

Third-worldism – A petty-bourgeois deviation

Marxism is a science of how we can abolish capitalism and replace it with a classless society. Since Marxism is not an exact knowledge where we can always know in advance what is true or not, we will always have greater or lesser deviations in our theories and beliefs in relation to what is actually true. Minor deviations are not that very dangerous. Larger deviations, on the other hand, can be fatal to the revolutionary movement, and its ability to achieve victory. Third-Worldism is an example of such a fatal deviation.

By Reidar Knudsen

Where do petty-bourgeoisie thoughts come from?

The traditional petty bourgeois is an independent farmer or craftsman. He lives primarily of his own labour. This is in contrast to the modern proletariat, which is traditionally a class that produces in large collectives in industrial workplaces and the like. It is the reality we live in that determines our thoughts, as Marx described. We are the center of our own universe. We know our own reality well, but the others' not as much. Therefore, we like to believe that what is important to us is important to everyone, and that our living condition is the same for everybody. Parliament politicians like to think that a normal annual salary is a little under a million kroner, since this is what they earn, and they do not know that in reality they belong to a small privileged elite.

Based on this, it happens that there arises some thinking that is typical of people of certain classes and strata of society.

This thinking can spread across the classes, but will naturally be strongest in the classes it springs from.

Since the petty bourgeoisie, as mentioned, largely consists of people who make a living from their individual labour, it is the case that ideas about the strong individual who by his own struggle and creativity builds himself up, become an ideal that they protect. Since their livelihood is largely generated by their own labour and their own struggle, they believe that the world is governed by strong individuals and by individual actions. The proletariat, which can not create anything if not within the collective, has another, more collective consciousness. In reality, both the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie are really dependent on the large collectives, since production today is globalized. The petty bourgeoisie, just like the proletariat, by and large must buy their own food, their house, their clothes, etc. But they do not comprehend the labour of the thousands of workers that are needed to produce these goods, since they appear to them as goods they buy as a product of their own labour.

Ideas about the lone wolf who saves the world and other individualistic and elitist ideas are in other words thoughts that are typical of this class.

What is Third-Worldism?

Third-Worldism is linked to the Danish communist Gotfred Appel. Appel was born on 9 February 1923 and joined the Danish Communist Party (DKP) in 1945, where he became an active and somewhat central member. In the great polemic between China and the Soviet Union, he sided with China. In 1963 he was excluded from the DKP for factionism and then founded the Communist Labour Circle (KAK).

Appel eventually developed what would later be called the «parasite state theory». While the rest of the left in the 1960s tried to get the working class to fight for the

revolution, KAK and Appel believed that this was impossible under the given conditions. They believed that the working class in the rich western world, apart from being exploited by their own bourgeoisie, also took part in the bourgeoisie's exploitation of the poor parts of the world. As a consequence, the working class had no interest in taking power from the bourgeoisie, and therefore from a revolutionary perspective it was pointless to support its economic struggle. Instead, the spearhead for the revolution should be the struggles of the Third World.

The material foundation of Third-Worldism

Engels and Lenin wrote about the «labour aristocracy» as a privileged stratum in the working class movement.

Engels wrote in 1958;

The English proletariat is, in fact, becoming more and more bourgeois. It therefore seems that this nation – which is more bourgeois than any other nation – has as its ultimate goal to have a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie itself. For a nation that exploits the whole world, of course, this is something that to a certain extent can be defended. ((http://www.vardoger.no/fulltekst/vardoger03/11_nicolaus.pdfhttp://www.vardoger.no/fulltekst/vardoger03/11_nicolaus.pdf))

In 1882 he wrote;

There is no Labour Party here, there are only Conservative and Liberal Radicals, and the workers are taking a merry part in the dance around England's monopoly on the world market and in the colonies ((http://www.vardoger.no/fulltekst/vardoger03/11_nico

[laus.pdf](#)))

Eight years later (in 1890) he saw a sign of a split between the higher and the lower part of the working class:

The truth is this: during the period when England had an industrial monopoly, the English working class was to some extent involved in sharing the profits of this monopoly. However, this profit was distributed very unevenly among them: the privileged minority received the most, but even the large masses received from time to time at least a temporary part of the profit. And this is why there has been no socialist movement in England since the movement after Owen died out.

