

THE LAND QUESTION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

FROM THE BANKS OF THE Zambezi to the Limpopo River and on to the shores of our native land, the Land question is priority number one in the struggle for freedom. It is a complex question and requires a deep understanding of the conflicting issues involved. There are no simple solutions, no easy unravelling of the injustice under the present circumstances more so where the Herrenvolk are so completely in control, and have merely announced that they will be scrapping the 1913, the 1936 Land Acts and also the Group Areas Act. Nothing else. Nothing about the hated Bantustans. But the announcement was enough to set off a flurry of workshops and mini-conferences where ANC delegates from rural and other areas as well as international delegates took up some of the most contentious issues, like nationalisation, compensation, aspirant black producers and other important questions.

As the first statement on the Land Question issued by the ANC, it was a model of statesmanship and moderation. In fact such a dignified pronouncement must and should stir the hearts of the most hardened bureaucrats in the Herrenvolk parliament. It should convince the Government that the ANC has shed its wayward ways, its extreme egalitarian views and should now be welcomed into the fold. There is of course another reason why the ANC is so over-eager to proclaim its stand, to silence other contestants and block all other opponents. However, as a guide to action for the millions of landless peasantry, exploited millions of agricultural workers, the deprived in the Removal schemes, and the squatters in the many camps, this statement of policy with its sickening, convoluted phraseology will fall like stones.

Let us for once pause and listen to the fall of these sonorous phrases:

"The African National Congress ... has made an urgent plea for a major redistribution of land in South Africa as part of a State-run affirmative action programme, using nationalisation selectively."

Again,

"In the context of a mixed economy there would only be selective nationalisation and the distribution of this land would be based on land use needs."

Once more,

.. an urgent need for a programme of affirmative' action regarding acquisition of land for black people and in support of black producers."

Another,

"... delegates went so far as to give detailed proposals on exactly how to compensate landowners ..."
Then the Report added as if making a serious decision "No compensation to be paid in foreign exchange ..."
There arose the need for a land claims commission through which land claims commission can be adjudicated.

It is difficult to understand the manner in which the land question was handled. There was a timidity of approach as if handling a dangerous object, administering soothing syrup etc. Their very starting point was appalling, as was stated

"Most delegates agreed that the state should play the principal role in effecting the major distribution of land."

All that the layman can gather from this blather is that the ANC is putting the whole onus on the state to do this and that, appoint the land, commissions, the land claims commissions, selective nationalization, compensation in local currency only if you please sir, and the lot. Whose state is the ANC talking about? Is it their state or ours? What does all this talk amount to when we, the oppressed, have as yet **NOTHING**. Here is an example of how people can get lost in words where they lose direction.

Let us with a sigh of relief turn to the clear enunciation of Point 7 in the 10 Point Programme and deal with the last directive especially "A new division of the land in conformity with the existing rural population living on the land and working on the land is the first task of a democratic state and Parliament."

We can all recall how Hosea Jaffe (of ill fame) mechanically interpreted this to mean that all that was required was to divide the land area by the number of the rural population and Hey, Presto! the land question would be solved.

Lenin once more comes to our rescue and states that we must view the land from an historical point of view for it has roots in the past. "We must look at the peasant himself; what his thoughts are? What did he think about the land in the past, what does he think about the land today and on the morrow? As a class, en masse, his attitude throughout the vicissitudes of history has remained basically the same." states Lenin.

The Narodniks (Populists) a political group which existed prior to the appearance of Marxist parties in Russia, held that the principal revolutionary force was NOT the working class but the peasantry and that the rule of the Tzar and the landlords could be overthrown by means of peasant revolts which they regarded as the embryo and basis of socialism. As Lenin once stated the stock formula. of the Populists was "We are in favour of the nationalisation of the land' Other left- wing groups stated in almost identical terms the same stock formula, but says Lenin, "This is a very inexact term and must be examined

The peasantry as a class demand the land spontaneously for they are opposed to the feudal latifundia that is the LARGE ESTATES, and do not have any conception (in an economic sense) how the land can be transferred to the people. In other words, the peasants as a class are not concerned with the "HOW" but with the "WHEN"; whether the system under which they live is feudalism or capitalism or socialism. All that they want is the land, a cry elemental in its essence born out of suffering and hardship through years and generations of deprivation. And yet, what does this cry in essence amount to? It amounts to nothing else but a plea for the revival, the strengthening, the consolidation and expansion of small agriculture and making it the predominating system. In other words, all that the peasants want - is equal division of the land which eventually leads to nothing less than the small proprietor and - CAPITALISM.

The picture the peasant sees in his own mind's eye is the large estates being broken up and passing into the hands of the mass of rural poor. This leads him to make only one demand, "**OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND BY THE PEOPLE.**" The peasant is guided by the instinct of the proprietor, who is hindered by the endless splitting up of present forms of mediaeval land ownership (strips of scattered land cultivated by the peasants during the middle ages and in Russia before 1917) and by the impossibility of organizing the cultivation of the soil in a manner that fully corresponds to "proprietor" instincts requirements as long as this motley mediaeval system continues. The economic necessity of abolishing also the system - the fetters of allotment land ownership - such are the negative concepts which completely encompass the peasant's idea of "nationalization".

