot become a rival to the domination of the USA and its allies. There are outstanding national questions like that of the Kurds and Palestinians but these issues will not promote the revival of world revolution. Instead it is possible that the diplomacy of the type practiced by the Obama administration can resolve outstanding issues such as indicated by the renewal of American links with Cuba. Instead it would seem that the approach of Rosa Luxemburg has become more appropriate because globalisation has not overcome the generation of the possibility of international class struggle. However, the lack of contemporary inter-imperialist conflict means that Lenin’s strategy of the connection of the national struggle to the world socialist revolution seems to have become anachronistic.

But the situation in Greece has transformed and challenged this conclusion. The EU has imposed an austerity settlement in Greece that seems to undermine its ability to act as a sovereign power. This means the generation of a national question in Greece seems to be connected to the necessity to promote international class struggle against the policy of the EU. It could be argued that the possibility of left wing action requires opposition to the domination of the EU. In this particular example the national question becomes connected to the importance of socialist revolution both within Greece and the EU. In this context a discussion of the relevance of Lenin’s conception of the right to self-determination has become timely. This point could also connected to the rebellion of Scotland against the austerity Conservative government of the UK. The only alternative to the limitations of the SNP could be the development of the struggle for a socialist Scotland. John Maclean is the ghost that haunts the situation in Scotland!

However, it is also necessary to accept that the world situation is not amenable to a revival of Leninism. But is the alternative the effective rejection of the Leninist conception of self-determination? Lenin’s argument that self-determination is the democratic basis of the struggle for socialism has not been refuted by the era of globalisation. However, this claim does not make Lenin’s approach relevant as the contemporary strategy for world revolution. This issue has to be discussed in terms of analysing the alternative of Mike Macnair. What we can say in favour of Lenin is that whilst the relevance of his standpoint may be questioned it has also been difficult to develop an alternative. (We assume here that Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution does not contradict the standpoint of Lenin) Furthermore, it is easier to locate faults in the original theory than to develop a superior alternative. This is why the dogma of the various Marxist groups is often difficult to challenge in terms of providing a more explanatory and principled strategic understanding of the world. With this in mind we should first of all congratulate Mike Macnair for being prepared to challenge what has become traditional doctrine. If we are to understand the world in continually advanced terms it is necessary that we be prepared to critique old theories however prestigious. This comment does not mean that we should be reticent about defending Lenin’s approach, and instead be prepared to criticise what could be considered to be the faults of Macnair’s approach. Also we should be willing to suggest that the approach of Lenin and Macnair could be reconciled. What is important is to be ready to tackle the subject without any pre-conceptions and to evaluate the issues in terms of their merits. In this sense we will not dogmatically defend Lenin despite his prestige, and we should be ready to support Macnair despite his more modest status in the history of Marxism. (After all this point could be said about ourselves) With all this in mind: let the polemic begin.

THE VIEWS OF MACNAIR CONCERNING LENIN’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE RIGHTS OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION

Macnair considers that Lenin’s understanding of the dialectical understanding of the perspective of self-determination is flawed: “The Bolshevik line of asserting the right of nations to self-determination but fighting politically against actual secession is overlaid with false theory about the ‘democratic and national’ character of the bourgeois revolution.”(21) But as we have tried to indicate the issue of the importance of Lenin’s approach is that it is not limited to the period in which the leadership of the national bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation may be dominant. Instead he is trying to establish a dynamic that will facilitate the prospect of the working class of the oppressed nation becoming hegemonic. In this context the unity between the oppressed nation and the dominant nation is established in terms of voluntary unification. This process will imply that the working class of the oppressed nation becomes the leadership of the national struggle and in this manner the most democratic form of unification becomes possible. In other words the aim of Lenin is to create the political and democratic conditions for unification in a multi-national state in terms of the development of socialism.