((http://www.vardoger.no/fulltekst/vardoger03/11_nicolaus.pdf))

Lenin wrote in 1907:

The European proletarian is partly in a situation where it is not his work, but the work of the practically speaking enslaved natives of the colonies, that sustains society. The British bourgeoisie receives for example more profit from the many millions of the population of India and other colonies than from the British workers. In some countries this constitutes the material and economic basis for the infection of the proletariat with colonial chauvinism((http://www.vardoger.no/fulltekst/vardoger03/11_nicolaus.pdf))

It is not difficult to see also today a similar split in the labor movement in the rich imperialist countries of Europe and America. «Proletarian» derives from French, meaning propertyless. This term is used to describe a social class in recent history (the «proletariat») that consists of people who formally are free (i.e. that are not subjected to forced

labour such as e.g. slaves and serfs), but who at the same time have to sell their labour to obtain food and other goods they need to survive.

It is no coincidence that the term «propertyless» was used to describe this class, since this was used to describe a class that lived on a subsistence level. Today, many millions live in this state. First and foremost in poor countries, but also in rich countries like Norway. However, the majority of those who make a living from selling their labour in Norway and many other rich countries in the world, live in a far more comfortable state, where in addition to having their primary needs covered, they also have access to a number of luxury products, expensive southern holidays, mountain cabins, etc. Their position is on the whole the same as the position described by Engels and Lenin in regards to the labour aristocracy.

Marx wrote that the proletariat wants the revolution, because it has only its chains to lose. But the labour aristocracy has more than its chains to lose, and for this reason it is not a revolutionary class. Only when it loses its privileges and is pushed down into the real proletariat, will it have a revolutionary potential.

The Third-Worldists conclude from this that there is no revolutionary potential in these imperialist countries. But this is a logical misconception. And also a dangerous one because it leads away from revolutionary work.

There exists revolutionary potential also in the imperial core countries

Even in countries like Norway and the USA, there exist real proletarians and therefore a revolutionary potential. In

addition, the labour aristocracy – if we look at it as a separate class – is a temporary class, which in the long run will necessarily be pushed down in the proletariat. The reason is that the basis for the existence of this class lies in the super-profits that the monopoly bourgeoisie plunders through the gross exploitation of the oppressed countries. Because capitalism needs ever-increasing profits, and there are limits to how much of these can be obtained from the oppressed countries, the monopoly bourgeoisie must sooner or later begin to squeeze more out of its own working class – and in the end it is necessarily the labour aristocracy where the most is gained from. This is a development we are already seeing today, and it is a development that accelerates during the cyclical crises of capitalism.

The Third-Worldists overfocus on the economic inequality between countries. They believe that the question of revolutionary potential is solely an economic one. But this is wrong. Firstly, because the question of class is not only determined by how well you are doing materially, but also by the position you have in the productive process ((Lenin defines classes as follows: «Classes are large groups of people that differ from each other in the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relationship (in most cases established and formulated by laws) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and consequently the extent and way of acquiring the part of the social wealth that they control. Classes are groups of people, and one of them can acquire the labour of another as a result of the different places they occupy in a particular socioeconomic system. » – V. I. Lenin: Arbeiderklassens rolle og analyse av klassene. From «En stor begynnelse», juni 1919. https://www.akp.no/ml-historie/pdf/rode_fane/1976/rf_1976_02.pdf)). Secondly, because history is full of examples of large sections of the intermediate classes being torn away towards revolution, or in some cases even spearheading them. Poverty

does not in itself create revolutionary consciousness. On the contrary, it can lead to apathy. A high unemployment rate also means that those who have an employment will refrain from revolutionary activism for fear that they will lose the job they depend on, even if the wages and working conditions are extremely poor. The fact of having a security in case of sudden unemployment, makes proletarians dare to fight more. This may also be part of the explanation for why the proletariat in Russia made the revolution in 1917. Russia, unlike many European countries, industrialized late, and when industrialization came to the country, the establishment of large factories quickly took place from scratch. The workers who got employment at these factories came from the countryside, and had a retreat opportunity back there in case they lost their jobs. They therefore had a safety net that most proletarians in countries such as England and Germany lacked. The more privileged sections of the working class in the imperialist countries also have a similar safety net in the form of social security arrangements, as well as more wealth in their extended family, which means that they e.g. can move into the basement of the in-laws if it gets really tight.

