

J. V. Stalin

The National Question and Leninism

Reply to Comrades Meshkov, Kovalchuk, and Others

March 18, 1929

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I have received your letters. They are similar to a number of letters on the same subject I have received from other comrades during the past few months. I have decided, however, to answer you particularly, because you put things more bluntly and thereby help the achievement of clarity. True, the answers you give in your letters to the questions raised are wrong, but that is another matter—of that we shall speak below.

Let us get down to business.

1. The Concept of "Nation"

The Russian Marxists have long had their theory of the nation. According to this theory, a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of the common possession of four principal characteristics, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifested in common specific features of national culture. This theory, as we know, has received general recognition in our Party.

It is evident from your letters that you consider this theory inadequate. You therefore propose that the four characteristics of a nation be supplemented by a fifth, namely, that a nation possesses its own, separate national state. You consider that there is not and cannot be a nation unless this fifth characteristic is present.

I think that the scheme you propose, with its new, fifth characteristic of the concept "nation," is profoundly mistaken and cannot be justified either theoretically or in practice, politically.

According to your scheme, only such nations are to be recognised as nations as have their own state, separate from others, whereas all oppressed nations which have no independent statehood would have to be deleted from the category of nations; moreover, the struggle of oppressed nations against national oppression and the struggle of colonial peoples against imperialism would have to be excluded from the concept "national movement" and "national-liberation movement."

More than that. According to your scheme we would have to assert:

- a) that the Irish became a nation only after the formation of the "Irish Free State," and that before that they did not constitute a nation;
- b) that the Norwegians were not a nation before Norway's secession from Sweden, and became a nation only after that secession;
- c) that the Ukrainians were not a nation when the Ukraine formed part of tsarist Russia; that they became a nation only after they seceded from Soviet Russia under the Central Rada and Hetman Skoropadsky, but again ceased to be a nation after they united their Ukrainian Soviet Republic with the other Soviet Republics to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

A great many such examples could be cited.

Obviously, a scheme which leads to such absurd conclusions cannot be regarded as a scientific scheme.

In practice, politically, your scheme inevitably leads to the justification of national, imperialist oppression, whose exponents emphatically refuse to recognise as real nations oppressed and unequal nations which have no separate national state of their own, and consider that this circumstance gives them the right to oppress these nations.

That is apart from the fact that your scheme provides a justification for the bourgeois nationalists in our Soviet Republics who argue that the Soviet nations ceased to be nations when they agreed to unite their national Soviet Republics into a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

That is how matters stand with regard to "supplementing" and "amending" the Russian Marxist theory of the nation.

Only one thing remains, and that is to admit that the Russian Marxist theory of the nation is the only correct theory.

2. The Rise and Development of Nations

One of the grave mistakes you make is that you lump together all existing nations and fail to see any fundamental difference between them.

There are different kinds of nations. There are nations which developed in the epoch of rising capitalism, when the bourgeoisie, destroying feudalism and feudal disunity, gathered the parts of nations together and cemented them. These are the so-called "modern" nations.

You assert that nations arose and existed before capitalism. But how could nations have arisen and existed before capitalism, in the period of feudalism, when countries were split up into separate, independent principalities, which, far from being bound together by national ties, emphatically denied the necessity for such ties? Your erroneous assertions notwithstanding, there were no nations in the pre-capitalist period, nor could there be, because there were as yet no national markets and no economic or cultural national centres, and, consequently, there were none of the factors which put an end to the economic disunity of a given people and draw its hitherto disunited parts together into one national whole.

Of course, the elements of nationhood—language, territory, common culture, etc.—did not fall from the skies, but were being formed gradually, even in the precapitalist period. But these elements were in a rudimentary state and, at best, were only a potentiality, that is, they constituted the possibility of the formation of

a nation in the future, given certain favourable conditions. The potentiality became a reality only in the period of rising capitalism, with its national market and its economic and cultural centres.

