

Revolutionaries and the Slogan of “Azadi Kashmir”

Should Marxists advocate the independence of Kashmir?

An Essay by Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 13 September 2019, www.thecommunists.net

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Introduction

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) and its comrades in South Asia have always considered the liberation struggle of the Kashmiri people as a key question of the revolutionary struggle in the region. Kashmir is divided and occupied by three powers – India, Pakistan, and China. The majority of the 14 million people live under Indian occupation; most of the rest live under in the area controlled by the Pakistani state.

In the past decades, and particularly in recent weeks, the oppression in Indian-Occupied Kashmir has dramatically accelerated. The right-wing chauvinist Modi government abolished on 5 August the formal autonomy rights of Muslim-majority province and transformed Kashmir into a huge concentration camp. People are locked up in their houses for most of the time and all communication means are cut. According to government reports, the authorities in Indian-Occupied Kashmir have arrested nearly 4,000 people since the scrapping of its special status last month. ¹ As we have stated repeatedly: Kashmir has become a second Palestine! ²

Hence, our movement has always supported the liberation struggle of the workers and poor peasants in Kashmir and combined this with a socialist perspective. We integrated our support for an independent and united Kashmir into our program from the very beginning. In our Manifesto, adopted at the foundation of the RCIT in 2012, we state:

“For the right to self-determination of oppressed peoples including the right to form their own state, if they wish so! Wherever oppressed people have already clearly stated their desire for a separate state, we support this and combine this with the slogan for a workers ‘and peasants’ republic. This applies for example for a socialist Tamil Eelam, a united Ireland, a united Kashmir, an independent Kurdistan, Chechnya, Tibet, etc. Unconditional support for the liberation struggle – including in its armed form!” ³

In this essay, we will explain both the theoretical considerations as well as the concrete reasons why the RCIT supports the slogan of “*Azadi Kashmir*”, i.e. a free and independent Kashmir. In later articles we intend to deal with other aspects of the program of the Kashmiri liberation struggle, the positions of the Indian left on Kashmir, etc.

¹ Devjyot Ghoshal, Alasdair Pal: Thousands detained in Indian Kashmir crackdown, official data reveals, September 12, 2019 / <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-kashmir-detentions/thousands-detained-in-indian-kashmir-crackdown-official-data-reveals-idUSKCN1VX142>

² We have collected the RCIT’s statements and articles on Kashmir in a special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/collection-of-articles-on-the-liberation-struggle-in-kashmir/>.

³ RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto (2012), p. 49, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>. In this context, we refer readers also to a recently published pamphlet of the RCIT, written by our comrade Yossi Schwartz: The National Question. The Marxist approach to the struggle of the oppressed people, August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-national-question/>.

1. The Marxist classics on national self-determination of oppressed peoples

Our support for the slogan of “Azadi Kashmir” is first and foremost based on the fundamental principles of Marxism. A key concept of Marxism is the recognition that the national question has become a central feature of the epoch of imperialism. V. I. Lenin, founder of the Bolshevik Party and leader of the young Soviet Union, emphasized this point numerous times.

*“The programme of Social-Democracy (this is how the Marxists called themselves at that time, Ed.), as a counter-balance to this petty-bourgeois, opportunist utopia, must postulate the division of nations into oppressor and oppressed as basic, significant and inevitable under imperialism.”*⁴

Lenin concluded from this that Marxists have to support unequivocally the struggles of oppressed nations to determine freely their future. It is up to the oppressed people to decide if they want to continue living in the same state but with specific provisions (local self-government, autonomy, etc.), if they prefer to join another state or if they want to separate and to live in an independent state.

*„Socialists cannot achieve their great aim without fighting against all oppression of nations. They must, therefore, unequivocally demand that the Social-Democratic parties of the oppressor countries (especially of the so-called “Great” Powers) should recognise and champion the oppressed nation’s right to self-determination, in the specifically political sense of the term, i.e., the right to political secession. The socialist of a ruling or a colonial nation who does not stand for that right is a chauvinist.”*⁵

*“The proletariat must struggle against the enforced retention of oppressed nations within the bounds of the given state, which means that they must fight for the right to self-determination. The proletariat must demand freedom of political separation for the colonies and nations oppressed by “their own” nation.”*⁶

The Bolsheviks have always insisted that advocating freedom of an oppressed nation is crucial for several reasons. First, international unity between the workers of different nations is only possible on the basis of freedom, i.e. the absence of any state coercion of one nation by another. It is an old Stalinist illusion to imagine that one can build trust between nations by putting a gun on the head of oppressed people. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the desire of the oppressed nations to have their own states once the Soviet army was forced to retreat has been a powerful confirmation of this fact!