Macnair also believes that Lenin’s approach does not tackle the question of the inequality between nations within the world political order of states, and so fails to resolve the issue of inequality between states. His answer is to effectively reject the significance of the right of self-determination: “So, similarly, communists might say to the nationalists: in our view the only real way to overcome national inequality is directly, through a struggle for the equality of nations within a common state. National inequality grows out of the world capitalist order, and the creation of separate states will not overcome it. For this reason we are opposed to secession. On the contrary we fight for broader international unification – for the radically democratic united states of Europe, for instance. But, if you – with majority backing in your territory – insist on creating a separate state we will not use force against you to prevent it.”(22)

The major problem with this approach is that it ignores the fact that Lenin’s ultimate aim is the formation of a multi-national and centralised state because it is compatible with socialism. But Lenin also recognised that if this process is to be voluntary and democratic it is necessary to uphold the right to secession of the oppressed nations. Furthermore, in order that this right be effective it is necessary that the people of what had been the oppressor nation, and presumably the most dominant nation within the socialist society, should support the right of secession of the countries that had been oppressed and subordinate. If this right is not acknowledged there is a possibility that the process of unification will become coercive and bureaucratic. Instead of this clarity, Macnair introduces confusion. In order to uphold the principle of the aim of the creation of the multi-national state he wants the general principle to be opposition to secession. This approach would enable coercion to become justified in terms of the forcible rejection of the right of self-determination. On the other hand, he accepts as a last resort the right of secession. This conflicting stance would create confusion and possibly undermine the possibility to develop a process of the democratic development of a multi-national state. The point is that the aim of creating larger states, which presumably are of a socialist character, is not advanced by the justification of a situation in which the interests of the dominant national unit is effectively upheld. Only democratic relations between different national units can ensure that the formation of the multi-national state is principled. This prospect can only be upheld if the right of secession is explicitly established. Instead of Lenin’s clarity, Macnair dilutes the principle of self-determination and makes it arbitrary and selective. In practice, the right of secession will not be exercised and instead the multi-national state will be based on rejection of this principle. This situation will mean that the peoples of the formerly dominant nation remain dominant, and this is exactly what happened with the creation of the Soviet Union. Hence Macnair’s formulations effectively uphold the practice of Stalinism in relation to the multi-national state.

Indeed, Macnair outlines a dynamic that resulted in the confrontation between the centralised Red Army and the governments of the various nationalities in the civil war. The implicit assumption is that the right of self-determination would become a formality under these circumstances. He concludes his analysis of this situation: “The Soviet regime in the heartlands of European Russia could survive under one of two conditions. The first was overthrow of the central imperialist states in favour of workers’ regimes, which would both have removed the military and economic backing of the nationalists and forced them to abate their hostility to the Soviet power, and provided military and industrial backing to the Soviet regime. This did not happen. The second was the re-conquest of territory of the former tsarist empire which would allow enough autarkic military and economic coherence to let the regime survive. This was the path taken.”(23) However, this comment is a justification of the actions of the Red Army in an uncritical manner. A more principled analysis would establish how the Red Army originally carried out defensive measures in order to protect the regime, and then effectively engaged in a process of military expansionism. This meant the principle of self-determination was undermined, and this situation was consolidated with the formation of the Soviet Union.

Instead of recognising this contradiction between theory and practice, Macnair effectively supports the actions of the Red Army, and he interprets these developments in terms of a generalised revolutionary law which implies that military action against counterrevolution may contradict the principle of self-determination: “The promise of self-determination therefore cannot be guaranteed to be kept by a proletarian revolutionary regime, as long as there exists even one great capitalist power in the world which will provide a haven and world hegemon for capital and reorganise the seceded nationalists into subordinate elements of its world system. This is not a ‘specifically Russian’ problem.”(24) Thus the only policy contemplated concerning secession is the threat of confrontation and the prospect of military invasion of the nation that acted to leave the socialist multi-state. In practice, Macnair does not recognise any progressive content to the policy of self-determination and he implicitly suggests that the preferred option for maintaining the multi-national state is that of coercion. This perspective is based on the assumption that relations between the socialist multi-national society and the independent capitalist society will be ones of hostility and the threat of war in order to undermine the prospect of counterrevolutionary military action.

