

FATHERLAND OR MOTHER EARTH? NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM FROM A SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE

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Two hundred years after the call for a universal brotherhood of all humankind issued by the Great French Revolution and seventy years after the foundation of the Communist International, what remained of the great dream of internationalist solidarity of the oppressed? Hasn't nationalism always been the main moving forces of world politics? And how should socialists relate to it?

The contradictory **rôle** of nationalism is one of the great paradoxes in the history of the 20th century, which is now approaching its end.

At the service of the State and of reactionary forces, the ideology of nationalism fostered and **legitimised** some of the worst crimes of the century: the two world wars, the genocide of Armenians, Jews and Gypsies, the colonialist wars, the rise of fascism and military dictatorship, the brutal repression of progressive or revolutionary movements from China in the 20s to Indonesia in the 60s and Argentina in the 70s.

On the other hand, in the name of national liberation, the colonised people gained their independence and some of the most important and radical socialist-revolutionary movements were able to win popular support and triumph: in Yugoslavia, China, Indochina, Cuba and now Nicaragua. . .

Another puzzling paradox: although nationalism has been the dominant factor in shaping 20th century politics, the greatest revolution of our times, October 1917, owed nothing to nationalism and was explicitly directed against the 'national defence of the Fatherland' in the war with Imperial Germany. Moreover, there has never been in the history of the labour and socialist movement a mass world organisation so thoroughly committed to internationalism as in the 20th century: the Third International (at least during its first years of existence).

How to understand these paradoxes? Can Marxism furnish the theoretical tools for such an understanding? Have the workers and the exploited really no Fatherland, as **Marx** thought in 1848? How far can Mother Earth become the concrete horizon for social liberation? And what are the perspectives for nationalism and internationalism in the next years of this *fin de siècle*?

Any attempt to answer these questions has to start with a dialectical approach to the problem: the national question is contradictory and its

contradictions are not the expression of some eternal trait of human nature, but of concrete *historical conditions*.

First of all, what *is* a nation? This problem has plagued many generations of Marxist thinkers and leaders.' They hoped to find the *objective criteria* permitting them to define whether a collective body of people was or was not a nation. For Karl Kautsky the nation was essentially the result of a common *language*. For Otto Bauer, each nation had a peculiar 'national character'. Anton Pannekoek considered the nation as merely a 'bourgeois ideological phenomenon'. Others *suggested* geographical or economic criteria.

The most systematic attempt to build such a classificatory theoretical framework is of course **Stalin's** famous essay from 1913 (*Marxism and the National Question*). Compounding all 'objective' criteria – common language, territory, economic life, and 'psychological make-up' – in one single definition, he insisted that it is 'only when all the characteristics are present together that we have a **nation**'.² This rigid and dogmatic frame was a true ideological **Procrustean** bed, and became for many decades a huge obstacle for the understanding of 'heterodox' national communities like the Jews, or the US Blacks, etc, etc. It cannot explain how Germany, long before its economic unification through the Customs Union, became a nation or why French speaking Belgians or Swiss are not part of the French nation.

In contrast to such abstract and 'closed' conceptions, Otto Bauer made a very significant contribution to an 'open' Marxist analysis of the nation by his *historicist* approach: without ignoring the various other criteria (language, economy, etc) he defined the nation as being above all the product of a *common historical destiny*. In other terms: the nation is not only a crystallization of past events, a 'frozen piece of history' but also the 'never-finished outcome of a constant process'. This historical method permitted him to avoid mistakes such as Engels' neo-hegelian theory of the 'non-historic nations' (Czechs, Roumanians and others) doomed to disappearance. . .³

It seems to me that this kind of un-dogmatic analysis leads logically to the conclusion that a nation is not simply a collection of abstract, external, 'objective' criteria. The *subjective* dimension, i.e. the consciousness of a national identity, the vitality of the national culture, the existence of a national political movement, is no less important. Of course, these 'subjective factors' do not come out of the blue; they are the result of certain **historical** conditions: persecution, oppression, discrimination, etc. But this means that in the last analysis no doctrinaire 'expert' armed with a list of 'objective' characteristics will determine whether a community constitutes a nation or not, but *the community itself* (or that part of it which considers itself as belonging to a nation).⁴

It is important to distinguish very carefully between the feeling of national identity, the attachment to a national culture, the consciousness of belonging to a national community with its own historical past – and **nationalism**. Nationalism as an ideology is composed of all these elements but also of

something else, which is its decisive ingredient: the choice of the nation as *the* primary, fundamental and most important social and political value, to which all others are – in one way or another – subordinated. Hans Kohn, the well known historian of modern nationalism defined it as 'a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the **nation-state**'.⁵ This is a quite adequate definition – if one includes in it **also** the struggle *for the establishment* of the nation-state – even if one has to admit that there exist at least some (moderate) nationalist movements who aim only at cultural or territorial autonomy.