The famous statement of Friedrich Engels has not lost its importance: *“A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations.”*⁷ Lenin strongly supported this idea and repeated its spirit many times: *“On the other hand, in contrast to the Proudhonists, who “repudiated” the national problem “in the name of the social revolution,” Marx, having in mind mainly the interests of the proletariat*

⁴ V. I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 147

⁵ V. I. Lenin and G. Zinoviev: Socialism and War (1915); in: LCW 21, pp.316-17

⁶ V. I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, pp. 147-148

⁷ Friedrich Engels: Speech on Poland (1847), Speeches at the International Meeting held in London on November 29,1847 to mark the 17th Anniversary of the Polish Uprising of 1830, in MECW Vol. 6, p. 389, online: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/12/09.htm#engels>

*class struggle in the advanced countries, put into the forefront the fundamental principle of internationalism and socialism, viz., that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations.”*⁸

Secondly, unequivocally advocating the cause of freedom of an oppressed nation is also important in order to allow revolutionaries to achieve a leading role in a given liberation movement of an oppressed nation and to win them for a socialist perspective. If revolutionaries do not actively support such a movement and fight *within* it for a proletarian strategy, they will inevitably isolate themselves and allow various petty-bourgeois nationalist and Islamist forces to gain hegemony in such movements.

Leon Trotsky, the most important collaborator of Lenin from the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917 until the latter's death, explained this fact in an article, written in 1939, in which he defended the slogan of independence for the Ukraine.

*“The sectarian simply ignores the fact that the national struggle, one of the most labyrinthine and complex but at the same time extremely important forms of the class struggle, cannot be suspended by bare references to the future world revolution. With their eyes turned away from the USSR, and failing to receive support and leadership from the international proletariat, the petty-bourgeois and even working-class masses of Western Ukraine are falling victim to reactionary demagoguery. Similar processes are undoubtedly also taking place in the Soviet Ukraine, only it is more difficult to lay them bare. The slogan of an independent Ukraine advanced in time by the proletarian vanguard will lead to the unavoidable stratification of the petty bourgeoisie and render it easier for its lower tiers to ally themselves with the proletariat. Only thus is it possible to prepare the proletarian revolution.”*⁹

Thirdly, supporting the struggles of oppressed nations is essential so that socialists of an oppressor nation can win the trust of the masses of an oppressed nation. Hence, the Communist Party of Russia, at the instigation of Lenin, codified in its program adopted in 1919 the following programmatic statement: *“In order to remove mistrust on the part of the working masses of the oppressed countries toward the proletariat of those states which oppressed them, it is necessary to abolish all privileges of any national group, to proclaim the full equality of nations and to recognize the rights of colonies and dependent nations to state separation.”*¹⁰

And finally, the unambiguous and bold advocacy of the cause of national self-determination is particularly important in order to educate the working class of the oppressor nation. Lenin repeatedly pointed out that the ruling class of an oppressor nation often succeeds to poison the political consciousness of the working class with chauvinist ideas. In an essay on the national question he explained that the workers of an oppressor nation *“are taught, at school and in life, disdain and contempt for the workers of the oppressed nations. This has been experienced, for example, by every Great Russian who has been brought up or who has lived among Great Russians.”*¹¹

In order to counter this chauvinist manipulation, it is crucial that Marxists openly support the right of oppressed nations to determine their political future independently. Lenin emphasized this

⁸ V. I. Lenin: *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, p. 149

⁹ Leon Trotsky: *Independence of the Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads* (July 1939), in: *Writings 1939-40*, p. 50, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/07/ukraine.htm>

¹⁰ Robert H. McNeal and Richard Gregor: *Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vol.2, The Early Soviet Period: 1917-1929*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1974, p. 61

¹¹ V. I. Lenin: *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*; in: *CW Vol. 23*, p. 56

repeatedly: *“The important thing is not whether one-fiftieth or one-hundredth of the small nations are liberated before the socialist revolution, but the fact that in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into two international camps, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominantnation bourgeoisie—obtained, among other things, from the double or triple exploitation of small nations—while the other cannot liberate itself without liberating the small nations, without educating the masses in an anti-chauvinist, i.e., anti-annexationist, i.e., “selfdeterminationist”, spirit.”*¹²

2. The algebraic slogan of the “right of national self-determination” and the specific slogan of “independence”

Marxists *always* advocate the right of national self-determination for oppressed nations. This is a fundamental democratic principle and as such it is part of the comprehensive program of socialist revolution. Of course, there can be situations where a given principle can be superseded by a higher principle. For example if a war takes place between two powers, the right of national self-determination of a small nation might, depending on the concrete conditions, become subordinated to the tactics in such a war. This was, for example, the case during World War I when the defence of Serbia against the Austrian-Hungarian Empire or the right of national self-determination of the Polish people became subordinated to the necessary revolutionary tactics of defeatism, i.e. the task for socialists to oppose all Great Powers.¹³ However, such subordination will take place only in exceptional and temporary circumstances.

To give an analogy: a medic will always help a person whose arm has been broken in the accident. However, if another person suffered a fractured skull in the same accident, the medic will focus all his or her attention this victim. He or she will “subordinate” the treatment of the person with the broken arm and deal with it at a later point.

As said, in general, the Marxist position is to advocate the right of national self-determination for oppressed nations. We say that it is up to this people to decide *how* they wish to realize this right. Do they prefer to remain within the state they are currently living and to invoke some form of local self-government? Or do they want to live under some kind of autonomy? Or do they wish to separate and join another state or to have their own, independent state? It is up to the oppressed people, and not to the oppressor nation, to decide about these questions!