Hence Macnair’s alternative to the principle of self-determination is a variation on the Brezhnev doctrine! He fails to recognise that the democratic basis to promote consent for the formation of a multi-national socialist state is recognition of the right of self-determination. The point is that we do not want any nationality to exercise that right but the very ability to put this right into practice, via the act of secession, should promote the voluntary and democratic basis of the multi-national society. In contrast, it will be the restrictions placed on the right of secession that will generate opposition within various nationalities against the socialist society. In practice, Macnair is agreeing with Bukharin and company when they argued that national self-determination was impractical in the era of imperialism. Lenin outlined this standpoint in the following terms: “Imperialism is highly developed capitalism: imperialism is progressive; imperialism is the negation of democracy – “hence” democracy is “unobtainable” under capitalism. Imperialist war is a fragrant violation of all democracy, whether in backward monarchies, or progressive republics – “hence”, there is no point in talking of “rights” (i.e. democracy!) The “only” thing that can be opposed to imperialist war is socialism; socialism alone is “the way out”; “hence” to advance democratic slogans in our minimum programme, i.e. under capitalism, is a deception or an illusion, befuddlement or postponement, etc, of the slogan for socialist revolution.”(25)

Lenin is making the point that whilst the significance of democracy and self-determination may seem problematical in the era of imperialism they are actually crucial aspects that facilitate the struggle for socialism. Only principled Marxists advocate the right of secession as an integral aspect of the revolutionary programme. This policy will encourage people to become part of the socialist multi-national state on the basis of the principles of consent and democratic participation of all the various nations. In contrast, Macnair is implying that only coercion will ensure that the multi-national state is maintained, and if any nation has the audacity to separate then diplomatic relations will be based on the perpetual prospect of war. What about the problem of the capitalist hegemon? The point is that if relations between the various nationalities of the socialist multi-national state are based on the role of democracy, including the right to secede, then it is entirely possible that the influence of the imperialist hegemonic power can be undermined. But if the right to secession is effectively denied then it is possible that this hegemonic power will gain support within the various oppressed nations of the multi-national state. The struggle against imperialism is actually advanced by the socialist multi-national state having the highest levels of voluntary integration including the right of secession. In this manner the character of society is based on the role of consent and rejection of coercion. However, if national self-determination is denied then the ideological appeal of global capitalism is connected to the promise of the realisation of this standpoint.

Lenin makes this point in the following manner: “For the bourgeoisie the proclamation of equal rights for all nations has become a deception. For us it will be the truth that will facilitate and accelerate the winning over of all nations. Without effectively organised democratic relations between nations – and, consequently, without freedom of secession – civil war of the workers and working people generally of all nations against the bourgeoisie is impossible.”(26) Thus instead of being a diversion from the tasks of world revolution the right of secession will inspire the unity of working people within the socialist state and encourage the struggle against world capitalism. In contrast, the restrictive denial of national rights within the socialist multi-national state can only enhance the ideological influence of the imperialist hegemonic power. The very experience of the Soviet empire, which encouraged the influence of imperialism because of the denial of national rights, should indicate to us that military power cannot oppose imperialism more effectively than the actual exercise of authentic socialist democracy including the prospect of self-determination.

The problem is that Macnair does not learn from generalised historical experience and instead extrapolates dogmatically from the Soviet civil war. He concludes from this experience that the exercise of the right of self-determination can only be counterrevolutionary. As a result he does not consider that the bureaucratic formation of the Soviet Union was avoidable. Furthermore, he does not outline the detrimental aspects generated by the creation of the USSR such as bureaucratic centralisation and the promotion of Greater Russian Chauvinism. This means he does not elaborate how the creation of the USSR justified coercion in the relations between nations, and all that Lenin had outlined about the democratic character of self-determination was transformed into a fiction. The result of this situation was the promotion of the coercive ability of the state to carry collectivisation of agriculture in the Ukraine in the most tragic manner, and the increasing identification of the Soviet Union with the interests of Russia. Lenin’s approach towards self-determination would have represented a progressive and democratic alternative to the creation of a centralised USSR.

