

THE FORMATION OF

by I

IN recent years I have concerned myself almost exclusively with the study of the formation of nations in Africa (south of the Sahara).

I would first like to say what I understand by the word "nation."

A generally recognised definition of that word does not yet exist in world science. It is often used in an extremely arbitrary way and its content can be very different. Sometimes the word "nation" is used for a people without considering its level of social development. In that case the words "nation" and "tribe" are used as interchangeable terms. In the literature dealing, for example, with the Zulus at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we find the expressions "Zulu nation" and "Zulu tribe"; the twentieth-century Ashantis are sometimes called a nation, sometimes a tribe. Sometimes the word "nation" is used for the whole population of a given country, without considering whether they speak a common language or different languages.

Webster's New World Dictionary gives for the word "nation" the following definition: "1. Stable community of individuals, which has developed in the course of history, having a common territory, an economic life, a culture and a specific language; 2. Population of a territory united under the same government, country, state; 3. (a) People or tribe; (b) tribe of Indians in North America, belonging to a confederation, such as the ten nations; (c) territory of such a tribe."

If we understand that word in such a vague way, the problem of the formation of nations does not even exist: nations have always existed; they have existed everywhere, and as a result there cannot be a problem of the formation of nations. On the contrary, if the word nation has a definite sense the problem exists of how and when are they formed.

It is by no means an argument about words. To give a definition of a "nation" is of vital importance for the peoples. A nation is not an imaginary or mystical concept — it is a very real phenomenon, and as such needs an exact definition, without which it is impossible to understand the national question which plays such an important part in the life of the peoples of the present time.

NATIONS IN AFRICA

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A SOVIET VIEWPOINT ON IMPORTANT PROBLEMS IN AFRICA

All students of African affairs should find much to interest them in this article by the Soviet student of African affairs, Professor I. Pothekin, whose book on the Southern Bantu was recently published in Moscow. His approach typifies the thorough study's being made of African affairs today in the Soviet Union.

STALIN'S DEFINITION OF A NATION

To study the problem of the formation of nations, I start from the definition given by Stalin as early as 1913. According to this definition a nation represents a definite human community, strictly outlined. Several human communities exist; but not all can be considered as nations. A nation has specific characteristics.

The first criterion or characteristic feature is a common territory. Without a common territory a nation cannot exist. The most vivid example is that of the Jews. Disseminated throughout the world for a number of historical reasons, they did not form a nation. The Jews, living in different countries, did not have in common, any political, economic or cultural interests; many have for a long time forgotten their tongue and speak that of the people among whom they live. The Jews who established themselves in Israel do obviously form a nation; but I have not studied this question specially.

The second characteristic is a common tongue. Without a common tongue daily regular relations are not possible between individuals. If they speak different languages and cannot understand each other they are naturally unable to form a nation. The language is the expression of the

soul of a people. Everybody loves his own language and prefers to speak it.

From their prolonged common existence within the same territory and their continued relations based on a common language, people acquire customs, habits and a way of life common to all, similar artistic tastes, and a single spiritual and secular culture. Great and small nations differ from each other not only in language but also in culture and psychology. Every nation has its national culture which it loves and respects. This is the third characteristic of a nation.

The fourth is a common economy, i.e. that all parts of a territory inhabited by a particular people are economically linked together. There is a geographical division of labour and a regular exchange of products, in a word a single national market. A common economy creates links between the people living in the different parts of the country shared by a particular people, and creates the necessity for regular relations between them — which encourage the disappearance of local language differences such as dialects and the development of a single national language with its permanent expression in literature. It is only as the consequence of a common economy that the common characteristics of a spiritual and secular culture can develop. A common economy makes a single unity of the territory of a nation and gives a concrete meaning to territorial unity. It is on this basis that a good understanding of the common political and economic interests of a nation are founded.

Such are briefly the four main or characteristic criteria of a nation. This does not mean that a nation has no other characteristics, but these four are the main and fundamental ones.

If we understand the word nation in this way it becomes clear that a nation can only come into existence under the capitalist system, and that nations are the product of capitalist development.