If an oppressed people want to realize its right of national self-determination in the form of state separation, it is the duty of Marxists to unconditionally support this. This has always been the method of Marxists. Hence, the Communist International stated in a resolution adopted at its Fourth Congress in 1922: *“The communist workers’ parties of the colonial and semi-colonial countries ... fight for the most*

¹² V. I. Lenin: The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 343

¹³ For the RCIT’s program of revolutionary defeatism against all imperialist Great Powers see e.g. RCIT: Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States, 8 September 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-on-revolutionary-defeatism-in-imperialist-states/>; see also Michael Pröbsting: Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left’s Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective, RCIT Books, Vienna 2019. The book can be read online or downloaded for free here: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>

*radical possible solution of the tasks of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which aims at the conquest of political independence.”*¹⁴

When Trotsky, after the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern, was educating and organizing the forces of the Fourth International in the 1930s, he applied this principle to various struggles of oppressed nations. He did so not only in the case of nations which fought against imperialist colonialism but also in other cases. For example he advocated support for the national struggle of the Macedonian people which were oppressed by Greece (a semi-colonial state at that time):

*“We merely say that if the Macedonians want it, we will then side with them, that they should be allowed to decide, and we will also support their decision. What disturbs me is not so much the question of the Macedonian peasants, but rather whether there isn’t a touch of chauvinist poison in Greek workers. That is very dangerous. For us, who are for a Balkan federation of soviet states, it is all the same if Macedonia belongs to this federation as an autonomous whole or part of another state. However, if the Macedonians are oppressed by the bourgeois government, or feel that they are oppressed, we must give them support.”*¹⁵

Likewise, he developed the program of an independent Soviet-Ukraine in 1939 when the national oppression by the Stalinist bureaucracy alienated the Ukrainian people from the USSR:

“If our critic were capable of thinking politically, he would have surmised without much difficulty the arguments of the Stalinists against the slogan of an independent Ukraine: “It negates the position of the defense of the Soviet Union”; “disrupts the unity of the revolutionary masses”; “serves not the interests of revolution but those of imperialism.” In other words, the Stalinists would repeat all the three arguments of our author. They will unfailingly do so on the morrow.

The Kremlin bureaucracy, tells the Soviet woman: Inasmuch as there is socialism in our country, you must be happy and you must give up abortions (or suffer the penalty). To the Ukrainian they say: Inasmuch as the socialist revolution has solved the national question, it is your duty to be happy in the USSR and to renounce all thought of separation (or face the firing squad).

*What does a revolutionist say to the woman? “You will decide yourself whether you want a child: I will defend your right to abortion against the Kremlin police.” To the Ukrainian people he says: “Of importance to me is your attitude toward your national destiny and not the ‘socialistic’ sophistries of the Kremlin police; I will support your struggle for independence with all my might!”*¹⁶

How shall Marxists estimate if an oppressed people desires for state separation and independence? This question is undoubtedly not always easy to answer and necessitates a concrete analysis by Marxists. It is in the very nature of national oppression that the ruling class of the oppressor state usually does not allow the oppressed people to freely express their wishes. However, this does not mean that it is not possible for Marxists to determine the preferences of an oppressed people. Mass struggles, the influence of political forces, popular slogans at mass demonstrations, history and

¹⁴ Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question, 5 December 1922, Fourth Congress of the Communist International, in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, p. 389

¹⁵ Leon Trotsky: A Discussion on Greece (Spring 1932), In: Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement (1929-33), Pathfinder, New York 1979, p. 129-130

¹⁶ Leon Trotsky: Independence of the Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads (July 1939), in: Writings 1939-40, p. 48, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/07/ukraine.htm>

tradition of the liberation struggle, etc. – all these can be clear indicators of the consciousness and the mood of an oppressed people.

The RCIT has summarized its approach to the issue of the struggle of oppressed nations in its programmatic Manifesto adopted in 2016 as follows:

*“The growing importance of the democratic question is also reflected in the increasing number of struggles of national and ethnic minorities against national oppression. There have been important struggles of oppressed nations both in imperialist countries (...) as well as in semi-colonial countries (e.g., the Palestinians, the Kurdish people, the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Kashmiri in India, etc.). (...) The RCIT strives to achieve the closest unity between the workers and oppressed of different nations and religious beliefs. However, this goal is impossible to achieve by simply denying existing national oppression or by abstract appeals to “class unity.” This task can only succeed if revolutionaries acknowledge the oppression and fight for the full equality of the oppressed group. Thus, the RCIT calls upon the workers’ vanguard to oppose all forms of chauvinism, pressure to assimilate, etc., and to implement the program of revolutionary equality. Socialists unconditionally defend the right to national self-determination for all oppressed peoples. Socialists must support the struggle for full equality (equality of their native language, equality of citizenship rights, equal wages, etc.), local self-government and territorial autonomy. Whenever an oppressed people wishes to have an independent state, socialists are obligated to support this demand.”*¹⁷

3. Not only opposition *against* oppression but active support for the struggle of oppressed nations!

Furthermore, it is essential to understand that the Marxists’ support for the right of national self-determination for oppressed nations always includes support for the actual liberation struggle of these peoples. For authentic revolutionaries it is not sufficient to oppose the oppression, it is also necessary to side with the oppressed people and to support their struggle.

The Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky was unequivocally clear on this: *“In regard to the more backward states and nations, primarily feudal or patriarchal or patriarchal-peasant in character, the following considerations must be kept specially in mind: All communist parties must support by action the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries. The form which this support shall take should be discussed with the communist party of the country in question, if there is one. This obligation refers in the first place to the active support of the workers in that country on which the backward nation is financially, or as a colony, dependent.”*¹⁸

It was in this same spirit that the Communist International in 1920 called the active support of the national liberation struggle as a duty of every revolutionary in the imperialist states:

“A particularly explicit and clear attitude on the question of the colonies and the oppressed peoples is necessary for the parties in those countries where the bourgeoisie possess colonies and oppress other nations. Every party which wishes to join the Communist International is obliged to expose the tricks and dodges of ‘its’ imperialists

¹⁷ RCIT: Manifesto for Revolutionary Liberation, 2016, p. 18, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-program-2016/>

¹⁸ Communist International: Theses on the National and Colonial Question, 1920, Second Congress of the Communist International, in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, p. 143

*in the colonies, to support every colonial liberation movement not merely in words but in deeds, to demand the expulsion of their own imperialists from these colonies, to inculcate among the workers of their country a genuinely fraternal attitude to the working people of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and to carry on systematic agitation among the troops of their country against any oppression of the colonial peoples.”*¹⁹

Trotsky aptly summarized the different approaches between Bolshevism which advocates such active support for the struggle of oppressed nations and pseudo-revolutionary centrism which confines itself to vague “opposition“ against national oppression:

*„Nevertheless, Ledebour’s position even on this question does not leave the precincts of centrism. Ledebour demands that a battle be waged against colonial oppression; he is ready to vote in parliament against colonial credits; he is ready to take upon himself a fearless defense of the victims of a crushed colonial insurrection. But Ledebour will not participate in preparing a colonial insurrection. Such work he considers putschism, adventurism, Bolshevism. And therein is the whole gist of the matter. What characterizes Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognizing their “right” to self-determination and to parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus, or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilized executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism.”*²⁰

Marxists must energetically *support* such struggles irrespective of the fact that they take place under a non-Marxist, petty-bourgeois leadership (usually nationalists, Islamists or populists) and despite the fact that the masses still have a politically less developed consciousness. Numerous centrists arrogantly glance down to the “backward” masses and prefer to stand aside of such struggles (or even support the counter-revolution). In contrast, revolutionaries wholeheartedly side with and join such liberation struggles of the workers and oppressed. The centrists say that such masses are hopelessly backward and one should wait until they have learned and only then one could join forces with them. In contrast, the Marxists insist on joining the fighting masses already now while they still follow wrong ideologies but struggle against their oppressors and, during and in the midst of such struggles, we will help them to politically learn and to advance their consciousness.

In summary, the RCIT follows the following approach: *“On the basis of these principles, Marxists always supported the liberation struggle of oppressed people even if they took place under the leadership of (petty-)bourgeois forces. Naturally they supported only the practical, military struggle without giving an inch of political support for those (petty-) bourgeois forces.”*²¹

¹⁹ Communist International: Conditions of Admission to the Communist International, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents. Selected and edited by Jane Degras, Volume I 1919-1922, p. 170

²⁰ Leon Trotsky: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat (1932), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/index.htm>

²¹ Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, p. 306, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>

4. The occupation of Kashmir: A casualty of the colonial legacy

For socialists it is decisive for the future state form of Kashmir what its people wish for and not what is the geopolitical power-political calculus of the ruling elites in Delhi or Islamabad. Here is not the place to elaborate on the history of Kashmir – an issue about which a vast literature already exists.²²

However, it is sufficient to state that the people of Kashmir were never allowed to freely express their preference! When British imperialism was forced to retreat from its colonies in South Asia after World War II, it left a devastating legacy. The colonial occupation had opened a period of sustained stagnation and super-exploitation. According to the distinguished economic historian Angus Maddison, "*India's per capita income in 1750 was probably similar to that in 1950*".²³ India's share in global output dramatically declined to 4.2% in 1950, i.e. at the end of Britain's colonial occupation. A study by the economic historians Clingingsmith and Williamson calculates that India's share in world manufacturing output collapsed from 24.5% (1750) in the pre-colonial era to only 2.4% in 1938.²⁴

The people suffered terrible consequences. It is estimated that up to 19 million people died of starvation and disease in India between the years 1896 and 1903.²⁵ According to another estimate, more than 30 million people died in India owing to plague, influenza, cholera and other kinds of disease between 1901 and 1947.²⁶ The notorious Bengal famine of 1943 was a 'manmade famine' of British rule. More than 3 million people died during that calamity.