It is not easy to find out exactly how and when nationalism was born. Some authors see it as contemporary with the emergence of the modern **nation-state** in the 15-16th centuries (Machiavelli!). Others, like Hans Kohn, relate it to the first great bourgeois revolutions; in England in the 17th century and France in 1789 for the first time the state 'ceased to be the king's state: it became the people's state, a national state, a **fatherland**'.⁶ More recently, Tom **Nairn** tried to prove that nationalism emerged in the 19th century (as a result of the uneven development of capitalism) in the peripheral countries (Germany, Italy and Japan), and only later attained the 'core-areas' (England, **France**),⁷ but this strange chronology is too arbitrary and seems to ignore such well known historical facts as the patriotic dimension of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic wars. . . In any case there is no doubt that for many centuries the political ideal was not the nation, or the nation-state, but other forms of social and political organization: the clan, the city-state, the feudal lord, the church, the dynastic kingdom and the multi-national empire. And although some precedents can be found in the past (the ancient Hebrews or the ancient Greeks), they are of a quite different nature and substance from modern nationalism.

Marxist socialism is fundamentally opposed to nationalism. First of all because it refuses to see the nation as an undifferentiated bloc: all nations are divided into *different social classes*, with different interests and different conceptions of the national identity. But above all it rejects the nationalist ideology and its scale of values because its supreme loyalty is not to any nation, but to an international historical subject (the proletariat) and to an international historical aim: the socialist transformation of the world. It is internationalist both for ethical and for material reasons.

The ethical motives are important: for the Marxist world-view, materialist and atheistic, the only value which can be considered 'sacred' – i.e. absolute – is humanity itself (of which the exploited and the oppressed are the emancipatory force). In this sense, the motto 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!' is not only a practical proposition for action, but also the socialist ethical answer to the 'Amour **sacré** de la patrie' of the nationalist ideology. Socialism is therefore an internationalist movement by the universalist and humanist character of its values and its aims. Without this ethical appeal it is impossible to understand the total commitment and sacrifice of many

generations of activists from the labour movement of many countries to international socialism (or communism). As the old bolshevik Adolf Yoffé wrote in his last letter (before committing suicide in 1927) to Trotsky: 'Human life has no meaning unless it is at the service of an infinite, which for us is humanity'.

However, if internationalism were only a moral principle, a categorical imperative, it would be easy to dismiss it as a beautiful utopia. If this is not the case, it is because proletarian internationalism draws its political force from *objective, concrete, and material* conditions, already analysed by Marx in the *Manifesto*: the economic unification of the world by the capitalist system.

As any dialectic totality, world capitalism is not the addition of its parts, the national economies – nor is the international class struggle the addition of the national struggles. They constitute an organic whole, with its own forms of motion, distinct from the peculiarities of its component elements. Georg Lukacs insisted in *History and Class Consciousness* that the category of totality was, on the methodological level, the carrier of the revolutionary principle. From the dialectical standpoint of totality, any local or national situation cannot be grasped in theory and transformed in practice, if one ignores its articulation with the whole, i.e. with the world economic, social and political movement.

As a matter of fact, far from being anachronistic, Marx's analysis in the *Manifesto* is much more adequate *in our times* than in 1848: imperialism has imposed on the world capitalist system a much higher degree of integration, the control of the market by multi-national monopolies is incomparably greater; in short, the unification of the planet by the capitalist mode of production has achieved today a qualitatively higher level than in 1848. And this economic unity has also its political and military expression in Western atlanticism, US interventionism, etc. This means that internationalism has its roots in the structure of world economy and world politics; socialist internationalism is *also* the consciousness of this objective reality.

Which is the decisive factor in class struggle: the national or the international conditions? Should one privilege the importance of the world process, or, as Mao once wrote, the internal factors and the national (endogenous) causes? In this problematic, the question itself is misleading. It supposes an abstract, metaphysical and static separation between the national and the international, the 'internal' and the 'external', the 'inside' and the 'outside'. The dialectical standpoint is precisely based on the understanding of the *contradictory unity* between the national economy and the world market, the national and the international class struggle – unity which appears already in the fact that the (economic and social) national specificity is the product of the unequal development of international capitalism.

What *is* wrong in the *Manifesto* and other of Marx's writings is the idea that modern industrial capitalism is essentially a *homogenizing* force, creating *identical* conditions of life and struggle among the exploited of all countries.

