

Some Brief Comments on the National “Right of Self-Determination”

[When I was a member of the Single Spark Collective we had a small discussion about the national question as it pertained to Kosovo. These are some general comments I made on Feb. 23, 2008, as part of that discussion. –S.H.]

Hi comrades,

Just some general observations:

These national question issues are often tough to figure out, in part because it is not clear whose interests the various contending forces represent, and more basically, because it is not always clear how best to serve the true interests of particular groups of people or of the people as a whole.

Our first, overriding principle is that the interests of the workers and the masses of the people of the world should always come first. But this has many implications. The first implication is that anything that promotes world revolution must be supported. Generally, national unity of the masses in any existing nation is something that promotes that. But sometimes accepting the necessity of nationalist divisions and separations is necessary in order to approach revolution in particular regions.

In other words, support for national breakaways is *not* something that we should automatically support (nor automatically oppose), even though—in general—we often have to acquiesce in it as a step which seems to promote revolution in at least one of the newly separated regions. But this is based on a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, and not upon any Kantian moral absolute about the universal “right of self-determination”.

The general policy of the Bolsheviks was to support the right of minority nationalities to independence, but for Party members among that minority to work *against* actually breaking off as a separate nation, and only accept it if the minority masses insisted on it. As a rule of thumb that seems correct to me.

However, since there seems to be no genuinely revolutionary force (of any significance) currently active in Serbia-Kosovo this is somewhat moot. In that case, if one part of the population wants to break off as a separate country, why shouldn't they be allowed to do so? This seems like a democratic right.

I.e., where revolutionary interests do *not* override democratic rights, democratic rights should prevail. Only if this would clearly end up playing into the hands of fascism, or something else extremely negative, would I have any doubts about it.

Scott