When the ruling class in London was forced to recognize the independence in 1947, it instigated divisions and communal hatred between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in order to keep the former colonial slaves weak and divided – following the old maxim of the Roman Empire "*divide et impera*". It found willing collaborators among the emerging bourgeoisie which had its political expression in Mohandas Gandhi's *Indian National Congress* resp. Muhammad Ali Jinnah's *Muslim League*. The result was a painful division of the region and horrible pogroms and expulsions. In a short period of time more than fifteen million people were uprooted, and between one and two million were killed. On the basis of this tragedy the country became partitioned between Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated Pakistan.²⁷

²² See e.g. Sumantra Bose: *Kashmir. Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2003; Prem Nath Bazaz: *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, Kashmir Pub. Co., New Delhi 1954; Prem Nath Bazaz: *Inside Kashmir*, The Kashmir Publishing Corporation, Srinagar 1941; Rakesh Ankit: *The Kashmir Conflict. From Empire to the Cold War, 1945–66*, Routledge, New York 2016; Prithivi Nath Kaul Bamzai: *Culture and Political History of Kashmir. Volume 1-3*, M.D. Publications, New Delhi 1994; Sumit Ganguly (Ed): *The Kashmir Question. Retrospect and Prospect*, Frank Cass, London 2003

²³ Angus Maddison: *Class Structure and Economic Growth. India and Pakistan since the Moghuls*, First published in 1971, Reprinted in 2006 by Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 18

²⁴ David Clingingsmith, Jeffrey G. Williamson: *India's Deindustrialization in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Harvard University, 2005, p. 34

²⁵ Janam Mukherjee: *Hungry Bengal. War, Famine and the End of Empire*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015, p. 28

²⁶ D.N. Panigrahi: *India's Partition. The story of imperialism in retreat*, Routledge, New York 2004, p. 251

²⁷ See on this e.g., D.N. Panigrahi: *India's Partition. The story of imperialism in retreat*, Routledge, New York 2004; Joya Chatterji: *Bengal divided. Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994; Joya Chatterji: *The Spoils of Partition. Bengal and India, 1947–1967*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007; Bidyut Chakrabarty: *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932–1947*, RoutledgeCurzon, London

Kashmir became a casualty of this devastating process. It was a princely state during the British colonial rule. It was ruled by a Hindu monarch despite the fact that, according to the British census of 1941, its population had a majority of 77% Muslims (plus 20% Hindu, and 3% others, mostly Sikhs, with a sprinkling of Buddhists).²⁸ Maharaja Hari Singh, a thoroughly dissolute and corrupt autocrat, refused to allow the population to express their will. According to the *India Independence Act* of 1947, the princely states had the right to remain independent or to accede to either of the then two new fully sovereign dominions of India and Pakistan. Initially, the Maharaja hoped to keep an independent state by playing off India versus Pakistan. However, after a short period of formal independence of Kashmir (between August and October 1947), Singh faced a popular revolt in Poonch (as a result of punitive taxes imposed on the region's Muslim peasantry) which was later supported by the Pakistan army. The Maharaja called the Indian army in order to save his reign and declared the accession of Kashmir to India. The war between India and Pakistan resulted in a partition of the region which lasts until today.²⁹

According to a resolution of the UN Security Council (Resolution 47, adopted on 21 April 1948), a commission should facilitate *"a free and impartial plebiscite to decide whether the State of Jammu and Kashmir is to accede to India or Pakistan."*³⁰ (We note in passing that this resolution did no longer allow the people of Kashmir to choose independence – a reactionary decision of the Great Powers dominating the UN Security Council!) While this UN resolution was formally accepted by the Indian government, it never allowed holding such a plebiscite to this day.

5. Kashmir: What do the people want?

It is no accident that the Indian government never allowed such a plebiscite to take place. The reason is that India's ruling class was always aware that the majority of the Kashmiri people would never agree to be part of India. In 1966 Jayaprakash Narayan, an Indian opposition leader, wrote to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi: *"We profess democracy, but rule by force in Kashmir. We profess secularism, but let Hindu nationalism stampede us into establishing it by repression. Kashmir has distorted India's image in the world as nothing else has done. The problem exists not because Pakistan wants to grab Kashmir, but because there is deep and widespread discontent among the people."*

Prem Nath Bazaz, a Kashmiri Pandit (as the Hindu people in the region are called) writer, argued at the time that while *"India may reject the plebiscite and turn down UN resolutions as outdated and impractical, India cannot forever defraud the State [Indian-Occupied Kashmir, Ed.] people of their constitutional right to free elections."* He added that *"if free elections are held, it may be taken for granted that the majority of seats will be captured by those unfriendly to India."*³¹

2004; William Dalrymple: *The Great Divide - The violent legacy of Indian Partition*, *The New Yorker*, June 29, 2015 Issue, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>

²⁸ Sumantra Bose: *Kashmir*, p. 16

²⁹ Sumantra Bose: *Kashmir*, p. 32

³⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan*, 14 June 2018, p. 8

³¹ Both quotes from Sumantra Bose: *Kashmir*, pp. 84-85

At this point, we would also like to quote the argument of Prithivi Nath Kaul Bamzai. Bamzai was a staunch Indian chauvinist who worked for the government in India and wrote a number of books on Kashmir. To illustrate his pro-Indian bias, we refer to his claim that the Kashmiri population enthusiastically welcomed (!) the military intervention of the Indian army in late October 1947.³²

