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Marxism and the National Question



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Alan Woods and Ted Grant, 25 February 2000



A 4 part document by Alan Woods and Ted Grant. The question of nationalities has always occupied a central position in Marxist theory. In particular, the writings of Lenin deal with this important issue in great detail. It is true to say that, without a

correct appraisal of the national question, the Bolsheviks would never have succeeded in coming to power in 1917. This document reviews the rich Marxist literature on this issue and applies it to today's conditions.

Part One: The national question in history

Introduction

The question of nationalities—that is, the oppression of nations and national minorities—which has characterised capitalism from its birth till the present time, has always occupied a central position in Marxist theory. In particular, the writings of Lenin deal with this important

issue in great detail, and still provide us with a sound foundation to deal with this most complicated and explosive issue. It is true to say that, without a correct appraisal of the national question, the Bolsheviks would never have succeeded in coming to power in 1917. Only by placing itself at the head of all oppressed layers of society could the proletariat unite under the banner of socialism the mass forces necessary to overthrow the rule of the oppressors. Failure to appreciate the problems and aspirations of the oppressed nationalities of the tsarist empire would have undermined the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat severely.

The two fundamental barriers to human progress are on the one hand the private ownership of the means of production and on the other hand the nation state. But whereas the first half of this equation is sufficiently clear, the second half has not received the attention due to it. Today, in the epoch of imperialist decline, when the crying contradictions of a socio-economic system that is decaying on its feet have reached the most unbearable limits, the national question is once again raising its head everywhere, with the most tragic and sanguinary consequences. Far from peacefully receding into the background as an antiquated phase of human development, as hopeless reformists imagine, it has acquired a particularly vicious and poisonous form that threatens to drag whole nations into barbarism. The solution of this problem is a vital component for the triumph of socialism on a world scale.

No country—not even the biggest and most powerful states—can withstand the crushing domination of the world market. The phenomenon which the bourgeois describe as globalisation, predicted by Marx and Engels 150 years ago, is now working itself out under almost laboratory conditions. Since the Second World War, and particularly over the last 20 years, there has been a colossal intensification of the international division of labour and an enormous development of world trade, to a degree that even Marx and Engels could not have dreamt of. The knitting together of the world economy

has been carried out to a degree never before seen in human history. This is a most progressive development because it means that the material conditions for world socialism are now established.

Control of the world economy is in the hands of the 200 biggest international companies. The concentration of capital has reached staggering proportions. Every day 1.3 trillion dollars cross frontiers in international transactions and 70 per cent of these transactions take place within the multinationals. With every passing day, huge monopolies engage in mortal combat to take over other giants. Vast sums of money are spent on these operations, which are concentrating unimaginable power into the hands of fewer and fewer companies. They conduct themselves like ferocious and insatiable cannibals, devouring each other in the pursuit of greater and greater profit. In this cannibalistic orgy, the working class is always the loser. No sooner has a merger taken place than head office announces a new wave of sackings and closures, and remorseless pressure on the workforce to boost profit margins, dividends and executive payouts.

In this context Lenin's book, *Imperialism—the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, acquires a very modern ring. Lenin explained that imperialism is capitalism in the period of the big monopolies and trusts. But the degree of monopolisation in Lenin's day seems like child's play in comparison with the situation today. In 1999 the number of cross-border take-overs was an astonishing 5,100. Moreover, the value of the deals rose by no less than 47 per cent compared to 1998, to a record high of \$798 billion. With such staggering sums as these it would be possible to solve most of the pressing problems of world poverty, illiteracy and disease. But that presupposes the existence of a rational system of production in which the needs of the many take precedence over the super-profits of a few. The colossal power of these gigantic multinational companies, which is increasingly fused with the capitalist state, producing the phenomenon which the American sociologist Wright-Mills dubbed the "Military Industrial Complex", dominates the world far more completely than at any time in history.

Here we see a striking contradiction. On the basis of globalisation, the argument is put forward by the bourgeois and particularly the petty-bourgeois apologists for capitalism that in effect the nation state does not matter any more. This is not new. It is the same argument that was put forward by Kautsky in the period of the First World War (the so-called theory of "ultra-imperialism"), when he argued in effect that the development of monopoly capitalism and imperialism would gradually eliminate the contradictions of capitalism. There would be no more wars because the development of capitalism itself would render national states redundant. The same theory is put forward today by revisionist theoreticians like Eric Hobsbawm in Britain. This ex-Stalinist who has gone over to the right wing of Labourism argues that the national state was just a transient period of human history which has now passed. Bourgeois economists have put forward the same argument throughout history. They try to abolish the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system merely by denying their existence. Yet precisely at this moment in time, when the world market has become the dominant force on the planet, national antagonisms have everywhere acquired a ferocious character and the national question far from being abolished everywhere assumed a particularly intense and poisonous character.