In an essay written in 1845 (recently discovered) he wrote this astonishing sentence: 'the nation of the worker is not French, nor English, nor German, it is *toil, the wage slavery, the selling of oneself*. His government is neither French, nor English, nor German, it is *Capital*. His native air is not French, English nor German, its the *factory air*. The *land* which belongs to him is not French, nor English, nor German, it is a few feet *below the earth*'.⁸ This thesis has a large part of truth, but it ignores not only the cultural specificities of each nation (which capitalism does not abolish at all) but also socio-economic differences between the proletarians of different nations, which result from the *uneven and combined development of the world capitalist system*. Moreover, one cannot neglect the importance of the national peculiarities for the 'making of the working class' in each country and for the development of its own tradition of anti-capitalist resistance and struggle.

In other words: although capitalism creates both in the **industrial** metropolis and in the dominated countries a modern proletariat which fights against the same enemy and has the same objective historical interests, this does not mean at all that the material and social conditions of life (not to mention the national cultures) are identical. . . . As Leon **Trotsky** once wrote: 'If we take England and India as the two poles of the capitalist type, we must recognize that the internationalism of the English and Indian proletarians is not at all based on the *identity* of their conditions, tasks and methods, but on their *unseparable interdependence*'.⁹ World capitalism creates incredible inequalities and brutal differences in life-conditions between centre and periphery of the system: only the complementarity, the reciprocal relation of the struggles in the different countries can generate internationalist solidarity. Thus the anti-war movements in France in the 50s and in the USA in the 60s and 70s were a powerful contribution for the struggle of the Algerians and of the Indochinese people – and vice-versa: these colonial struggles helped to ignite radical contestation in the metropolitan centres.

The same logic of complementarity applies also, but in a different context, to the link between the struggle for socialist **democracy** in the West and the post-capitalist societies of Eastern Europe: it is not the identical situation which creates a relationship of reciprocity and mutual reinforcement, but the *common aim*. The events of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were the beginning of such an internationalist dynamic, but it was thwarted by the Soviet invasion, before it could unfold all its potentialities. In any case, there is no doubt that the existence of the (bureaucratized) post-capitalist States creates a new international dynamic (unforeseen by Marx and classical Marxism) and a new form of internationalism which cannot be deduced only from the unity of world capitalism. This new form results from the common interest of the labour movement, East and West, to see bureaucratic dictatorship abolished in the post-capitalist societies, thus destroying the most efficient ideological argument of the Western ruling classes against radical (i.e. socialist) change.

To sum up: internationalism is **not** the expression of the identity in life-conditions of the exploited and oppressed of all countries, but of a *dialectical* relationship of complementarity **between** at least three very different kinds of struggles: the socialist labour movement in the advanced capitalist societies, the social and national liberation movement in the dependent (or colonial) capitalist countries, and the anti-bureaucratic movement for socialist democracy in the post-capitalist societies.

Marxists have often under-estimated the importance of the national question, the decisive significance of national liberation for the dominated people. This is part of a general pattern of blindness, neglect or at least insufficient attention to *non-class* forms of oppression: national, racial or sexual. It is not that Marxism as such is unable to take into account these dimensions, but the economic approach which dominated much of Marxist thinking (and also some of **Marx's** own writings) led to a tendency to disregard them.

Marxists have also very frequently under-estimated the power of nationalism. A peculiar combination between economicism and the illusions of linear progress (inherited from the Enlightenment) led to the wrong belief that nationalism would inevitably and soon decline. For instance, in the *Communist Manifesto*: 'National differences, and antagonisms between people, are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.'¹⁰ The Second International also believed that nationalism belonged to the past and Karl Kautsky dreamed of a socialist future without nations and with one single language: 'In a painless way, the nations will fuse with each other, more or less in the same fashion as the Roman population of the Grisons canton in Switzerland, who, insensibly and without resistance, is slowly germanizing itself because it discovers that it is more advantageous to speak a language that everybody understands in a vast area rather than a language that is only spoken in a few valleys'.¹¹ Obviously, equipped with such ideas, Marxists were little prepared to confront the fantastic upsurge of nationalism after August 1914, which took over the labour movement and led to 'Sacred Unity in Defence of the Fatherland' – and to the mutual slaughter of the workers of all countries. Kautsky himself rallied to the 'National Defence' of Imperial Germany, arguing that the Socialist International was an instrument suited only for peaceful times, and had to be put gently aside during the war. . .

The first condition for an effective confrontation with nationalism is therefore to give up the illusions of linear progress, i.e. the naive expectations of a peaceful evolution, and of a **gradual** 'withering way' of nationalism and national wars, thanks to the modernisation and democratisation of industrial societies, the internationalisation of productive forces, etc.