In this connection it would be well to recall the remarkable words of Lenin on the subject of the rise of nations, contained in his pamphlet *What the "Friends-of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*. Controverting the Narodnik Mikhailovsky, who derived the rise of nationalities and national unity from the development of gentile ties, Lenin says:

"And so, national ties are a continuation and generalisation of gentile ties! Mr. Mikhailovsky, evidently, borrows his ideas of the history of society from the fairy-tale that is taught to schoolboys. The history of society—this copybook doctrine runs—is that first there was the family, that nucleus of all society . . . then the family grew into the tribe, and the tribe grew into the state. If Mr. Mikhailovsky solemnly repeats this childish nonsense, it only goes to show—apart from everything else—that he has not the slightest notion of the course even of Russian history. While one might speak of gentile life in ancient Rus, there can be no doubt that by the Middle Ages, the era of the Muscovite tsars, these gentile ties no longer existed, that is to say, the state was based not at all on gentile unions but on territorial unions: the landlords and the monasteries took their peasants from various localities, and the village communities thus formed were purely territorial unions. But one could hardly speak of national ties in the true sense of the word at that time: the state was divided into separate lands, sometimes even principalities, which preserved strong traces of former autonomy, peculiarities of administration, at times their own troops (the local boyars went to war at the head of their own companies), their own customs borders, and so forth. Only the modern period of Russian history (beginning approximately with the seventeenth century) is characterised by an actual merging of all such regions, lands and principalities into a single whole. This merging, most esteemed Mr. Mikhailovsky, was not brought about by gentile ties, nor even by their continuation and generalisation: it was brought about by the growth of exchange between regions, the gradual growth of commodity circulation and the concentration of the small local markets into a single, all-Russian market. Since the leaders and masters of this process were the merchant capitalists, the creation of these national ties was nothing but the creation of bourgeois ties" (see Vol. 1, pp. 72-73 ¹).

That is how matters stand with regard to the rise of the so-called "modern" nations.

The bourgeoisie and its nationalist parties were throughout this period the chief leading force of such nations. Class peace within the nation for the sake of "national unity"; expansion of the territory of one's own nation by seizure of the national territories of others; distrust and hatred of other nations, suppression of national minorities; a united front with imperialism—such is the ideological, social and political stock-in-trade of these nations.

Such nations must be qualified as bourgeois nations. Examples are the French, British, Italian, North-American and other similar nations. The Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Armenian, Georgian and other nations in Russia were likewise bourgeois nations before the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet system in our country.

Naturally, the fate of such nations is linked with the fate of capitalism; with the fall of capitalism, such nations must depart from the scene.

It is precisely such bourgeois nations that Stalin's pamphlet *Marxism and the National Question* has in mind when it says that "a nation is not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism," that "the fate of a national movement, which is essentially a bourgeois movement, is naturally bound up with the fate of the bourgeoisie," that "the final disappearance of a national movement is possible only with the downfall of the bourgeoisie," and that "only under the reign of socialism can peace be fully established." ²

That is how matters stand with regard to the bourgeois nations.

But there are other nations. These are the new, Soviet nations, which developed and took shape on the basis of the old, bourgeois nations after the overthrow of capitalism in Russia, after the elimination of the bourgeoisie and its nationalist parties, after the establishment of the Soviet system.

The working class and its internationalist party are the force that cements these new nations and leads them. An alliance between the working class and the working peasantry within the nation for the elimination of the survivals of capitalism in order that socialism may be built triumphantly; abolition of the survivals of national oppression in order that the nations and national minorities may be equal and may develop freely; elimination of the survivals of nationalism in order that friendship may be knit between the peoples and internationalism firmly established; a united front with all oppressed and unequal nations in the struggle against the policy of annexation and wars of annexation, in the struggle against imperialism—such is the spiritual, and social and political complexion of these nations.

Such nations must be qualified as socialist nations.

These new nations arose and developed on the basis of old, bourgeois nations, as a result of the elimination of capitalism—by their radical transformation on socialist lines. Nobody can deny that the present socialist nations of the Soviet Union—the Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Tatar, Bashkir, Uzbek, Kazakh, Azerbaijanian, Georgian, Armenian and other nations—differ radically from the corresponding old, bourgeois nations of the old Russia both in class composition and spiritual complexion and in social and political interests and aspirations.

Such are the two types of nations known to history.

You do not agree with linking the fate of nations, in this case the old, bourgeois nations, with the fate of capitalism. You do not agree with the thesis that, with the elimination of capitalism, the old, bourgeois nations will be eliminated. But with what indeed could the fate of these nations be linked if not with the fate of capitalism? Is it so difficult to understand that when capitalism disappears, the bourgeois nations it gave rise to must also disappear? Surely, you do not think that the old, bourgeois nations can exist and develop under the Soviet system, under the dictatorship of the proletariat? That would be the last straw. . . .