With the development of imperialism and monopoly capitalism, the capitalist system has outgrown the narrow limits of private property and the nation state which plays approximately the same role today as did the petty local princedoms and states in the period prior to the rise of capitalism. During the First World War Lenin wrote: "Imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism. In the foremost countries capital has outgrown the bounds of national states, has replaced competition by monopoly and has created the objective conditions for the achievement of socialism." (Lenin, *Collected Works, The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination*, January-February 1916, vol. 22. Henceforth referred to as LCW.) Whoever fails to understand this elementary truth will be incapable of understanding, not just the national question, but all the most important manifestations of the present epoch.

The whole history of the last hundred years is the history of the rebellion of the productive forces against the narrow confines of the nation state. Out of this comes world economy—and with it world crises, and world wars. Thus, the picture painted by the Professor Hobsbawms of a world in which national contradictions are being eliminated is an idle fancy. Just the opposite is true. With the general crisis of capitalism the national question is not confined to the ex-colonial countries. It is beginning to affect the advanced capitalist countries also, even in places where it appeared to have been solved. In Belgium, one of the most developed countries in Europe, the conflict between the Walloons and the Flemish has assumed a vicious character which under certain circumstances could lead to the break-up of Belgium. In Cyprus, we have the national antagonisms between Greeks and Turks, and the broader conflict between Greece and Turkey. Recently the national question in the Balkans has dragged Europe to the brink of war.

In the USA there is the problem of racism against the Blacks and also the Hispanics. In Germany, France and other countries we see discrimination and racist attacks against immigrants. In the former Soviet Union the national question has resulted in the descent into a bloody chaos of wars and civil wars in one country after another. In Britain, where capitalism has existed for longer than anywhere else, the national problem is still unresolved, not only in Northern Ireland, but also in Wales and Scotland has also been placed firmly on the agenda. In Spain we have the question of Euskadi, Catalonia and Galicia. Most extraordinary of all, over a hundred years after the unification of Italy, the Northern League advances the reactionary demand for the break-up of Italy on the grounds of self-determination for the North ("Padania"). The conclusion is inescapable. We ignore the national question at our peril. If we are to succeed in transforming society, it is imperative that we have a scrupulous and a clear and correct position on this issue. For this purpose, we address ourselves to the workers and youth, to the rank and file of the Socialist and Communist Parties, who wish to

understand the ideas of Marxism in order to fight to change society. To these we dedicate the present work.

Part One: The national question in history

"In Western Europe the epoch of the formative stage of bourgeois nations, if you leave out the struggle of the Netherlands for independence and the fate of the island country, England, began with the great French revolution, and was essentially completed approximately one hundred years later with the formation of the German Empire." (L. Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution, p. 889.)

Although most people think of the national state as something natural, and therefore rooted in the distant past, if not in the blood and soul of men and women, it is, in fact, a relatively modern creation, which really speaking has only existed for the last 200 years. The only exceptions to that would be Holland, where the bourgeois revolution in the 16th century took the form of a war of national liberation against Spain, and England because of its unique position as an island-kingdom where capitalist development took place earlier than in the rest of Europe (from the late 14th century onward). Prior to this period there were no nations, but only tribes, city-states and empires. It is scientifically incorrect to refer to the latter as "nations", as is frequently done. One Welsh nationalist author even referred to the "Welsh nation"—before the Roman invasion of Britain! This is wishful thinking. The Welsh at that time were an agglomeration of tribes not fundamentally different from other tribes which inhabited what is now known as England. It is a pernicious trait of nationalist writers to try and create the impression that "the nation" (especially their particular nation) has always existed. In fact, the nation state is an historically evolved entity. It has not always existed, and will not always exist in the future.

In reality, the nation state is a product of capitalism. It was established by the bourgeoisie which required a national market. It had to break down the local restrictions with little local areas with their local taxes, toll roads, separate money systems, separate weights and measures. The following extract by Robert Heilbroner puts it very graphically when he describes a journey by a German merchant about the year 1550:

"Andreas Ryff, a merchant, bearded and fur-coated, is coming back to his home in Baden; he writes to his wife that he has visited thirty markets and is troubled with saddle-burn. He is even more troubled by the nuisances of the times; as he travels he is stopped approximately once every ten miles to pay a customs toll; between Basle and Cologne he pays thirty-one levies.