Macnair also argues that the Leninist conception of the national policy resulted in justification of the unprincipled anti-imperialist united front: “On this basis it was possible to discriminate between imperialist nationalism, which was the core enemy of the working class, and anti-imperialist nationalism, which was a potential ally of the working class.”(27) The suggestion is that the working class adopted to nationalism as an ideology, even if this was assumed to be progressive because of supposed anti-imperialist credentials. However, the initial conception of the anti-imperialist united front was not connected to any dilution of internationalism and instead outlined what could represent a principled united front against imperialism in the oppressed nations: “The workers movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries must first of all establish itself as an independent revolutionary factor in the common anti-imperialist front. Only when its importance as an independent factor is recognized and its complete political autonomy secured can temporary agreements with bourgeois democracy be considered permissible or necessary.”(28) The strategic principle being established is that the Communist Party must have political independence before any prospect of a united front with the national bourgeoisie is contemplated. This approach is not unprincipled and is instead an effective attempt to apply the strategic lessons of Lenin’s understanding of the national question. This point was made by Lenin himself at the Second Congress of the Communist International when his Theses comments: “The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form.”(29) Hence despite this original principled conception of the anti-imperialist united front, the degeneration of Stalinism led to it being interpreted in opportunist terms.

However, Macnair makes an important point when he contends that the standpoint of Marxist groups has been reduced to the simplification of support for the nationalism of the oppressed against the nationalism of the oppressor. He indicates with examples how it is often difficult to identity who is the oppressed or oppressing group and maintains that this formulation often results in support for repressive regimes. He concludes that: “The strategic way out Marxists suggest is the struggle for the unity and independent interests of the working class as a global class – not the solution to the world’s national divisions and inequalities as a precondition for the class struggle between workers and capitalists.”(30) This standpoint is a dogmatic resolution of a complex problem. It is one thing to suggest that the complexity of the national question cannot be resolved by the rigid demarcation of people into oppressed or oppressor – although this classification may still be useful in important situations. It is another thing entirely to maintain that the alternative to this reasoning is merely to emphasise the international character of the working class. This approach suggests that the only valid policy is socialism and democratic questions like the national issue are irrelevant.

Instead of this ‘economistic’ dogma we would be better engaged in elaborating what the national question means in the era of globalisation. (Some would argue that national issues have been replaced by religious/cultural matters in the postmodern world) The situation in Scotland, and the continued national oppression of the Kurds and Palestinians, indicates that the national question is still relevant, but the point is how important is it in a world where the majority of countries have achieved political independence and national economic rivalries seem to have been replaced by the international dynamics of globalisation. Instead of dogmatically dismissing Lenin’s conception of national self-determination we need to re-appraise the situation since his time and establish the importance of this perspective in a world transformed by the informal American empire. Furthermore, nationalism is an ideology that influences the majority of the people of the world and so we cannot dismiss its significance by merely establishing the international character of the working class. Instead we have to carry out ideological struggle in order to challenge the conservative political role of national identity and provide an alternative in terms of the struggle for socialism. The point being made is that we are not merely considering the ‘error’ of the Marxist left in relation to over-emphasising the national question because this error has expressed the very illusions of people about the enduring quality of the role of nations and the related aspiration for the right to secede. This is precisely why the era of globalisation has not ended the relevance of the national question despite the continual internationalisation of economic activity and the apparent demise of the importance of the nation state. For example, the formation of the EU has not eroded national distinctions and instead has often re-generated nationalist grievances as a response to the centralising tendencies of the EU.

Macnair does not approach the national questions in these terms and instead accommodates to subjective idealist reasoning that reduces the world to the illusions of the Marxist left. In actuality, the Marxist left is often trying to reply to the concerns of people in an inadequate manner, and in this context equates the aspirations of the people of Scotland in terms of rigid opposition, or support for self-determination. What is not recognised is that Lenin would ask: what is the distinctive position of the working class in relation to the national discontent? How can the working class develop an independent position that enables it to connect the national question with the tasks of realising socialism? The answer provided by Lenin is that the very realisation of national independence enables the working class to begin to consider issues in class terms: “The more democratic the system of government, the clearer will the workers see that the root evil is capitalism, not lack of rights. The fuller national equality (and it is not complete without freedom of secession), the clearer will the workers of the oppressed nations see that the cause of their oppression is capitalism, not lack of rights.”(31) Thus we do not undermine the understanding of the role of the working class as being international by also recognising the importance of the national question. Instead the working class by expressing a distinctive policy of support for national freedom enables it to create policies that represent the interests of internationalism. In this manner there is a dialectical relationship between the struggle for national emancipation and socialism which is not recognised by Macnair. To him the national question is a diversion and so the standpoint of self-determination should be revised. But his revision does not contribute to programmatic clarity and instead is inferior to the approach of Lenin. The standpoint of Lenin may have anachronistic aspects but it is still superior to the confusion generated by Macnair.

