

HOW CHINA SOLVES THE NATIONAL QUESTION

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CAN a people of various nationalities, with diverse customs, culture, habits, languages and religious beliefs, live together in harmony and on the basis of national equality?

This is a question generally posed in all countries that are confronted with the problem of finding a practical and realistic policy that will allow the co-existence of various nationalities living together within the same State.

While various countries, at different times, have formulated and worked out policies for the solution of their national questions, each solution has been based and guided by various historical facts. For instance: what interests are being served by the class that is attempting to solve their national question? And at what period in its development? Because of this, different countries have various concepts, coupled with their varying historical traditions and background, of what constitutes a nation, and their patterns of policy and approach are dissimilar.

In colonial and semi-colonial countries the dominant nations follow a particular, definite pattern of policy towards the subject nations, a pattern conforming to their system of government, namely, to subject the vast majority of the people to cruel, discriminatory laws, restricting them from development, so as to keep them in perpetual subjugation and domination. All this is done in the national interests of a tiny minority of the class that is dominating that country.

Therefore, any policy on the national question which does not take into consideration the fundamental right of all nationalities to self-determination, independence and national equality, cannot hope to be a fair and permanent solution.

China, a huge multi-racial country whose various nationalities have created their own history and culture, is making a practical contribution to solving this fundamental question.

When the People's Republic of China was founded in October, 1949, with over 60 nationalities, they adopted definite principles as their guide. Their main principle was to wipe out completely the enmity and misunderstanding among nationalities, left over from a long history of oppression of national minorities, both by the Hans (the largest national group in China) and by foreign and local oppressors.

China did not mechanically apply principles borrowed from other lands. The Chinese leaders first set themselves the task of going to the people and discussing their problems with them, to get a proper assessment of actual conditions prevailing in the areas inhabited by various national groupings. From the outset they knew that no policy towards nationalities would be worth anything unless supported by proper consultation and co-operation from the people concerned. Consultation and co-operation, therefore, became the keynote of their research work.

They carefully analysed the existing historical relations among the nationalities, coupled with the economic conditions in areas where different nationalities are concentrated. Thus they were able to formulate a policy that enjoys the support and co-operation of the various nationalities living within China and other territories within the Republic.

After conducting research work and holding consultations with the people, the leaders of the new Republic set themselves the task of drawing up a general programme, designed to entrench the fundamental rights of the various nationalities on the basis of national equality. This programme is drawn up in accordance with provisions of certain articles as follows:—

“(a) All nationalities within the boundaries of the People’s Republic of China shall have equal rights and duties.

“(b) All nationalities within the boundaries of the People’s Republic of China are equal. They shall establish unity and mutual aid among themselves, and shall oppose imperialism and public enemies in their midst, so that the People’s Republic of China will become a big fraternal and co-operative family, comprising all its nationalities. Greater nationalism and local nationalism shall be opposed. Actions involving discrimination, oppression and splitting the unity of the various nationalities shall be prohibited.

“(c) Regional autonomy shall be exercised in areas where national minorities are concentrated, and various kinds of autonomous organs for the different nationalities shall be set up according to the size of the respective populations and regions. In places where different nationalities live together and in the autonomous areas of the national minorities, the different nationalities shall each have an appropriate number of representatives in the local organs of the State power.

“(d) All national minorities within the boundaries of the People’s Republic of China shall have the right to join the People’s Liberation Army, and to organise local people’s public security forces in accordance with the unified military system of the State.

“(e) All national minorities shall have freedom to develop their spoken and written languages; to preserve or reform their traditions, customs and religious beliefs. The People’s Government shall assist the broad masses of all national minorities to develop their political, economic, cultural and educational construction work.”

REGIONAL AUTONOMY FOR NATIONALITIES

The fundamental policy of the People’s Republic of China, which is the key to the solution of China’s national question, is the establishment of national autonomous regions for nationalities. This policy, which enjoys the wholehearted support of the people of various nationalities, was laid down by the Republic as a solution of China’s national question. It is being implemented within the boundaries of China under the unified leadership of the Central People’s Government. The basic

principle is: to ensure that all national minorities enjoy the right of national equality, that is, equal rights in every respect for all nationalities; to help the nationalities develop politically, economically, culturally and educationally; to consolidate the unity among the various nationalities as well as within each nationality; to oppose domination by the majority nationality, as well as manifestation of narrow nationalism, so that all nationalities will be united in the common task of building their great country.