"And that is not all. Each community he visits has its own money, its own rules and regulations, its own law and order. In the area around Baden alone there are 112 different measures of length, 92 different square measures for cereals and 123 for liquids, 63 for liquor, and 80 different pound weights." (R. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, p. 22.)

The overthrowing of this local particularism was a giant step forward at that time. The gathering together of the productive forces into one national state was a colossally progressive historical task of the bourgeoisie. The basis for this revolution was laid in the later Middle Ages, in the period of the decline of feudalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie and the towns which gradually asserted their rights. The medieval kings needed money for their wars and were forced to lean on the rising class of merchants and bankers like the Fuggers and the Medicis. But the hour of the market economy had not yet struck. What existed was only an embryonic form of capitalism, typified by small-scale production and local markets. One could not yet speak of a truly national market, or national state. True, the elements of some modern European states were present in outline, but these were also as yet in an undeveloped stage. Although France gradually took shape as a result of

the hundred years' war with England, these struggles had a feudal and dynastic, rather than a really national, character. The soldiers who fought in the wars owed more allegiance to their local lord than to the king of France, and despite the existence of a common territory and language, considered themselves as Bretons, Burgundians and Gascones rather than French.

Only gradually, painfully, over a period of several centuries did a real national consciousness arise. This process runs parallel to the rise of capitalism, money economy and the gradual emergence of the national market, typified by the wool trade in England in the later Middle Ages. The decay of feudalism and the rise of the absolute monarchies which, for their own purposes, encouraged the bourgeoisie and trade, accelerated the process. As Robert Heilbroner puts it:

"First, there was the gradual emergence of national political units in Europe. Under the blows of peasant wars and kingly conquest, the isolated existence of early feudalism gave way to centralised monarchies. And with monarchies came the growth of the national spirit; in turn this meant royal patronage for favoured industries, such as the great French tapestry works, and the development of armadas and armies with all their necessary satellite industries. The infinity of rules and regulations which plagued Andreas Ryff and his fellow sixteenth-century travelling merchants gave way to national laws, common measurements, and more or less standard currencies." (Ibid., p. 34.)

The national question, from an historical point of view, therefore, pertains to the period of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Strictly speaking, the national question does not form part of the socialist programme, since it should have been resolved by the bourgeoisie in its struggle against feudalism. It was the bourgeoisie that created the nation state in the first place. The establishment of the nation state was, in its day, a tremendously revolutionary and progressive development. And it was not achieved peacefully and without struggle. The first real European nation, Holland, was formed in the 16th century as a result of

a bourgeois revolution that took the form of a war of national liberation against imperial Spain. In the United States it took place on the basis of a revolutionary war of national liberation in the 18th century and was consolidated through a bloody civil war in the 1860s. In Italy also it was achieved through a war of national independence. The unification of Germany—a progressive task at the time—was carried through by the Junker Bismarck by reactionary means, on the basis of war and a policy of "blood and iron".

The French revolution

The establishment of the modern European nation states (with the exceptions of Holland and England) begins with the French revolution. Up to this point the notion of the nation state was identical to that of kingship. The nation was the property of the ruling sovereign. This antiquated legal set-up, inherited directly from feudalism, was in direct conflict with the new conditions related to the rise of the bourgeoisie. In order to conquer power the bourgeoisie was obliged to put itself forward as the representative of the people, that is, the Nation. As Robespierre put it: "In aristocratic states the word patrie [nation] has no meaning except for patrician families who have seized the sovereignty. It is only under democracy that the state is truly the patrie of all the individuals composing it." (Quoted in E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 414.)

The first principle of the French revolution was the most implacable centralisation. This was the prior condition for its success in the life-and-death struggle against the old regime backed up by the whole of Europe. Under the banner of "the Republic, one and indivisible" the revolution united France for the first time into one nation, sweeping aside all the local particularisms and separatisms of Bretons, Normans and Provençals. The alternative was the disintegration and death of the revolution itself. The bloody struggle in the Vendée was both a war against separatism and feudal reaction. The overthrow of the Bourbons gave a powerful impetus to the national spirit throughout Europe. In the first period, the example of a revolutionary people that succeeded in

overthrowing the old feudal monarchist order served as an inspiration and a focal point to revolutionary and progressive forces everywhere. Later, the revolutionary armies of the French republic were compelled to take the offensive against the assembled powers of Europe which united under the leadership of England and Russian tsarism to crush the revolution. By a prodigious feat of arms, the revolutionary forces succeeded in throwing back the forces of reaction on every front, thereby revealing before an astonished world the power of a revolutionary people and a nation in arms.