This confusion is specifically expressed by the fact that he claims the principles of democracy should be supported whilst their relationship to the national self-determination is effectively obscured. Consequently the coherent principle of the right of secession is replaced by ‘equality of national groups’.(32) This formulation may suggest democratic criteria but the question of whether this aim is connected to self-determination is not explained. Instead his concern is to outline how the process of transition to socialism can only be international, which means the beginning of revolution is also connected to global dynamics if it is to be successful: “It is perfectly illusory to imagine the overthrow of capitalism through a series of separate national revolutions. Capitalism is an international economic order and the system of nation states is an international military-political order tied to capitalism. Each separate national revolution would therefore be strangled more or less rapidly after its birth, either by immediate overthrow or economic strangulation or….by bureaucratic degeneration.”(33) Only a multi-state like the old USSR could survive in bureaucratic forms. However, this point is dogmatic: we cannot predict so precisely the future and character of world revolution. Indeed, the present situation would suggest that the very prospect of revolution is doubtful because of sociological changes and the hegemonic character of bourgeois ideology. But if we do engage in making predictions it is necessary to be aware of the complexity of the class forces involved in the revolutionary process. Thus it is entirely possible that a national proletarian revolution could still emerge and be able to survive on the basis of international solidarity. This development would be reminiscent of the October revolution and it would be dogmatic to deny its possible repetition. Nevertheless we would have to admit that this development is not what we would favour, instead what would be more conducive to revolutionary success would be the emergence of an international process of transformation. Unfortunately we cannot anticipate what we would like to happen; instead we have to be prepared for what could occur such as a national revolution. Mike Macnair is being dogmatic when rejecting this possibility because he has already convinced himself that such an eventuality is unlikely to be successful. Instead of upholding a pessimistic standpoint we should be realistic and flexible and be prepared for many possibilities.

Macnair is also utilising this dogmatic perspective in order to deny the strategic relevance of the connection of the national question to world revolution. He is suggesting that the only principled, credible and realistic prospect of socialism is via the role of an international dimension, and so in this context the national question should be considered to be a diversion or limitation in relation to the only possible principled resolution of the class struggle: “Our positive goal is therefore a world democratic republic, within which continents, territories and localities all the way down to the level of the ward have self-government. Within this goal, our strategic orientation has to be at a minimum at continental level….It is only by going beyond the nation state that the working class can hope to overthrow the capitalist political-economic order.”(34) He also contends that the domination of international capital means that projects of reform are becoming as difficult as the attempt to achieve the revolutionary transformation of society in national terms. The conclusion that he makes from this analysis is that the right of secession is reactionary in relation to the tasks of accomplishing international revolution and the formation of multi-national states: “For this reason, we should in general oppose national secessionism and socialist variants of secessionism: they travel in the opposite direction to that in which the workers movement and society need to go.”(35) He concludes that the principled policy is to be in favour of the equality of nations within the multi-national state.

This standpoint is flawed for a number of reasons. Firstly, as already mentioned it is dogmatic to conceive of world revolution as a schema with rigid stages that cannot deviate from our conception of historical materialism. In this context the assumption is that the international development of the productive forces means the character of the revolutionary process precludes the importance of national aspects. If reality deviates from our reasoning this can only indicate that the revolution will fail. Hence the success of the class struggle is reduced to the logic of a super-brain, and therefore we should criticise anything that occurs which cannot be explained by the rationality of the elite intellectual. Secondly, we may advocate an international revolution as being the highest expression of the class struggle, but if we are to be flexible it may be necessary to both explain and support a process of struggle that occurs in a different manner. This unexpected development could mean providing solidarity for a nationally based proletarian revolution. The point is that fraternal support is more constructive than criticism of a sectarian character. In this manner we aim to overcome the isolation of the nationally based revolution by providing the politics that can generate the development of an international revolution. In contrast, in Menshevik fashion, Macnair seems to be prepared to effectively oppose any revolution that does not correspond to his theoretical premises. In practice his standpoint means passivity rather than becoming part of the struggle for connecting the national revolution with international dimensions.