How can one explain this incredible force of nationalism in the course of 20th century history? A first answer would be the classic Marxist argument:

nationalism is a bourgeois ideology and its power over the popular masses is one of the main forms taken by the ideological domination of the bourgeoisie in capitalist societies. This analysis is not wrong, but insufficient to explain the power of attraction of nationalism, sometimes over significant sections of the labour movement. Other causes have to be taken into consideration:

1) Concrete material and economic conditions: the competition between workers of different nations (or States), resulting from the nature itself of capitalism. It is a question of short-range interests – for instance, to prevent the entrance of foreign commodities which can provoke unemployment – but their real weight can hide from the competing workers their common historical interest: the abolition of exploitation. This, incidentally, happens also inside one single nation, when unemployed workers volunteer to replace striking ones. Marx himself recognized in the *Manifesto* that the competition among workers constantly threatens to divide and destroy their common organisation.

2) Irrational tendencies, similar in chauvinist nationalism, religious fanaticism, racism and fascism: a complex psychological phenomena, which still has to be studied. Reich's work on the mass psychology of fascism, Erich Fromm's on the 'escape from freedom' and Adorno's on the authoritarian personality are among the first important contributions for an explanation. Nationalism is by its own nature an irrationalist ideology: it cannot legitimate the privilege of one nation over the others with any rational criteria – since substantive (i.e. not purely instrumental) rationalism is always tendentially universal. It must therefore make appeal to non-rational myths like the divine mission attributed to the nation, the innate and eternal superiority of a people, the right to occupy a **larger** geographical *Lebensraum*, etc. However, it may also make use of pseudo-rational and pseudo-scientific forms of legitimization: geo-politics, racial anthropology, etc. Often it does not correspond to any deep historical and cultural unity, being just the official ideology of more or less artificial states, whose borders are the accidental product of colonisation and/or de-colonisation (in Africa and Latin America for instance).

But there is another reason for the upsurge of nationalism, which has to be taken very seriously by Marxists and Socialists: the struggle for liberation of the oppressed or colonised nations. Although Marxism is as such opposed to the nationalist ideology, it must very clearly distinguish between *the nationalism of the oppressors and the nationalism of the oppressed*. It has therefore to support all struggles for national liberation, or for the right of self-determination of the oppressed nations, even if their ideology (or the ideology of their leaders) is nationalist. Of course, Marxist internationalists taking part in a movement for national liberation should keep their independence, and try to persuade the exploited popular masses of the need to develop the struggle (in an uninterrupted way) beyond the national aims, towards a socialist-revolutionary transformation. But they cannot ignore or under-rate the significance of the popular demand for national self-determination.

The reason for this is not only that Socialists are opposed to *all forms of oppression* (national, racial, sexual or class) but also because there is a *dialectical relation* between internationalism and national rights. Socialist internationalism cannot develop without the recognition, by the socialist movement, of the equal rights of all nations. In the same way as the unity and solidarity of the workers of one and the same nation cannot be established except on an egalitarian basis – without any distinctions or privileges of profession, religion, race, sex or branch of production – the internationalist unity of the exploited can only be built on the recognition of the national rights – and in particular the right to self-determination – for all people. When Lenin insisted that the Russian Workers Party (the POSDR) should recognise the right of self-determination of Poland – i.e. the right of the Polish people to decide for themselves if they want or not to establish a *separate State* – he did it not only because the struggle of the Polish nation against *tsarism* was historically progressive (the argument used by Marx and Engels) but above all because it was the pre-condition for the establishment of an internationalist alliance between Russian and Polish workers. The recognition of national rights is an essential condition for international solidarity, insofar as it permits the dissolution of suspicions, hatreds and fears which oppose nations and nourish chauvinism. As Lenin wrote, without the right to divorce – i.e. to have a separate State – there can be no truly free marriage – i.e. unity or federation between nations. Unfortunately, the policy of the Bolshevik government (including Lenin) after October 1917 did not always correspond to this principle: invasion of Poland in 1920, occupation of Georgia in 1921 etc. . .

One of the most negative aspects of Stalin's famous pamphlet from 1913 is that – in contradiction to Lenin – he makes no distinction between **Great-Russian** oppressive nationalism and the nationalism of the oppressed nations of the Tsarist Empire. In a very revealing paragraph of his essay, he rejected in the same terms the 'warlike and repressive' nationalism 'from above' – i.e. of the Tsarist State – and the 'wave of nationalism from below which sometimes turns into crass chauvinism' of the Poles, Jews, Tatars, Ukrainians, Georgians, Ukrainians, etc. Not only did he fail to make any distinction between nationalism 'from above' and nationalism 'from below', but he aimed his most severe criticism at social-democrats in the oppressed nations who had not 'stood firm' in the face of nationalist movements.

By making the capital distinction between oppressed and oppressor's nationalism, socialist internationalists do not have to adhere to the former. But they perceive its contradictory nature: its emancipatory dimension as a rebellion against unjust oppression, and its limits as a particularistic ideology. It is therefore logical that all truly social-revolutionary movements in an oppressed nation necessarily put national liberation at the centre of their struggle, while linking it to the social emancipation from capitalist exploitation – Nicaragua is the most recent example – while in the imperialist

metropolis, it is the rejection of nationalism which is at the heart of all radical confrontation with the established order – from the anti-war movement in the USA to the French Mai 68 (whose main slogan was 'les frontières on s'en fout!').