You are afraid that the elimination of the nations existing under capitalism is tantamount to the elimination of nations in general, to the elimination of all nations. Why, on what grounds? Are you really unaware of the fact that, besides bourgeois nations, there are other nations, socialist nations, which are much more solidly united and capable of surviving than any bourgeois nation?

Your mistake lies precisely in the fact that you see no other nations except bourgeois nations, and, consequently, you have overlooked the whole epoch of formation of socialist nations in the Soviet Union, nations which arose on the ruins of the old, bourgeois nations.

The fact of the matter is that the elimination of the bourgeois nations signifies the elimination not of nations in general, but only of the bourgeois nations. On the ruins of the old, bourgeois nations new, socialist nations are arising and developing, and they are far more solidly united than any bourgeois nation, because they are exempt from the irreconcilable class contradictions that corrode the bourgeois nations, and are far more representative of the whole people than any bourgeois nation.

3. The Future of Nations and of National Languages

You commit a grave error in putting a sign of equality between the period of the victory of socialism in one country and the period of the victory of socialism on a world scale, in asserting that the disappearance of national differences and national languages, the merging of nations and the formation of one common language, are possible and necessary not only with the victory of socialism on a world scale, but also with the victory of socialism in one country. Moreover, you confuse entirely different things: "the abolition of national oppression" with "the elimination of national differences," "the abolition of national state barriers" with "the dying away of nations," with "the merging of nations."

It must be pointed out that for Marxists to confuse these diverse concepts is absolutely impermissible. National oppression in our country was abolished long ago, but it by no means follows from this that national differences have disappeared and that nations in our country have been eliminated. National state barriers, together with frontier guards and customs, were abolished in our country long ago, but it by no means follows from this that the nations have already become merged and that the national languages have disappeared, that these languages have been supplanted by some one language common to all our nations.

You are displeased with the speech I delivered at the Communist University of the Peoples of the East (1925),³ in which I repudiated the thesis that with the victory of socialism *in one country*, in our country, for example, national languages will die away, that the nations will be merged, and in place of the national languages one common language will appear.

You consider that this statement of mine contradicts Lenin's well-known thesis that it is the aim of socialism not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and every form of isolation of nations, not only to bring the nations closer together, but also to merge them.

You consider, further, that it also contradicts another of Lenin's theses, namely, that with the victory of socialism on a *world scale*, national differences and national languages will begin to die away, that after this victory national languages will begin to be supplanted by one common language.

That is quite wrong, comrades. It is a profound illusion.

I have already said that it is impermissible for Marxists to confuse and lump together such diverse phenomena as "the victory of socialism in one country" and "the victory of socialism on a world scale." It should not be forgotten that these diverse phenomena reflect two entirely different epochs, distinct from one another not only in time (which is very important), but in their very nature.

National distrust, national isolation, national enmity and national conflicts are, of course, stimulated and fostered not by some "innate" sentiment of national animosity, but by the striving of imperialism to subjugate other nations and by the fear inspired in these nations by the menace of national enslavement. Undoubtedly, so long as world imperialism exists this striving and this fear will exist—and, consequently, national distrust, national isolation, national enmity and national conflicts will exist in the vast majority of countries. Can it be asserted that the victory of socialism and the abolition of imperialism in one country signify the abolition of imperialism and national oppression in the majority of countries? Obviously not. But it follows from this that the victory of socialism in one country, notwithstanding the fact that it seriously weakens world imperialism, does not and cannot create the conditions necessary for the merging of the nations and the national languages of the world into one integral whole.

The period of the victory of socialism on a world scale differs from the period of the victory of socialism in one country primarily in the fact that it will abolish imperialism *in all countries*, will abolish both the striving to subjugate other nations and the fear inspired by the menace of national enslavement, will radically undermine national distrust and national enmity, will unite the nations into one world socialist economic system, and will thus create the real conditions necessary for the gradual merging of all nations into one.

Such is the fundamental difference between these two periods.