Thirdly, the formation of the multi-national state can only express genuine equality between nations if it has the right to secession. It is to be hoped that this right of self-determination is not exercised but the realisation of democracy is connected to the possibility for any nation to be able to secede if discontent with the multi-national state develops. We cannot suggest in dogmatic terms that the socialist character of the multi-national state will mean that national issues will be resolved smoothly. Consequently, if unrest develops, the ultimate expression of a genuine equality of nations is represented by the ability to exercise the right of secession. In contrast, Macnair’s formula of equality of nations could become only formal if a nation does not have the right to secede. However in an inconsistent manner, Macnair accepts that as a last resort and ‘where appropriate’ nations should have the right of secession. But this arbitrary formulation actually implies some nations will have the right of self-determination in contrast to others. The only principled, coherent and democratic approach is to have a policy that allows any distinct nation the right of secession from the multi-national state. This point is made emphatically by Lenin: “The Russian proletariat cannot march at the head of the people towards a victorious democratic revolution (which is its immediate task) or fight alongside its brothers, the proletarians of Europe, for a socialist revolution, without demanding fully…..for all nations oppressed by tsarism, the freedom to secede from Russia. This we demand, not independently of our revolutionary struggle for socialism, but because this struggle will remain a hollow phrase if it is not linked up with a revolutionary approach to all questions of democracy, including the national question. We demand freedom of self-determination, ie, independence, i.e., freedom of secession for the oppressed nations, not because we have dreamt of splitting up the country economically, or of the ideal of small states, but, on the contrary, because we want large states and the closer unity and even fusion of nations, only on a truly democratic, truly international basis, which is inconceivable without the freedom to secede.”(36)

This viewpoint does not deny that it would undermine the multi-national socialist state if a distinct nation did exercise the right of self-determination. The prestige of the state would be lowered in the minds of the international working class, and the prospects of world revolution will be undermined. But what would be far worse is a situation, which did occur in the history of the USSR, whereby various nations are oppressed by the party elite of the dominant nation, and so the result is the formation of a bureaucratic centralist state. This was the legacy of Stalin’s role in the creation of the USSR, and Lenin only realised too late what was occurring. The effective denial of the right of self-determination within the USSR meant democracy was seriously restricted, and this meant the USSR became a seriously degenerated workers state until the counterrevolution that created the domination of the new ruling class in 1929. If the USSR had been created in different terms with an effective right to secession it is possible that developments may have taken an alternative course. Macnair’s indifference towards the importance of the right of self-determination indicates that he has learnt little from the history of the USSR. This is a sobering thought given his intelligence and integrity.

LESSONS OF THE FIRST TWO ARTICLES ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The first article mainly consists of interesting remarks about democracy that will not be commented upon because they are not directly connected to the issue of national self-determination.(37) However in his concluding comments he introduces his concept of the equality of nations and its relationship to democracy: “The logic of my analysis so far yields the conclusion that political democracy requires the equality of nationalities within the state…..A state which discriminates in political participation against members of a minority nationality within its territory will to that extent be undemocratic or anti-democratic.”(38) However, this conception of equality of nations is implicitly the alternative to what could be considered the most important expression of democracy, which is the right of self-determination. The assumption is that a socialist state without the practice of discrimination can resolve national grievances and instead ensure the equality of nations. But Lenin would suggest that the ultimate test of the equality of nations is the right of secession: “It is for that right, and in a struggle to achieve sincere recognition for it, that the Social Democrats of the oppressor nation must demand that the oppressed nations should have the right of secession, for otherwise recognition of equal rights for nations and of international working class solidarity would in fact be mere empty phrase-mongering, sheer hypocrisy.”(39) Lenin is outlining how the equality of nations can only be realised by the right of secession. This point is not accepted by Macnair who considers that self-determination is effectively antiquated. The rights of democracy are justified by denying an important democratic right!