However, even such an Indian chauvinist has difficulties to justify why the Indian government never allowed a plebiscite of the Kashmiri population. He claims that by the early 1960s, the Indian government has brought numerous benefits to Kashmir: *“Conditions in Kashmir had materially altered since the day the Security Council was seized of the question. During these 15 years Kashmir, the part of the State that is free (!), had made allround progress politically, economically and socially. Land reforms were implemented, canals dug, a network of roads built. The tourist trade was flourishing. Education was free from the primary to the post-graduate classes. New schools and colleges were opened, dispensaries and hospitals established, refugees rehabilitated and development plans implemented courageously and with enthusiasm. The conditions prevailing were thus quite different from those in 1947. To have a plebiscite now would amount to throwing all this progress to the wind by creating uncertainty and chaos which might throw open the floodgates of communal disorder not only in Kashmir but in India and Pakistan.”*³³

This is a somehow better articulated version of an “argument” a la Donald Trump! If India has brought “freedom” and many material and economic benefits to the region, how on earth could a plebiscite have caused “*uncertainty, chaos and communal disorder*”? Many plebiscites have taken place around the world and usually they do not provoke “*chaos and disorder*”. So why should this be the case in Kashmir?! If Bamzai’s claim would have been true, the Kashmiri population would have overwhelmingly voted to remain part of India! Why should they have wished to leave all these supposed blessings of the Indian state?! In fact, of course, this whole claim has been silly nonsense and the opposite is true: the Kashmiri people never wanted to be part of India. This is the real reason why Delhi has refused holding such a plebiscite to this day. As we have shown above, more honest Indian politicians have been always aware of these real reasons.

If the majority of the Kashmiri people didn’t want to remain within the Indian state in the past, this is even more true today! When the people of Indian-Occupied Kashmir launched a popular uprising in 1989, the Indian state responded with unprecedented brutality. In a report from 2010, the *International People’s Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-administered Kashmir* stated: *“The actions of military and paramilitary forces in Kashmir inflict terror on the local population, disbursed through “extrajudicial” means and those authorized by law. In the enduring conflict, 667,000 military and paramilitary personnel act with impunity to regulate movement, law, and order across Kashmir. Between 1989-2009, the*

³² *“There was widespread jubilation among the citizens of Srinagar and the inhabitants of neighbouring towns and villages. For five anxious days they had carried on with normal life, kept the essential services going, and maintained a strict discipline. Their morale was high; they did not give way to panic, and they organised bands of volunteers to maintain law and order and keep a strict watch on strategic points. For five days they faced manfully the alarming reports of the raiders* advance and their eyes were constantly cast to the skies in the hope of seeing the first Indian plane coming with the sorely needed help and relief. They had collected all available motor vehicles and kept them ready to carry the first troops to the front. Local drivers were at the wheels ready to risk their lives in defending their land.”* (Prithivi Nath Kaul Bamzai: *Culture and Political History of Kashmir*. Vol. 3, p. 761)

³³ Prithivi Nath Kaul Bamzai: *Culture and Political History of Kashmir*. Vol. 3, p. 790

actions of India's military and paramilitary forces in Kashmir have resulted in 70,000+ deaths, including through extrajudicial or "fake encounter" executions, custodial brutality, and other means." ³⁴

Kashmir's largest independence movement, the *All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference*, reported in 2008 that more than 100,000 people had died since the insurgency broke out in 1989. Even the Indian authorities had to admit at that time that the death toll in that period was more than 47,000 people! ³⁵ In addition, thousands of women have been gang raped by marauding bands of Indian soldiers. ³⁶

Already before the latest escalation, Kashmir has been the world's most militarized zones. The Indian state has stationed about 750,000 soldiers and police forces - in an area with a population of only 8 million people! And since 5 August, Delhi has sent an additional 50,000 Indian troops into Kashmir! This means there is roughly one Indian troop for every 10 Kashmiri citizens! ³⁷

The Indian state is using such massive oppression because it faces a population which in its huge majority is hostile to it! As we have already said, it is hardly surprising that Delhi never allowed holding a plebiscite: despite its hundreds of thousands occupation troops it expects to lose a popular referendum!

There have been various surveys of Western institutes about the opinion of the Kashmiri people. Since these surveys can not take place under free conditions, it is clear that many people fear to express their anti-Indian views openly. Nevertheless, these surveys show very clearly that the Kashmiri people in their majority do not want to remain part of the Indian state.

An Indian paper published a survey in 2007 about the views of the population of Srinagar, Indian Kashmir's summer capital. According to this survey 87% of people questioned wanted independence. ³⁸ Another survey published in 2010 by Chatham House, a British think-tank, revealed that on average 44% of people in Pakistani-administered Kashmir and 43% in Indian-administered Kashmir favoured independence. The rest (in both regions combined) was divided between joining Pakistan (15%) and India (21%). ³⁹

³⁴ International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-administered Kashmir: Fake Encounters and State Terror in Kashmir: A Brief, Srinagar, June 06, 2010, pp. 8-9

³⁵ India revises Kashmir death toll to 47,000, November 21, 2008 / <https://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-36624520081121>; see also: Murtaza Solangi: Pakistan's Kashmir Narrative Is Falling Flat. How Might That Change? September 10, 2019 <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/pakistans-kashmir-narrative-is-falling-flat-how-might-that-change/>

³⁶ Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS): Torture. Indian State's Instrument of Control in Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir, 2019; Human Rights Watch: Rape in Kashmir. A Crime of War (1993); Binish Ahmed: Call the crime in Kashmir by its name: Ongoing genocide, August 8, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/call-the-crime-in-kashmir-by-its-name-ongoing-genocide-120412>