But it follows from this that to confuse these two different periods and to lump them together is to commit an unpardonable mistake. Take the speech I delivered at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. There I said :

"Some people (Kautsky, for instance) talk of the creation of a single universal language and the dying away of all other languages in the period of socialism. I have little faith in this theory of a single, all-embracing language. Experience, at any rate, speaks against rather than for such a theory. Until now what has happened has been that the socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages; for, by stirring up the lowest sections of humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities. Who could have imagined that the old, tsarist Russia consisted of not less than fifty nations and national groups? The October Revolution, however, by breaking the old chains and bringing a number of forgotten peoples and nationalities on to the scene, gave them new life and a new development."⁴

From this passage it is evident that I was opposing people of the type of Kautsky, who always was and has remained a dilettante on the national question, who does not understand the mechanics of the development of nations and has no inkling of the colossal power of stability possessed by nations, who believes that the merging of nations is possible long before the victory of socialism, already under the bourgeois-democratic order, and who, servilely praising the assimilating "work" of the Germans in Bohemia, light-mindedly asserts that the Czechs are almost Germanised, that, as a nation, the Czechs have no future.

From this passage it is evident, further, that what I had in mind in my speech was not the period of the victory of socialism on a *world scale*, but exclusively the period of the victory of socialism in *one country*. And I affirmed (and continue to affirm) that the period of the victory of socialism in one country does not create the necessary conditions for the merging of nations and national languages, that, on the contrary, this period creates favourable conditions for the renaissance and flourishing of the nations that were formerly oppressed by tsarist imperialism and have now been liberated from national oppression by the Soviet revolution.

From this passage it is apparent, lastly, that you have overlooked the colossal difference between the two different historical periods, that, because of this, you have failed to understand the meaning of Stalin's speech and, as a result, have got lost in the wilderness of your own errors.

Let us pass to Lenin's theses on the dying away and merging of nations after the victory of socialism on a world scale.

Here is one of Lenin's theses, taken from his article, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," published in 1916, which, for some reason, is not quoted in full in your letters :

"The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and all isolation of nations, not only to draw the nations together, but to merge them. . . . Just as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only by passing through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can arrive at the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through a transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., of their freedom of secession" (see Vol. XIX, p. 40⁵).

And here is another thesis of Lenin's, which you likewise do not quote in full:

"As long as national and state differences exist among peoples and countries—and these differences will continue to exist for a very, very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale—the unity of international tactics of the communist working-class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences (that is a foolish dream at the present moment), but such an application of the fundamental principles of communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as would correctly modify these principles in certain particulars, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state differences" (Vol. XXV, p. 227).

It should be noted that this passage is from Lenin's pamphlet *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, published in 1920, that is, *after* the victory of the socialist revolution in one country, *after* the victory of socialism in our country.

From these passages it is evident that Lenin does not assign the process of the dying away of national differences and the merging of nations to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, but exclusively to the period *after* the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, that is, to the period of the victory of socialism in all countries, when the foundations of a world socialist economy have already been laid.

From these passages it is evident, further, that the attempt to assign the process of the dying away of national differences to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, is qualified by Lenin as a "foolish dream."

From these passages it is evident, moreover, that Stalin was absolutely right when, in the speech he delivered at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, he denied that it was possible for national differences and national languages to die away in the period of the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, and that you were absolutely wrong in upholding something that is the direct opposite of Stalin's thesis.

From these passages it is evident, lastly, that, in confusing the two different periods of the victory of socialism, you failed to understand Lenin, distorted Lenin's line on the national question and, as a consequence, involuntarily headed for a rupture with Leninism.

It would be incorrect to think that after the defeat of world imperialism national differences will be abolished and national languages will die away immediately, at one stroke, by decree from above, so to speak. Nothing is more erroneous than this view. To attempt to bring about the merging of nations by decree from above, by compulsion, would be playing into the hands of the imperialists, it would spell disaster to the cause of the liberation of nations, and be fatal to the cause of organising co-operation and fraternity among nations. Such a policy would be tantamount to a policy of assimilation.

You know, of course, that the policy of assimilation is absolutely excluded from the arsenal of Marxism-Leninism, as being an anti-popular and counter-revolutionary policy, a fatal policy.

Furthermore, we know that nations and national languages possess an extraordinary stability and tremendous power of resistance to the policy of assimilation. The Turkish assimilators—the most brutal of all assimilationists—mangled and mutilated the Balkan nations for hundreds of years, yet not only did they fail to destroy them, but in the end were forced to capitulate. The tsarist-Russian Russifiers and the German-Prussian Germanisers, who yielded little in brutality to the Turkish assimilators, rent and mangled the Polish nation for over a hundred years, just as the Persian and Turkish assimilators for hundreds of years rent and mangled and massacred the Armenian and Georgian nations, yet, far from destroying these nations, in the end they were also forced to capitulate.

All these circumstances must be taken into account in order correctly to forecast the probable course of events as regards the development of nations directly after the defeat of world imperialism.