In the second article, Macnair analyses the history of theories about the nation state.(40) He outlines an interesting study of the development of the nation state and its connections to capitalism and the creation of the global economy. He asks: “But what is the positive interest of the working class? The answer has to start from the underlying interests in (1) its own unity as a class, (2) political democracy and (3) overcoming the rule of capital. From all three points of view, the interests of the working class is in creating a global democratic political order and, to the extent that this is not possible, creating the largest possible multi-national democratic order…….This is that communists…..should in general oppose the secession of national groups from larger states, even if these states are nationally oppressive, but instead fight for forms which make possible the equality of nations within a common state.”(41) We can agree that the interests of the working class are global to the extent that the possibility of ending its subordination and domination by capital is connected to the promotion of an international economic and political alternative. This suggests that the formation of a multi-national state is progressive and should be an important aim of the class struggle. However, what is the most democratic basis to politically sustain the multi-national state on the basis of the principles of democracy and voluntary unity? In replying to this question we would contend that equality of nations can only have meaning and practical significance if it is based upon the right of self-determination. If distinct nations within the multi-national state do not have the right to secession it is possible that a situation may occur of the domination of a given nation over others. The right to secession acts as a form of political and democratic constraint that actually promotes the realisation of the equality of nations, and so undermines the possibility of the subordination of nations within the multi-national state.

Macnair implicitly accepts this argument because he acknowledges that as a last resort the right of secession could be exercised even if communists would oppose this action. But Lenin never envisaged the right of secession being anything other than a measure of last resort, but the point is that this right needs to be an explicit part of the constitution of the multi-national state. In this manner everyone will recognise that the realisation of the aim of the equality of nations will include the right of secession. It is to be hoped that the multi-national state will develop in a democratic and participatory manner, and so no national group will develop a grievance, but if problems occur that involve discrimination of national groups the right of secession will be possible as a means of redress. If this right had been effective in the history of the USSR it is possible that if nations had exercised secession the leadership of the party may have reflected upon what was occurring and so acted to eradicate bureaucratic practices. It could also be argued that the process of forced collectivisation would have been undermined by the declaration of the independence of the Ukraine. Therefore the aim of the equality of nations means little without the right of secession. This is what Macnair reluctantly accepts and yet persist in his notion that the multi-national state can advance on the basis of declarations of equality that have little significance because these formulations lack the political ability to withdraw from the society that begins to practice discrimination.

Macnair tries to uphold his argument by outlining how in historical terms the practice of the rights of self-determination has led to discrimination and repression. This point cannot be contested but what we are primarily concerned with is the relationship of a distinct national grouping with a socialist multi-national state. He also outlines how political independence does not overcome the problem of economic domination within a capitalist world market. This is also true but it does not mitigate against the political reasons for self-determination as Lenin outlined, which is to advance democracy in order to promote the very possibility of socialist revolution: “Capitalism in general, and imperialism in particular, turn democracy into an illusion – though at the same time capitalism engenders democratic aspirations in the masses, creates democratic institutions, aggravates the antagonism between imperialism denial of democracy and the mass striving for democracy. Capitalism and imperialism can be overthrown only by economic revolution. They cannot be overthrown by democratic transformations, even the most “ideal”. But a proletariat not schooled in the struggle for democracy is incapable of performing an economic revolution.”(42) Hence it is true that national self- determination does not resolve the problems created by the domination of the world economy by imperialism but it also represents part of the process by which advances are made in terms of democratic political participation. This situation represents progress that will enable the working class to utilise democracy in order to promote the possibility of socialism.

Such considerations are ignored by Macnair who can only envisage the bourgeois reasons for self-determination such as the following: “To the extent that they claim the right to have ‘a state for our nation’, without seeking to retreat into autarky, nationalists are not seeking to overcome the inequality of nations in the global hierarchy. They are seeking merely to improve the standing of their nation within this hierarchy.”(43) We can accept that this consideration applies to the reasons why a national capitalist class should favour self-determination, but Lenin was interested in the reasons why independence could be to the advantage of the working class. In this context he suggests that what is occurring is the enhanced capacity for the workers to promote democracy and in this manner become adherents for socialism. Instead Macnair cannot conceive any progressive aspects of national aspirations in the contemporary period: “Because nationalism is a line of least resistance, it is natural that where states are beginning to lose their legitimacy, there will be a rise of forms of minority nationalism seeking to escape from subordinate status within the state by taking this line. Communists know that this line of least resistance is a dead end.”(44)

This comment is made after the dynamic emergence of Scottish nationalism, which is challenging the UK state because of its mass popularity. Instead of rejecting the role of nationalism in dogmatic terms we should consider how the working class could participate in the national movement in a distinctive and independent manner in order to advance the cause of socialism. It is also in these terms that unity within the working class of different nations can be developed. In other words we should not reject the importance of national struggles even if would have preferred as communists that they had not developed. Instead of relating to the national movement in this non-sectarian manner, Macnair raises his slogan of equality of nations in an arid manner. Unfortunately, this slogan is not related to how mass movements are emerging. The result is that his slogan is contrasted to the practical realities of the situation. Instead Lenin’s perspective of the right of nations to self-determination is still relevant in particular situations and is also a model for the multi-national state of socialism.