This being said, it should be stressed that the distinction between the two kinds of nationalism is a *relative* and not an absolute one. First, because very easily the oppressed from yesterday become the oppressors of tomorrow: there is no lack of historical evidence, in our own times. . . Secondly, because the nationalist ideology (or movement) of oppressed nations has often a double cutting edge: liberating against their oppressors, but oppressive towards their own national minorities. And thirdly, because one can find in both forms of nationalism elements of chauvinism, global rejection of the 'other' and (sometimes) racism.

Lenin was probably the 'classic' Marxist thinker who best understood the dialectics between internationalism and national rights. However, in certain passages of his writings he presents the democratic rights of the nations as a part which has to be subordinated to the whole which is the world democratic and socialist movement. This formulation seems to me dangerous and somewhat mechanistic. If socialist revolution is the self-emancipation of the proletariat – in alliance with all the other exploited and oppressed social groups – it is intimately linked with the democratic self-determination of the nation. A people to whom 'socialism' would be imposed from outside, against its will, would only know a caricature of socialism, inevitably doomed to bureaucratic degeneration (many Eastern European countries illustrate this rule!). In my opinion it would be more adequate – and corresponding better to the spirit of most of Lenin's writings on the national question – to conceive the socialist revolution and the international fraternity of the proletariat as the aim of Marxists, and the self-determination of the nations as a necessary means for implementing it. Means and aim are dialectically articulated, in such a way that the subordination of the national dimension to internationalism excludes the possibility of 'sacrificing' the first to the second one.

If socialist internationalism is opposed to nationalist ideology, this does not at all mean that it refuses the historical and cultural tradition of the nations. In the same way as the internationalist movements in each country have to speak the national language, they have also to speak the language of the national history and culture – particularly, of course, when this culture is being oppressed. As Lenin acknowledged, each culture and each national history contains democratic, progressive, revolutionary aspects which have to be incorporated by the socialist culture of the labour movement, and reactionary, chauvinistic and obscurantist aspects which have to be uncompromisingly fought. The task of the internationalists is to fuse the historical and cultural heritage of the world socialist movement with the culture and the tradition of their people, in its radical and subversive dimension – often deformed by bourgeois ideology, or hidden and buried by the official culture of the ruling

classes. In the same way as Marxists must take into consideration, in their revolutionary struggle, the decisive importance of the national specificity of their social formation, in their ideological struggle they cannot ignore the national peculiarity of their own culture and history. This is what the FSLN did in Nicaragua, articulating Marxism with the Sandino heritage, a radical tradition alive in the collective memory of the Nicaraguan people. And a similar process took place in Cuba, with the democratic and anti-imperialist tradition represented by Jose **Marti**, in South America with the Indian rebellious past embodied by Tupac-Amaru, etc.

If socialism, in the **Marxian** sense – i.e. a class-less and state-less society – can exist only on a world scale, what would be the place of the nations in the future 'Socialist Mother Earth'? This is not a purely utopian and irrelevant question, since the internationalist nature of the final socialist-revolutionary aim should inspire, to a certain extent at least, the present forms of struggle.

For historical materialism, the nation-state is not an eternal category: it is not the result of 'human nature' nor of any biological law of nature (a thesis advocated by certain ultra-reactionary 'socio-biologists' who pretend to deduce the nation from the 'territorial principle' of certain animal species. . .); it did not always exist in the past and nothing forces one to believe that it will always exist in the future. In one word: it is an historical product and can be historically superseded.

The necessity of some form of structured (or 'institutional') organization is a universal need of all civilized human societies. This organization can as well take national forms, as infra-national (the clan, the tribe) and supra-national ones (the religious civilizations). Medieval Europe is a characteristic example of a social and political organization combining local structures which are 'pre-national' (the fiefs, principalities, etc) and universalistic structures which are 'beyond the nation' (the Holy Roman Empire, the Church). The modern nation-state emerged around the 14–15th centuries, – with the rise of capitalism and the formation of the national market – precisely through the destruction/decomposition of these two non-national structures.

There is therefore no reason a-priori to deny the possibility, in the future, of a new supra-national organisation of human society, a World Socialist Republic, which, unifying economically and politically the human species, would reduce the nation essentially to its cultural dimension. The universal culture which would arise in such a framework would peacefully co-exist with the rich multiplicity of the national cultures.