It would be a mistake to think that the first stage of the period of the world dictatorship of the proletariat will mark the beginning of the dying away of nations and national languages, the beginning of the formation of one common language. On the contrary, the first stage, during which national oppression will be completely abolished, will be a stage marked by the growth and flourishing of the formerly oppressed nations and national languages, the consolidation of equality among nations, the elimination of mutual national distrust, and the establishment and strengthening of international ties among nations.

Only in the second stage of the period of the world dictatorship of the proletariat, to the extent that a single world socialist economy is built up in place of the world capitalist economy—only in that stage will something in the nature of a common language begin to take shape; for only in that stage will the nations feel the need to have, in addition to their own national languages, a common international language—for convenience of intercourse and of economic, cultural and political cooperation. Consequently, in this stage, national languages and a common international language will exist side by side. It is possible that, at first, not one world economic centre will be formed, common to all nations and with one common language, but several zonal economic centres for separate groups of nations, with a separate common language for each group of nations, and that only later will these centres combine into one common world socialist economic centre, with one language common to all the nations.

In the next stage of the period of world dictatorship of the proletariat—when the world socialist system of economy becomes sufficiently consolidated and socialism becomes part and parcel of the life of the peoples, and when practice convinces the nations of the advantages of a common language over national languages—national differences and languages will begin to die away and make room for a world language, common to all nations.

Such, in my opinion, is the approximate picture of the future of nations, a picture of the development of the nations along the path to their merging in the future.

4. The Policy of the Party on the National Question

One of your mistakes is that you regard the national question not as a part of the general question of the social and political development of society, subordinated to this general question, but as something self-contained and constant, whose direction and character remain basically unchanged throughout the course of history. Hence you fail to see what every Marxist sees, namely, that the national question does not always have one and the same character, that the character and tasks of the national movement vary with the different periods in the development of the revolution.

Logically, it is this that explains the deplorable fact that you so lightly confuse and lump together diverse periods of development of the revolution, and fail to understand that the changes in the character and tasks of the revolution in the various stages of its development give rise to corresponding changes in the character and aims of the national question, that in conformity with this the Party's policy on the national question also changes, and that, consequently, the Party's policy on the national question in one period of development of the revolution cannot be violently severed from that period and arbitrarily transferred to another period.

The Russian Marxists have always started out from the proposition that the national question is a part of the general question of the development of the revolution, that at different stages of the revolution the national question has different aims, corresponding to the character of the revolution at each given historical moment, and that the Party's policy on the national question changes in conformity with this.

In the period preceding the First World War, when history made a *bourgeois-democratic* revolution the task of the moment in Russia, the Russian Marxists linked the solution of the national question with the fate of the democratic revolution in Russia. Our Party held that the overthrow of tsarism, the elimination of the survivals of feudalism, and the complete democratisation of the country provided the best solution of the national question that was possible within the framework of capitalism.

Such was the policy of the Party in that period.

It is to this period that Lenin's well-known articles on the national question belong, including the article "Critical Remarks on the National Question" where Lenin says :

" . . . I assert that there is only one solution of the national question, in so far as one is possible at all in the capitalist world— and that solution is consistent democratism. In proof, I would cite, among others, Switzerland" (vol. XVII, p. 150 ⁶).

To this same period belongs Stalin's pamphlet, *Marxism and the National Question*, which among other things says:

"The final disappearance of a national movement is possible only with the downfall of the bourgeoisie. Only under the reign of socialism can peace be fully established. But even within the framework of capitalism it is possible to reduce the national struggle to a minimum to undermine it at the root, to render it as harmless as possible to the proletariat. This is borne out, for example, by Switzerland and America. It requires that the country should be democratised and the nations be given the opportunity of free development." ⁷

In the next period, the period of the First World War, when the prolonged war between the two imperialist coalitions undermined the might of world imperialism, when the crisis of the world capitalist system reached an extreme degree, when, alongside the working class of the "metropolitan countries," the colonial and dependent countries also joined the movement for emancipation, when the national question grew into the national and colonial question, when the united front of the working class of the advanced capitalist countries and of the oppressed peoples of the colonies and dependent countries began to be a real force, when, consequently, the *socialist* revolution became the question of the moment, the Russian Marxists could no longer content themselves with the policy of the preceding period, and they found it necessary to link the solution of the national and colonial question with the fate of the socialist revolution.