The Narodniki who express the demands and hopes of the peasantry also stress the removal of the old obstacles, the abolition of the landlord, the dis-enclosure of the land, the removal of fetters of allotment, big land ownership, the strengthening of small farming, the substitution of equality, fraternity and liberty for inequality (large estates) and this covers nine-tenths of their views.

"But," says Lenin, "equal right to land, equal tenure, socialisation - all these are merely negative concepts, for the populist has no conception of a new system as a definite system of SOCIO-ECONOMIC relationships. The populist regards the present agrarian revolution as the transition from feudalism, inequality and oppression in general to equality and liberty and nothing else. This is the typical narrow-mindedness of the petty bourgeois revolutionary who fails to see the capitalist qualities of the new society he is creating."

Marxism investigates the new system that is arising. Even with the fullest freedom of peasant farming and with the fullest equality of small proprietors occupying the people's land or nobody's or God's land what we have is nothing else but a commodity production system. This is how the system works

When one goes in for production of commodities it means that the small producers are tied and

subordinated to the market which fixes prices. Out of the exchange of products, arises the power of money; transformation of agricultural produce into money is followed by the transformation of labour power into money. Commodity production becomes capitalist production. This theory is not a dogma but a simple description of what is generally taking place. The free-er the system of farming is from land congestion, landlord oppression, oppression of mediaeval relationships and the agrarian system from bondage and tyranny, the more strongly capitalist relationships develop within this peasant farming.

Consequently the concept, NATIONALIZATION OF THE LAND, transferred to the soil of economic reality is a category of commodity and capitalist society. It is not what the peasant thinks and what the populists says that matters and applies to the world of harsh realities but what emerges from the economic relations of present society.

And now we come to the demand which is in the minds of everyone - our attitude towards nationalization of the land. Again this concept must be viewed historically. In theory, Marx viewed "Nationalization" as the "ideal" for which radical bourgeoisie should have fought for at the beginning of the era when they destroyed feudalism. At the dawn of their revolutionary period they should have loosened all the bonds on the land. If they had done so and nationalized the land, they would have brought capitalism to its full flowering capacity. Capital would have been invested in promoting agriculture itself, instead of spending the much needed capital in acquiring land. "But," says Marx, "the radical bourgeoisie lacks the courage to attack private landed property owing to the danger of a socialist attack on all private property."

The second obstacle was "The bourgeoisie has already territorialized itself". i.e. when the bourgeoisie as a class on a broad predominating scale has already bound itself up with landed property, has already "territorialised" itself, "settled itself of the land" has fully subordinated, landed property to itself, then a genuine social movement of the bourgeoisie in favour of nationalization is impossible. It is impossible for the simple reason that no class ever goes against itself.

There is no doubt that the peasants will demand a new division of the land. They will demand all that we have stated in the 7th Point of our Programme. They will demand "Nationalization" of the land.

And here Lenin puts forward the views of a proletariat party. It must ask the peasantry the following questions:-

- (a) Whether it is in their interest to demand division?
- (b) If so under what conditions?
- (c) How will this affect the proletarian agrarian programme?

It is possible that after a period of revolutionary nationalisation the demand for division of the land may be called for by the desire of the peasantry to stabilise to the utmost the new agrarian relations which correspond to the requirements of capitalism. (our emphasis)

Turning to the actual situation in the country, we see apartheid in its death throes and because it was a beast of violence and destruction, its end will be not without violence. Already the participants in the struggle for power, from right to left are taking up their respective positions. Under mounting pressure De Klerk has no option but to grant political rights to the blacks and for the first time in the history of South Africa since its conquest by the Whites, the indigenous people of the land will have their basic freedoms restored to them—universal franchise and the right to own land. Without doubt, that will be a momentous moment.

But like all momentous turns in history, the future depends on which course the oppressed will follow. All the groups will aim to win the peasant organisations over to their respective sides so as to be able to control them. The petty bourgeois will come up with conciliatory hare-brained schemes advising the peasantry to accept this or that, trying to ingratiate themselves not only with the peasantry but with the ruling class: All these class-conciliatory groups will advise compensation to win over the support of the upper groups of the peasantry, the rich peasant groups in Inkatha and in the Bantustans.

But the danger comes from the very system under which we live. As long as money rules and the market

dominates. so long will poverty and penury exist and there will be no alleviation in their miserable life.

Here the Unity Movement must state clearly its line of action

- (a) No peasant organisation must be involved in changing this clause or that when capital is in control.
- (b) The peasantry must reject compensation for only the rich can pay and the result will be a division in their ranks.
- (c) When it comes to the question of allotment of land, the peasantry must ask, "Who are in charge?" Allotment should not, on any account be handed by the old authorities.
- (d) Those who are elected to allot land to the landless must be elected by the people and' accountable to the people.

THAT IS TRUE DEMOCRACY IN ACTION.

Speaking from a long range point of view - the impending proletarian struggle with the working-class in the lead and the peasantry as its true ally, it is necessary for the proletariat to defend revolutionary traditions against capitalist strivings. But it would be a great mistake to think that the new farmer class turning towards division of the land, nationalisation will be a transient phenomenon of no serious significance. On the contrary, it will have serious material and moral significance. The moral significance of nationalization in a revolutionary epoch lies in that the proletariat helps to strike a blow at one form of private property. (Our emphasis)

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March 1991