This is probably what Marx and **Engels** had in mind when they wrote in the Communist Manifesto that the proletarian revolution would abolish 'national differences (*Absonderungen*) and antagonisms between peoples'.¹² As the well known Marxist historian Roman Rosdolsky rightly stressed, this means 'certainly not the "abolition" of existing ethnic and linguistic communities (which would have been absurd!) but of the political delimitation of peoples. In a society which (in the words of the Manifesto) "the public power will lose

its political character” and *the State as such will wither away*, there can be no room for separate “national States”. Of course, as Marx acknowledged in the *Manifesto*, the proletariat must first seize power within the framework of a national State, but this separate proletarian State ‘*will be only a transitional stage towards the future classless and Stateless society*, since the construction of such a society is possible only on the international scale’.¹³ There is no doubt that one can find in Marx and Engels’ writings (particularly during the years 1845-48) the hope of a future communist *cosmopolis*, a ‘world city’ without frontiers, a universal *Gemeinschaft*, an international socialist federation, in which not only national antagonisms and conflicts would disappear but also the *economic, social and political* (but not cultural) differences between nations.¹⁴

This issue has been quite controversial in 20th century Marxism. One can find basically two tendencies: 1) Those who favoured (or considered inevitable) the future *assimilation* of all nations in a universal common socialist culture: Kautsky, Lenin, Stalin, Pannekoek, Strasser. Kautsky’s theory of the single international language is the coherent expression of this position. 2) Those who believed in the *free development* of all national cultures in an integrated universal community: Otto Bauer, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. For instance, Leon Trotsky wrote in an essay from 1915: ‘The nation is an active and permanent factor of human culture. And in a socialist regime the nation, liberated from the chains of political and economic dependence, will be called to play a fundamental rôle in the historical development. . .’.¹⁵ A third position, ‘national neutrality’, is implicitly sketched by Vladimir Medem, the leader of the Jewish Bund: it is impossible to predict whether future historical development will or not lead to the assimilation of the Jewish nation. In any case, Marxists should neither prevent nor stimulate this process of assimilation, but remain neutral.¹⁶ If one generalizes this position to all national cultures (which Medem did not) one would have an original and new conception of the problem.¹⁷

What happened to socialist internationalism in the 20th century? August 1914 brought a catastrophic breakdown of internationalism, when the great majority of the socialist labour movement (leadership as well as rank-and-file) was engulfed by the immense wave of nationalist (and chauvinist) hysteria, in the name of ‘national defence’. However, this was not to be the end of internationalism, but the beginning of a *new* internationalist upsurge in the socialist movement; at first limited to small circles of revolutionaries or pacifists, and then, after October 1917, growing into an impressive mass movement – the Communist International. The existence of the Comintern, a world movement genuinely committed to proletarian internationalism (at least during its first years), is a powerful historical proof that the international solidarity of the exploited is not just a utopia, an abstract principle, but that in given circumstances it can have mass appeal among the workers and other exploited social layers. In several key European and ‘colonial’ countries, the

Third International soon rallied the majority of the organized labour movement, invalidating the conservative myth that the great masses of the working people cannot transcend nationalist ideology. This is a decisive evidence that internationalism – and revolutionary class consciousness in general – is an objective possibility, based on reality and its contradictions; of course, its concrete implementation depends on historical circumstances, and on a political battle of the revolutionary forces to win the people and liberate them from the blinkers of nationalism. In other words: Marxist internationalism – as well as the hope of revolution – is based not only on an objective analysis of world economy and world politics, but also on a historical wager: a wager on the rationality of the working people, on the capacity of the popular masses to understand, sooner or later, their objective historical interests.

However, this extraordinary upsurge of internationalist faith and action – without precedent in the past history of socialism – the incredible capital of internationalist energy and commitment represented by the Communist International was wasted by Stalinism. It channelled this energy at the service of bureaucratic nationalism, its state policy and its power strategy. Internationalism became the maid of Soviet diplomacy, and the world communist movement an instrument to help building 'socialism in one country'. The most obvious example is the policy of the Comintern towards German **naz**-ism, from 1928 until its dissolution in 1943: its strange turns and about-turns had little to do with the life-and-death interests of the European workers and peoples, but were exclusively determined by Soviet (Stalinist) changing diplomatic and military alliances.

Nevertheless, during the thirties Europe saw the most impressive example of internationalist practice: the International Brigades in Spain, and the general mobilisation in solidarity with the anti-fascist struggle during the Spanish Civil-War. Tens of thousands of volunteers – communists, socialists, anarchists, trotskysts, independent marxists, radicalized liberals and anti-fascists of various tendencies – from dozens of nationalities came from all over the world in order to help the Spanish people in its desperate war against fascism. Thanks to Hitler and Mussolini's help to **Franco** (and the so-called 'non-interventionist' policy of the Western democracies) this war was lost, but the fight of the International Brigades – many of whose volunteers fell in the battle-field – remains one of the highest manifestations of internationalism in our century.