Due regard is given to the wishes of the people, and account is taken of the actual conditions prevailing in any area, in establishing national autonomous regions for nationalities. By June, 1952, 130 such national autonomous regions had been established throughout the country, in various regions inhabited by 4½ million people of different nationalities.

The following types of autonomous regions have been established:

- (1) Autonomous regions established on the basis of an area inhabited by one national minority.
- (2) Autonomous regions established on the basis of an area inhabited by one large national minority, including areas inhabited by other national minorities with very small populations, who likewise shall enjoy regional autonomy.
- (3) Autonomous regions jointly established on the basis of two or more areas, each inhabited by a different national minority.

These different types of national autonomous regions have come into existence because of differences in the existing relations among nationalities in economic and historical conditions, but they are all based on the free will of the people and on national equality. All national minorities living in compact communities are entitled to regional autonomy and the right to administer their own internal affairs in conformity with the wishes of the great majority of their people.

The third type of regional autonomy is established in areas where members of different national minorities live side by side, with the advantage of fostering co-operation and mutual aid among nationalities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF NATIONALITIES

Democratic coalition governments of nationalities may be established in provinces, regions, districts and villages where the inhabitants belong to two or more national minorities, or where the people of national minorities constitute less than 10 per cent of the local population.

These Democratic-Coalition governments are a form of State power at a local level. The same general principles apply to their organisation as to people's governments in other provinces and regions.

THE PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENTS

Due consideration is given to nationalities with relatively small populations. Great care is taken to respect the functions and powers of members from national minorities, and to consult with them fully on questions concerning national minorities.

In the various departments of the People's Government itself, every endeavour is made to absorb in their work personnel of national

minority origin; and these people are given every assistance with proper consideration for their ways of life.

Respect for national traditions, customs, religious beliefs is inculcated among all the people; and they are encouraged to promote unity and mutual assistance among nationalities, to outlaw national discrimination, oppression or any act tending to provoke dissension between nationalities.

RELATIONS AMONG NATIONALITIES

Not only is attention paid to the establishment of autonomous regions as a solution to their national question, but the Central People's Government also takes steps to strengthen the unity and friendly relations of the various nationalities, by despatching visiting missions to various regions, and having delegates from national minorities come to Peking for friendly meetings and other purposes. These goodwill missions have helped cement the bonds of friendship among the nationalities.

What is the outcome of all these undertakings? One clear result has definitely emerged: the various nationalities of China who, for a long period, have suffered national oppression and brutal discrimination, in the same way as do the overwhelming majority of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples of Africa, have today developed healthy relations among themselves. Their task is no longer to liberate themselves from national oppression, but to develop and raise themselves to the level of their new democracy, which is, undoubtedly, bringing about improvements in their material and cultural life.

To develop cultural work among the national minorities, extensive training of cadres is being undertaken, so that thousands are engaged in full-time work in various parts of the country.

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALITIES

With all these measures, one would be tempted to think that China's national problem has been solved. Far from it. The real solution must await the emergence of the national minorities from their political, economic and cultural backwardness, which, for them, is a kind of historical liability, because such backwardness hampers the people in their full enjoyment of the right to national equality.

Therefore, every effort is made to help them develop in the fields of political, economic, cultural and social life, so that they may emerge out of their backwardness into full and actual equality.

This has become one of the most important tasks of the State and the people's governments, at all levels: training and assigning cadres; assisting their trades; establishing health services; and fostering other aspects of their economy. Together with this is the urgent problem of creating a written language for some nationalities who have only a distinct spoken language of their own, but not a written one.

Thus today, in new China, the era of national oppression has given way to an era of national equality. The various nationalities, who, in the past, have lived a miserable life of starvation, disease, landlessness and political backwardness, are now marching forward shoulder to shoulder in a spirit of fraternal co-operation and national equality.