This means that nations have not always existed; they are born, and are only formed at a definite point in human history. Under the feudal system they did not, and could not, exist. They could not exist because there was neither a common economy nor a national market. Feudal society is characterised by a subsistence, not a profit-making, economy.

This does not mean that under the feudal system the exchange of products did not exist at all and that there were no economic relations. No, an exchange of world products, economic relations, existed even under the primitive "commune" system. However, such relations were sporadic and not at all essential. Under the feudal system, economic relations between regions can or need not exist. Their non-existence cannot stop material production. This differs from the capitalist system in that economic relations have now become an essential condition of production.

A "NARODNOST"

We usually call the ethnic community living under a slave or feudal system a "narodnost". This word has no real equivalent in the West European languages. "Narodnost" comes from the word "narod" (people). From now on I shall use the word "narodnost".

The narodnost is an ethnical community of individuals who possess a common culture. Unlike a nation, it has no common economy. Moreover the three first characteristics of a narodnost differ from the corresponding characteristics of a nation. The feudal system is distinguished by the division of the land into small or feudal principalities and, in some cases, by the absence of a central state authority. In the capitalist system national states exist, generally including within their boundaries all the territory inhabited by a particular people.

The existence of regional dialects of a common language is typical of the feudal system. In many cases there is even a single literary language, but by reason of the illiteracy of the majority of the people it is used only by the upper classes while the mass of the people speak various dialects. Under the capitalist system it is only when large-scale economic relations are established along with mass migrations from one district to another, and with the development of education, that the literary language comes to be used by considerable sections of the community, being transformed into a single method of communication, and regional dialects disappear little by little.

The same thing can be said of the common culture; it is only fully developed under capitalism.

Finally the narodnost and the nation have a different class structure. In the first case the feudal lords and their peasants formed the basic classes. In the second case we find the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

In the primitive community there is no nation and no narodnost. The typical form of the ethnic community of the people was the tribe. What difference was there between a tribe and a narodnost?

A tribe is a classless community, while the narodnost is divided into classes. A narodnost forms when the change takes place from classless to class society.

A tribal community is based on blood relations: it is a community of people descended from the same actual or mythical ancestor. A narodnost is a territorial community, which includes people not on the basis of origin but on the basis of living within a given area: their geographical location in other words.

A narodnost grows out of the disintegration of the tribal community, of the mixing and merging of tribes and the emergence of classes. The mixing of tribes leads to the formation of a common language based on one of the tribal languages, while the others become regional dialects and finally disappear from history. The mixing and merging of tribes also lead inevitably to changes in the secular culture and psychology of the people: the tribal characteristics disappear and a single common culture emerges.

All these simultaneous processes have a definite economic basis which undergoes decisive modifications. The merging of the tribes and the transformation of the tribal system into narodnost are based on the replacement of one form of productive relations by another. It is precisely at this period that the co-operative and mutual-aid relations characteristic of the primitive community system, where classes did not yet exist, are superseded by relations of exploitation, domination and subordination, characteristic of all social and economic class systems.

The period of the formation of antagonistic classes and of the state is also the period when the tribe becomes a narodnost.

There is no precise line of demarcation between feudal society and the commune system. The transformation of the primitive social system into feudalism takes place little by little over a long period. Even when feudal-type relations predominate there are generally some fairly clearly distinguishable survivals of the primitive commune. These survivals are very enduring, and can even be found in capitalist society.

Similarly there is no precise line of demarcation between the tribe and the narodnost. The transformation of the tribe into the narodnost also takes place little by little over a long period.

The survivals of the clan and tribe structure and organisation can subsist for a long time after the formation of the narodnost. At the same time they are but relics, old moulds with a new content. In this case the decisive role is not played by the mould but by the most characteristic and dominating social relations of the period in question.

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

To sum up: the ethnic community of the peoples goes through several stages of development: tribe, narodnost, nation.

The passage from one form to another broadly corresponds, but only broadly, to the development of the socio-economic systems: the narodnost is formed during the transformation of the primitive commune system into slavery or feudalism; the nation develops out of the passage from the feudal to the capitalist system.