After (and also during) the Second World War nationalism became again the dominant ideology – even among **the** 'really existing socialist countries', who engaged in a process of nationalist confrontation (USSR vs. China) or war (China vs. Vietnam). What remained as 'internationalism' in the world communist movement after the dissolution of the Comintern was only a blind fidelity to the Soviet Union and its leadership (now in the process of vanishing too). The only exceptions were small revolutionary tendencies, among whom the Fourth International, who remained committed to

the original internationalist aims of the Comintern, but their influence was limited.

This decline in communist internationalism left an ideological void which very quickly was to be filled by nationalism. Today, as in the past, nationalism can be found with very different political contents. Reactionary nationalism is alive and well in the advanced capitalist metropolis, both in the traditional form of colonial or imperial hegemonism and in the more recent form of anti-immigrant racism. The immigrants from the former colonized people who were recruited as cheap labour force in Europe during the years of the economic boom are now being presented as the scapegoat for all social ills resulting from the crisis (unemployment, criminality, etc) by semi-fascist nationalist (racist) forces, particularly in France, Great Britain and Germany. But also in the Third World one can find reactionary forms of nationalism, in the ideology of various military regimes (particularly in Latin America and the Middle-East). Nationalism can also be used to legitimize wars of territorial or political expansionism, like the Indonesian invasion of Timor, and the Iran-Iraqi war – the bloodiest and most absurd national conflict in recent history. Finally it can be used to justify the oppression of national minorities, like the Kurds in various Middle-Eastern countries, the non-Muslim African population in Sudan, the Eritrean people in Ethiopia, etc.

But there are also, nowadays as before, forms of nationalism which have – whatever their limitations, shortcomings and contradictions – an emancipator-dimension. First, the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial nationalist movements of liberation in Latin America, Africa (Namibia, South Africa), the Middle-East (Palestine), etc. Secondly, the movements against national oppression in the post-capitalist societies: the national minorities in the USSR (Jews, Tatars, Armenians, etc) and the oppressed nations of East Europe: Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc. And finally, the various national minorities or national cultures in the main European nation-states which are struggling for their right of self-determination or at least for various forms of national autonomy (Basques, Catalans, Andalusians, Northern Irish, Scots, Welsh, Bretons, Corsicans, etc).¹⁸

While the old internationalism identified with the Soviet Union is in decline, there are new forms of internationalist fraternity which emerge in our times. The 60s produced already a big and unexpected wave of internationalism among the younger generation, taking the form of anti-war movements, solidarity with Third-World revolutions and the rejection of nationalist chauvinism. The French Mai 68 saw hundreds of young people chanting 'Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands' – a slogan which expressed this spontaneous and massive internationalist feeling.

To-day a *new internationalist culture* is in the making. In the Third-World it results from the convergence between a new Marxist Left – which refuses the disastrous Stalinist tradition of blind allegiance to a 'Socialist Fatherland' (USSR, China, Albania. etc) – and the christian socialists linked to Liberation Theology. The 'catholic' – i.e. international-character of religion has entered, thanks to Liberation Theology, in a relation of elective affinity with Marxist internationalism. . . Whatever the limits of their international outlook, Sandinismo in Nicaragua and the Brazilian new *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party) are some examples of this.

Among the new European generation this new internationalist culture in process of constitution is the product of various components, which combine and fuse with each other in various proportions:

1– What remained from the older socialist tradition of proletarian and revolutionary internationalism – kept alive among left-socialists, critical communists, anarchists and in such organisations as the Fourth International – and from the new-leftist culture of the 60's.

2– Pacifism. the vast anti-nuclear movement which rejects the armament course, the logic of cold war (in both military blocs) and imperialist (or nationalist) militarism. Whatever their disagreements, pacifist movements from both Western and Eastern Europe are united in the common aim of preventing the nuclear holocaust and saving humanity from 'exterminism'.

3– Ecology, whose struggle to protect Nature and 'Mother Earth' from destructive 'progress', industrial waste and ecological disaster knows of no borders, and relates to a common interest of all humankind.

4– Anti-racism, a spontaneous movement of fraternity with the (African, Arab, Asiatic or Turkish) immigrant population, refusing the national-isttiracist logic of exclusion. One of the most important issues raised by this movement (particularly in France) is the separation between nationality and citizenship: all inhabitants living in a country should be considered citizens (with the right of vote) independently of their nationality.

5– Feminism, which subverts the traditional patriarchal culture of aggressive nationalism, 'male' military virtues and 'heroic' patriotic violence. If there is an elective affinity between patriarchy and the reactionary cult of the imperial 'Fatherland', there is also a similar link between the feminist politics and culture and the pacifist (or ecological) defence of 'Mother Earth'.

6– 'Third-Worldism'. i.e. the sympathy and solidarity with the struggles of Third-World people to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression, native dictatorships, hunger and misery. Although less political than the anti-imperialist movements from the 60's, this current – today frequently composed of radicalised christian activists – is genuinely committed to internationalist fraternity.