CONCLUSION

(1)The working class is international and so its emancipation from the domination of capitalist relations of production should be connected to the development of world revolution.

(2)However we do not know how (and if) the revolutionary struggle may emerge, and it is entirely possible that it can take the form of a national struggle that can acquire international dimensions.

(3)There are also outstanding issues of national oppression which mean that Lenin’s perspective of the right of self-determination retains its relevance. Communist should aim to connect these struggles to the aspiration for world socialism.

(4)An important aim of the international class struggle will be the formation of multi-national states which should be based on the principle of equality of nations. However, the possible exercise of this principle will include the right of secession of any distinct nation. (A nation being defined by distinct territory and language) It is to be hoped that this right is not exercised because the multi-national state should not practice discrimination against any national group.

In other words we have concluded from the analysis of the articles of Mike Macnair that the standpoint of self-determination should not be substantially revised. Indeed we do not think that Macnair, himself, is in favour of significant revision, and instead has outlined some important issue for the proponents of the standpoint of self-determination to consider. We think that it is entirely possible and consistent to agree with some of his views and yet still support the Leninist conception of self-determination. But we agree with Macnair that since the time of Lenin the policy of self-determination has sometimes been understood and applied in an unprincipled manner.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Mike Macnair: Self Determination and Communist Policy, Weekly Worker, July 23rd 2015, number 1068

(2)V.I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, In Collected Works, Volume 22, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964 p143-156

(3)Ibid p147

(4)Ibid p149

(5)Lenin, The Junius Pamphlet, ibid p311

(6)Lenin: The Discussion on Self Determination Summed up, In Collected works volume 22 p320-360

(7)Ibid p324

(8)Ibid p324

(9)Ibid p333

(10)Ibid p336

(11)Ibid p341

(12)Ibid p342-343

(13)Ibid p347

(14)Ibid p355

(15)Tamas Krausz: Reconstructing Lenin: Monthly Review Press: New York, 2014 p162

(16)Leo Pannitch and Sam Ginden: Global Capitalism, (Second Edition) Verso, London, 2009

(17)David Harvey discusses contemporary imperialism in his: The New Imperialism, Oxford University Press, 2003

(18)League for a Fifth International: NATO Summit lays plans for a new Cold War, in Fifth International, number 15 2014 p3-6

(19)Karl Kautsky: Ultra Imperialism in Workers Liberty, volume 2 number 3 p78-79

(20)Joseph Nye: The Paradox of American Power, Oxford University Press, 2002 p8

(21)Macnair op cit p6

(22)Ibid p6

(23)Ibid p6-7

(24)Ibid p7

(25)V.I. Lenin: Reply to P.Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov) In: Collected works volume 23, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964 p24

(26)ibid p27

(27)Macnair op cit p7

(28)Theses on the Eastern Question in Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Communist International, Ink Links, London, 1980 p416

(29)Lenin: Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions op cit p80

(30)Macnair op cit p7

(31)Lenin, A Caricature of Marxism, volume 23 p73

(32)Macnair op cit p7

(33)Ibid p7

(34)Ibid p7

(35)Ibid p7

(36)V.I. Lenin: The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, in Collected Works, volume 21, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, p413-414

(37)Mike Macnair: Democracy and Rights, in Weekly Worker july 9th 2015, number 1066 p9-11

(38)Ibid p11

(39)Lenin, volume 21 op cit p409

(40)Mike Macnair: Nation state and Nationalism, In Weekly Worker, July 16th 2015, number 1067 p8-9

(41)Ibid p9

(42)Lenin op cit volume 23 p24-25

(43)Macnair nation state op cit p9

(44)Ibid p9