³⁷ Shubh Mathur: This Time, the World Is Watching in Kashmir, August 22, 2019 <https://fpif.org/this-time-the-world-is-watching-in-kashmir/>

³⁸ Majority in Kashmir Valley want independence: poll, August 13, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kashmir-poll/majority-in-kashmir-valley-want-independence-poll-idUSDEL29179620070813>

³⁹ Robert W. Bradnock: Kashmir: Paths to Peace, Chatham House, May 2010, p. 19. I allow myself to point out a peculiar detail of this study. Since it was published in 2010, this was a period in which British (and other Western) imperialism still had a friendly relationship with the Libyan dictator Gaddafi. Hence, there existed many business deals between the two countries, the EU paid the Libyan dictator for stopping migrants entering Europe and Gaddafi spent millions of Dollar to support Sarkozy's election campaign in France. Another expression of this collaboration is the fact that this study of Chatham House states at its front page "A project sponsored by Saif al

As we mentioned above, such surveys certainly do not fully express the popular desire for separating from India. For example, according to this study, only 2% of the respondents in Indian-Occupied Kashmir preferred joining Pakistan. This seems to us a very understated figure given the fact that slogans like “*Kashmir banega Pakistan*” (“Kashmir will become part of Pakistan”) and “*Pakistan Zindabad*” (“Long Live Pakistan”) are very popular at mass demonstrations in Kashmir. Furthermore, the largest guerrilla force in Kashmir, *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen*, openly advocates Kashmir’s accession to Pakistan.

In addition to such surveys, the people of Kashmir have unequivocally demonstrated their desire to separate from India in numerous mass actions – despite the extraordinary presence of Indian occupation troops. They have staged many general strikes, mass demonstration, a decades-long insurgency in which this small people scarified 100,000 martyrs, etc.!

There can be no doubt that the Kashmiri people do not want to live any longer within the Indian oppressor state! This is why the RCIT strongly and unconditionally supports the liberation struggle of the Kashmiri people to win independence!

6. Independence or joining Pakistan?

An important issue of the perspective of the Kashmiri liberation struggle is the question if Kashmir should become an independent republic or if it should join Pakistan. The RCIT states that such a decision must be left to the people of Kashmir – of all its parts. They must decide freely in a referendum, without the presence of any non-Kashmiri troops (Indian or Pakistani).

Nevertheless, it is our position that Indian-Occupied Kashmir should join with the Pakistani and the Chinese part to constitute an independent republic. More precisely, we advocate a *united, independent and socialist Kashmir* in which the workers and poor peasant take power and expropriate all big capitalists and landlords. Naturally, such an independent Kashmir should respect the rights of all ethnic and religious minorities on its territory.

What are our reasons for preferring independence to joining Pakistan? First, independence is clearly the more popular perspective among Kashmiri people by all accounts (see also the surveys mentioned above). It has been the traditional and historical based slogan of the Kashmiri liberation movement. and it has been the rallying cry of the insurgency since 1989 and was the official slogan of its leading force – the *Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front*.

We have explained in various documents that India is a “*prison house of nations*” and the Kashmiri people are not the only one oppressed by the ruling class in Delhi. ⁴⁰ However, Pakistan is also a state

Islam al Qadhafi” (i.e. the son of Gaddafi)! Surely, the bosses of Chatham House might feel some embarrassment about this today, but what the hell, “business is business” as the saying goes!

⁴⁰ See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: India: A Prison House of Nations and Lower Castes (On the Reasons for Modi’s Coup in Kashmir). Essay on the social and national contradictions of Indian capitalism and the rise of Hindutva chauvinism, 16 August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/india-is-a-a-prison-house-of-nations-and-lower-castes/>. We also refer readers to chapter V of a pamphlet in which we elaborate a substantial analysis of India’s contradictory development as a capitalist regional power, albeit we consider it not as an

which oppresses and discriminates a number of nations and nationalities (e.g. the Baloch people, the Kashmiri people, etc.)⁴¹

In our opinion it is important for Marxists in South Asia to recognize that the states in the region (like India, Pakistan and others) are not organically developed nation states but rather artificial products dominated by semi-colonial capitalist classes in collaboration with imperialist Great Powers. These borders were deliberately created by the decaying British Empire in order to foster hatred and divisions.

The RCIT considers that all socialists in South Asia should aim for overcoming these artificial borders. Obviously, the goal is not to force any nation or any ethnical group to join (or to remain part of) a state against its wish. The task is rather to combine two central issues.

First, all nations and nationalities must have the right of national self-determination. They must have the freedom to choose without any force if they want to live in a larger state or if they want to become independent. Secondly, revolutionaries should advocate the creation of a *Socialist Federation of the Peoples of South Asia*.

7. The Perspective of a *Socialist Federation of the Peoples of South Asia*

It is important to emphasize that such a federation must be constituted on a *completely voluntary basis*.⁴² No nation must be forced to join it against its will. However, it is equally clear that our model is not the division of different people into many small states but rather a process of (voluntary) convergence and unification.