The Party held that the overthrow of the power of capital and the organisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the expulsion of the imperialist troops from the colonial and dependent countries and the securing of the right of these countries to secede and to form their own national states, the elimination of national enmity and nationalism and the strengthening of international ties between peoples, the organisation of a single socialist national economy and the establishment on this basis of fraternal co-operation among peoples, constituted the best solution of the national and colonial question under the given conditions.

Such was the policy of the Party in that period.

That period is still far from having entered into full force, for it has only just begun; but there is no doubt that it will yet have its decisive word to say. . . .

A question apart is the present period of development of the revolution in our country and the present policy of the Party.

It should be noted that so far our country has proved to be the *only* one ready to overthrow capitalism. And it really has overthrown capitalism and organised the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Consequently, we still have a long way to go to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat *on a world scale*, and still more to the victory of socialism *in all countries*.

It should be noted, further, that in putting an end to the rule of the bourgeoisie, which has long since abandoned its old democratic traditions, we, in passing, solved the problem of the "complete democratisation of the country," abolished the system of national oppression and established equality of nations in our country.

As we know, these measures proved to be the best way of eliminating nationalism and national enmity, and of establishing mutual confidence among the peoples.

It should be noted, lastly, that the abolition of national oppression led to the national revival of the formerly oppressed nations of our country, to the development of their national cultures, to the strengthening of friendly, international ties among the peoples of our country and to their mutual co-operation in the work of building socialism.

It should be borne in mind that these regenerated nations are not the old, bourgeois nations, led by the bourgeoisie, but new, socialist nations, which have arisen on the ruins of the old nations and are led by the internationalist party of the labouring masses.

In view of this, the Party considered it necessary to help the regenerated nations of our country to rise to their feet and attain their full stature, to revive and develop their national cultures, widely to develop schools, theatres and other cultural institutions functioning in the native languages, to nationalise—that is, to staff with members of the given nation—the Party, trade-union, co-operative, state and economic apparatuses, to train their own, national, Party and Soviet cadres, and to curb all elements—who are, indeed, few in number—that try to hinder this policy of the Party.

This means that the Party supports, and will continue to support, the development and flourishing of the national cultures of the peoples of our country, that it will encourage the strengthening of our new, socialist nations, that it takes this matter under its protection and guardianship against anti-Leninist elements of any kind.

It is apparent from your letters that you do not approve this policy of our Party. That is because, firstly, you confuse the new, socialist nations with the old, bourgeois nations and do not understand that the national cultures of our new, Soviet nations are in *content* socialist cultures. Secondly, it is because—you will excuse my bluntness—you have a very poor grasp of Leninism and are badly at sea on the national question.

Consider, by way of example, the following elementary matter. We all say that a cultural revolution is needed in our country. If we mean this seriously and are not merely indulging in idle chatter, then we must take at least the first step in this direction: namely, we must make primary education, and later secondary education, compulsory for all citizens of the country, irrespective of their nationality. It is obvious that without this no cultural development whatever, let alone the so-called cultural revolution, will be possible in our country. More, without this there will be neither any real progress of our industry and agriculture, nor any reliable defence of our country.

But how is this to be done, bearing in mind that the percentage of illiteracy in our country is still very high, that in a number of nations of our country there are 80-90 per cent of illiterates?

What is needed is to cover the country with an extensive network of schools functioning in the native languages, and to supply them with staffs of teachers who know the native languages.

What is needed is to nationalise—that is, to staff with members of the given nation—all the administrative apparatus, from Party and trade-union to state and economic.

What is needed is widely to develop the press, the theatre, the cinema and other cultural institutions functioning in the native languages.

Why in the native languages?—it may be asked. Because only in their native, national languages can the vast masses of the people be successful in cultural, political and economic development.

In view of all that has been said, I think it should not be so difficult to understand that Leninists cannot pursue any other policy on the national question than the one which is now being pursued in our country— provided, of course, they want to remain Leninists.

Is not that so?

Well, then let us leave it at that.

I think I have answered all your questions and doubts.

With communist greetings,

J. Stalin

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Notes

¹ See V. I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 1, pp. 137-38.

² See J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 313, 322.

³ J. V. Stalin, "The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East" (see *Works*, Vol. 7, pp. 135-54).

⁴ See J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 7, p. 141.

⁵ See V. I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 22, pp. 135-36.

⁶ See V. I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 20, p. 23.

⁷ See J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 322-23. p. 367

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