In taking this interpretation of the term nation as a basis for our study of the ethnic development of the African peoples at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, we easily reach the conclusion that there was not and could not be any nation in Africa at that time. It could not exist because there was no capitalist society.

In the African countries where more or less developed relations of a feudal type already existed, the transformation of the tribe into the narodnost was already taking place. There was clearly a narodnost in the case of the Egyptians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Yorubas, Ashantis, Bagandas and others. The tribal organisation of these peoples, the Egyptians for example, had already completely disintegrated by this time, although still existing amongst other peoples.

In my book on the Southern Bantus, I made a special study of the development of the forms taken by the ethnic community of the Zulus, Xosas, Basutos and Bechuanas. I made detailed studies of the socio-economic system of the Southern Bantus at the beginning of the century, and submitted my conclusions to the Cambridge International Congress of Orientalists of 1954. I put them in this way: we see a picture of the primitive commune system at the last stage of development; the classical structure still exists but already has lost its first stability; private property exists and there are rich and poor, but without the community having split into antagonistic classes; the control of affairs is concentrated in the hands of wealthy dynastic families, but no state apparatus of coercion as yet exists. We conclude that the Southern Bantus were on the borderline between class and classless society: between a tribe and a narodnost.

THE ZULUS

I will deal more especially with the formation of the Zulu narodnost in the South African province of Natal. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were about 100 independent tribes in Natal. There was no Zulu narodnost. There was no common Zulu language, but a multitude of tribal languages divided into two groups, the Tekela and the Ntungwa.

In the 1820's, Chaka, chief of the Zulu tribe, set out to bring all the Natal tribes under his rule.

Chaka's campaigns had an enormous influence on the Natal tribes. After being defeated, many tribes broke up and dispersed in different directions, giving rise to a mass tribal migration. Some disappeared purely and simply from the ethnic range of Natal, while others increased in number by absorbing newcomers from other tribes. The tribal structure being destroyed, the mixing of the tribes led to the formation of the Zulu narodnost. At the same time the old tribal divisions were replaced by a central authority based on armed force. This marked the beginning of the formation of the Zulu state.

"Independent tribes . . . ceased to be independent, the governing families were hounded out or exterminated, all the tribes without distinction were amalgamated and together they could be called the Zulu nation with Chaka at their head," wrote Bryant (A. T. Bryant: *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, p. 233).

In the same way as the Zulu tribe took the lead in the powerful process of unifying the tribes in a single state, so also the Zulu language gradually became the common medium of communication for all the tribes, and supplanted all the other tribal languages. The men of Chaka's army spoke a Zulu language of the Ntungwa group and as this army included adult men from all the the tribes the Ntungwa language rapidly spread throughout the vast territory of Natal. According to Bryant the Tekela languages were retained for a certain time by the women but by the 1920's there only remained a few old women who spoke it. (A. T. Bryant: *A Zulu-English Dictionary—Maritzburg 1815*, p. 60).

A long period of determined struggle by the Zulus against Anglo-Boer colonisation then ensued during which the tribal structures disintegrated still further and the tribes intermixed still more.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Zulu narodnost, united in a common territory, language and culture, was already born in the territory of Natal.

The Xosas, Basutos and Bechuanas underwent a different process of transformation from tribe to narodnost, but nonetheless the process was concluded by the beginning of the twentieth century. This process is generally different for each people, and to give a general picture of the formation of the different narodnosts on the African continent the history of each people would have to be studied individually.

But not all the African people went through this process before the end of the nineteenth century, i.e. before European colonisation. In many regions, far from being any nation there was not even as yet a narodnost. Colonialisation found them at the stage of the primitive community with the characteristics of tribal organisation.

Colonialisation interrupted the natural course of the history of the African peoples and twisted the process of their ethnic development. At the present time it is very difficult to get a full appreciation of the stage of ethnic development reached by the African people. One thing only is clear: the process continues. In some regions the tribes are changing into narodnosts and in others existing narodnosts are becoming nations.

(The second part of this article will appear in our next issue.)