Such a perspective for a socialist federation is incompatible with insisting on keeping the current frontiers of India, Pakistan and other South Asian states! Such a federation will most likely not be the result of a mechanical merger of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal etc. It will be rather the result of a voluntary affiliation of the numerous nations and nationalities of the sub-continent which, at that point, will have partly their own independent states partly will live already together in larger states.

In advocating the model of a socialist federation, we also take into account the conclusions which the Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky drew: "*Federation is a transitional form on the way to the complete unification of the toilers of all nations. Federation has already showed its expediency in practice, not only in the relations between the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and the other Soviet Republics (the Hungarian, Finnish and Latvian in the past, those of Aserbaijan and the Ukraine at present), but also within the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, even in relation to nationalities who possessed*

imperialist but rather as a semi-colonial state. (Michael Pröbsting: The China-India Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements? August 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/>)

⁴¹ See on this e.g. the *Action Program of the Revolutionary Workers Organisation* (the Pakistani section of the RCIT), <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/pakistan-action-program/>.

⁴² We point out in this context the interesting study of our comrade Yossi Schwartz in which he elaborated the development of Lenin's concept of the national question and his conclusion in the final years about the superiority of the model of a federation. (See chapter 6 of his above mentioned pamphlet *The National Question*.)

*neither political existence nor self-government (for example the Bashkir and Tartar Republics in the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, which were set up in 1919 and 1920). The task of the Communist International in this respect consists not only in the further development of this federation based on the soviet order and the soviet movement, but also in its study and the testing of our experiences with it. Recognising that Federation is a form in the transition to complete unification, we must strive for an ever closer federal link.”*⁴³

8. The importance of the Kashmiri liberation struggle for the Indian workers movement and left

At the end of this essay, we want to emphasize that the liberation struggle of the Kashmiri people is not only important for the Kashmiris or for the people in Pakistan (most of whom are full of sympathy for their brothers and sisters across the border). It is our firm belief that the Kashmiri struggle against the Indian occupation is also of crucial importance for the Indian workers movement and left.

The support of the Indian state in its present borders, i.e. the support of its nature as a prison house of nations, is a dangerous poison which has contaminated the Indian workers movement and left since the foundation of this state. We intend to deal with the disastrous role of Stalinism in opportunist adaption to Indian chauvinism in more detail at a future essay. At this point we limit ourselves to the observation that the RCIT considers it as a crucial task for Marxists in India to patiently explain to the workers and poor peasants that the ruling class in Delhi is its main enemy – and not the “terrorists” in Kashmir or any neighboring state.

The Indian bourgeoisie has always utilized chauvinism, the myth of a “*united and secular India*”, as an ideological fetter to bind the masses to the capitalist Indian state. To free themselves from these social-chauvinist ideological shackles, the Indian workers and poor peasants must view the Kashmiri as their class brothers and sisters and should fully support their struggle for freedom. The Indian Marxists must explain the Indian masses that the freedom of Kashmir is also their own freedom!

In this context, it important to draw attention to those few forces in India which are willing to swim against the chauvinist stream. An example for this is Arundhati Roy, a prominent progressive writer and a courageous female activist. She emphasized the need to support the freedom struggle of the Kashmiri people on various occasions. In a passionate article with the self-explaining title “*Azadi: The Only Thing Kashmiris Want*” she wrote: “*The Indian military occupation of Kashmir makes monsters of us all. It allows Hindu chauvinists to target and victimize Muslims in India by holding them hostage to the freedom struggle being waged by Muslims in Kashmir. It’s all being stirred into a poisonous brew and administered intravenously, straight into our bloodstream. At the heart of it all is a moral question. Does any government have the right to take away people’s liberty with military force? India needs azadi from Kashmir just as much – if not more – than Kashmir needs azadi from India.*”⁴⁴

⁴³ Communist International: Theses on the National and Colonial Question, 1920, Second Congress of the Communist International, in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, p. 141

⁴⁴ Arundhati Roy: Azadi: The Only Thing Kashmiris Want, in: Tariq Ali, Hilal Bhatt, Angana P. Chatterji, Habbah Khatun, Pankaj Mishra, Arundhati Roy: Kashmir. The Case for Freedom, Verso, London 2011. It is worth pointing out the contrast between the opportunist Stalinists who oppose the liberation struggle of the Kashmiri people and Arundhati Roy who takes a much more principled stand on this issue. To underline we present also another

We conclude by repeating once more: All socialists, all democrats, all righteous people must support the struggle of the Kashmiri people for freedom. Kashmir is our second Palestine! Their liberation is our liberation!

quote from an interview with Roy: *“The second part of the question — yes, I am among those who are very uncomfortable with the idea of a nation state, but that questioning has to start from those who live in the secure heart of powerful states, not from those struggling to overthrow the yoke of a brutal occupation. Sure, an independent Kashmiri nation may be a flawed entity, but is independent India perfect? Are we not asking Kashmiris the same question that our old colonial masters asked us: are the natives ready for freedom?”* (Arundhati Roy: ‘An independent Kashmiri nation may be a flawed entity, but is independent India perfect?’, Tehelka Magazine, Vol 7, Issue 44, November 06, 2010, http://www.tehelka.com/story_main47.asp?filename=Ne061110CoverstoryII.asp)