History shows that it is first and foremost in a rapid deterioration in the material conditions that the masses readily resort to riots and revolutions. Capitalism is an unstable system. Not least today where climate change as a result of the combustion of oil, coal and gas, is just about to overrun us in a clearly tangible way, and in a world where the war rhetoric and the threat of war between the greatest imperialist powers are sharpening again. We cannot know exactly how this will develop, but it is quite obvious that imperialism cannot continue as before.

A revolutionary situation is described by Lenin as one where the oppressed classes no longer accept being governed in the same way, and in which the ruling class finds itself in a

political crisis and is no longer able to govern in the same way. ((Lenin: «Venstre»-kommunismen – en barnesjukdom. Lenin, Utvalgte verker i 12 bind, bind 11 (Forlaget Oktober A/S, Oslo 1976; ISBN 82-7094-120-4), s. 162-))

The world must necessarily go through a very radical process in the years to come. Either in the form of an environmental crisis, or in the form of a total and very rapid transformation of how production and transportation take place in the world to prevent this crisis. Even though capital's leaders are making some attempts to transform capitalism in a less climate-damaging direction, these attempts are far too small, and come far too late. Capitalism's inherent need for profit and its need for perpetual economic growth, demand continuously more exploitation of the planet's resources. Today, this exploitation has arrived at a pace where it greatly exceeds the globe's ability to reverse the changes. Under capitalism this imbalance cannot be stopped in all areas without also stopping growth and thus capitalism itself. The choice we have now is either climate and environmental crisis, or revolution. Everything else is utopia.

If we do not have revolution first, then the climate crisis will strike in such a way that many will have a large drop in their material standard of living, and the exploitation of imperialism will no longer be able to continue to the same degree as before. This will lead to a weakened state power and a restive population.

Third-Worldism is elitism

Lenin wrote:

It is a child's lesson that the revolution's only «hope» is the «masses», and that only a unified revolutionary organization that (in practice and not in words) leads these «masses», can fight the police.

The Third-Worldists, on the other hand, reject this line from Lenin and declare that the masses in the imperialist countries are lost for the revolution, since they are bourgeois. What remains for them then is that a small elite in the imperialist countries can engage in some form of support activity for the oppressed countries, or for the revolutionary movements in these countries. This is a typical petty-bourgeois thinking where one comfortably enough «avoids» having to engage in the time-consuming and laborious work of engaging the masses in the revolutionary struggle.

Third-Worldists make a double mistake

The Third-Worldists are in the first place wrong about the revolutionary potential in the imperialist countries. In the second place, they are wrong about what we can do to strengthen the struggle for liberation from imperialism in the oppressed countries. Since the Third-Worldists believe that there is no revolutionary basis in the imperialist countries, they have traditionally engaged in supporting activities for the people in poor countries, or for more or less revolutionary organizations in oppressed countries. Appel's group eventually split into two, with one group collecting clothes for poor people in the oppressed countries, while another robbing banks to support the Palestinian PFLP(<http://arkiv.tjen-folket.no/Sentralt/view/12804.html>)).

The most important contribution communists can make to the oppressed peoples of the world is to undermine imperialism by organizing and mobilizing the greatest possible revolutionary force and struggling against imperialism from within. One consequence of the Third-Worldists' first mistake is that they abdicate and, by spreading their petty-bourgeois line, also

sabotage the most important work communists can do to support the struggles in the third world. In this sense, Third-Worldism is not only detrimental to the revolutionary struggle in the imperialist countries, but also to the struggles in the oppressed countries.