An objective factor contributing to the rise of internationalist tendencies in Europe is of course the development of the European Common Market.

which renders increasingly obsolete many old nationalist quarrels (France vs. Germany) and creates favourable conditions for common European social struggles – for instance the trade union fight for a 35-hour week. However, in the short range, the so-called 'objective economic constraints' of the international environment and in particular of the Common Market have been used as one of the main arguments of social-democratic governments in Europe (France, Spain, Greece, etc) to justify the lack of any radical social measures on the national scale. The well known socialist historian Daniel Singer answered very accurately to this kind of self-legitimizing discourse by pointing to the present dialectics between national and international change: 'The fact that the medium sized nation-state is historically doomed in its present form does not mean that it does not provide for the time being the first platform for social transformation. Indeed, it still provides the only possible initial terrain. To deny it is to oppose the very idea of radical change. The question must still first be put within national borders even if the answers are already international, European to begin with. (. . .) Similarly, only a western Europe forging a different type of society stands a chance of preventing our future from being American. The growing economic interdependence, the inevitability of a rapid expansion of the movement from a national to a European scale does not condemn individual countries, as it is being suggested, to permanent submission to the rule of capital. It simply condemns a socialist movement, however deep its national roots, to **internationalism**'²⁰.

It is too soon to predict if these various ingredients will be able to combine harmoniously, and if the new internationalist culture will unfold as a unified mass movement in Europe (or the world). But it may be that these are the modest beginnings of what will be the socialist internationalism of the 21st century. . .

NOTES

1. For an historical survey of the debate see my article 'The Marxists and the National Question', *New Left Review* 96, March–April 1976.
2. J. Stalin, 'Marxism and the National Question', *Works*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1953, pp. 300–381.
3. Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Vienna, 1924, pp. 239–272.
4. Cf. Trotsky on the Blacks in the USA: 'An abstract criterion is not decisive in this case: much more decisive are historical consciousness, feelings and emotions'. *Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, N. York, Merit, 1967, p. 16.
5. Hans Kohn, *Nationalism*, Princeton, Von Nostrand, 1955, p. 9.
6. H. Kohn. *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
7. Tom Nairn. 'The Modern Janus', *New Left Review* 94, London, November–December 1975, p. 15.
8. Marx, 'Ueber Friederich Lists Buch. . .' (1845) in *Sozialistische Politik*, Berlin, 1972, no. 19. p. 103.

9. L. Trotsky, 'Vorwort zur deutschen Ausgabe', *Die Permanente Revolution*, Berlin, Verlag Die Aktion, 1930, p. 11.
10. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto* in *Revolutions of 1848*, London, Penguin-NLR, 1973, p. 85. For an interesting criticism of this aspect of the Marxist tradition, see T. Nairn, *Op. cit.*, pp. 19–21, 26–27.
11. Karl Kautsky, 'Die moderne Nationalität', *Die Neue Zeit*, V, 1887, p. 451.
12. Marx, Engels, *Werke*, 4, Berlin, Dietz-Verlag, 1959, p. 479.
13. Roman Rosdolsky, 'Worker and Fatherland: A note on a passage in the Communist Manifesto', *Science and Society*, Summer 1965, vol. XXIX, no. 3, pp. 335–337.
14. For a more extensive treatment of this idea, see my article 'Marx and Engels: Cosmopolites', in *Critique. A Journal of Socialist Theory*, no. 14, 1981.
15. L. Trotsky, 'Nation et Économie', 1915, in *Pluriel-Debat*, Paris, no. 4, April 1975, p. 48. Our analysis is borrowed from Enzo Traverso's excellent paper 'Socialismo e nazione: rassegna di una controversia marxista', *Il Ponte*, XL, 1984, no. 1, p. 60.
16. Vladimir Medem, *The national question and social-democracy*, Vilna, 1906, quoted in Arieh Yaari, *Le defi national. Les théories marxistes sur la question nationale a l'épreuve de l'histoire*, Paris, Anthropos, 1978, pp. 186–187.
17. E. Traverso, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.
18. For an interesting and provocative analysis of this new upsurge of the national minorities against the established nation-states, and its anti-capitalist potential, one should see the recent work of a Basque Marxist: Gurutz Jauregui Bereciartu, *Contra el Estado-nacion. En torno al hecho y la cuestion nacional*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1986.
19. By the way: *Mother Earth* was the name of an internationalist journal founded in the USA before World War I by the well known anarchist leader Emma Goldman. . .
20. Daniel Singer, 'Radical Change and Europe's Nation State', paper presented at the 1987 Cavtat Conference (Yugoslavia) on *Socialism, Nations, International Cooperation*, p. 10.