The revolutionary army carried the spirit of revolt everywhere, and was bound to carry a revolutionary message to the territories it occupied. In the ascending phase of the revolution, the armies of the French Convention appeared before the peoples of Europe as liberators. In order to succeed in this titanic struggle with the old order, they were obliged to appeal to the masses to carry out the same revolutionary transformations that had taken place in France. This was a revolutionary war, the like of which had never been seen before. Slavery was abolished in the French colonies. The revolutionary message of the Declaration of the Rights of Man was everywhere the rallying cry that announced the end of feudal and monarchic oppression. As David Thompson points out:

"They [the French] were aided, indeed, by native supporters, and the destructive side of their work was often welcome enough. It was only when populations found French masters no less exacting than their old régimes that they were fired to ideas of self-government. The idea that 'sovereignty of the people' should lead to national independence was the indirect result of French occupation; its original meaning, of abolishing privilege and universalising rights, came to merge into this new implication only as a result of conquests. The French revolutionaries spread liberalism by intention but created nationalism by inadvertence." (David Thompson, *Europe after Napoleon*, p. 50.)

The exhaustion and decay of the French revolution produced the dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte, just as the degeneration of the isolated Russian workers' state later ended up in the proletarian Bonapartist dictatorship of Stalin. The earlier revolutionary democratic message was twisted and deformed into the dynastic and imperial ambitions of Napoleon that proved fatal to France. However, even under Napoleon, albeit in a distorted form, some of the gains of the French revolution were maintained and spread throughout France's European territories, with revolutionary results, especially in Germany and Italy:

"Its most destructive achievements were among the most permanent. Napoleon extended and perpetuated the effects of the French revolution by destroying feudalism in the Low Countries, in much of Germany, and in Italy. Feudalism as a legal system, involving noble jurisdiction over peasants, was ended; feudalism as an economic system involving payment of feudal dues by peasants to nobles, was ended, though often in return for compensation and indemnity. The claims of the Church were never allowed to stand in the way of this reorganisation. Middle classes and peasants became, like nobles, subjects of the state, all equally liable to pay taxes. The system of levying and collecting taxes was made more equitable and efficient. Old guilds and town oligarchies were abolished; internal tariff barriers were removed. Everywhere greater equality, in the sense of careers open to talents, was inaugurated. A gust of modernisation blew through Europe in the wake of Napoleonic conquests. His violent attempts to hammer western Europe into one subservient bloc of annexed or satellite territories succeeded, at least, in shaking it free from antiquated jurisdictions and privileges, from outworn territorial divisions. Most of what he swept away could not be restored." (Ibid., p. 67.)

But Napoleonic rule was not an unmixed blessing. In order to avoid imposing heavy taxes at home, Bonaparte laid heavy impositions on the conquered territories. And for all the social advances, French rule remained foreign rule. As Robespierre so wisely remarked, nobody likes missionaries with bayonets. The French invasion inevitably called forth

its opposite in the form of wars of national liberation which ultimately undermined the earlier triumphs. Napoleon's defeat in the frozen wastes of Russia and the destruction of the French army was the signal for a wave of national uprisings against the French. In Prussia the whole nation rose and compelled Frederick William III into a war with Napoleon. Out of the bloody chaos of the Napoleonic wars and the subsequent carve-up of the victors arose most of the modern states of Europe as we know them today.

The national question after 1848

The year 1848 was a turning-point for the national question in Europe. Amid the flames of revolutions, the suppressed national aspirations of Germans, Czechs, Poles, Italians and Magyars were thrust sharply into the foreground. Had the revolution succeeded, the road would have been open to the solution of the national problem in Germany and elsewhere by the most democratic means. But, as Marx and Engels explained, the 1848 revolution was betrayed by the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. The defeat of the revolution meant that the national problem had to be solved by other means. Incidentally, one of the causes of the defeat was precisely the manipulation of the national problem (for example, of the Czechs) for reactionary ends.

In Germany, the national question could be expressed in one word: unification. After the defeat of the revolution of 1848, the country remained divided into a series of petty states and principalities. This was an insurmountable obstacle for the free development of capitalism in Germany—and therefore of the working class. Unification was therefore a progressive demand. But the question of who would unite Germany and by what means was of central importance. Marx hoped that the task of unification would be achieved from below—by the working class using revolutionary means. But this was not to be. Since the proletariat had failed to solve this question by revolutionary means in 1848, it was solved by reactionary means by the conservative Prussian Junker Bismarck.

The principal method of achieving this end was through war. In 1864 the Austrians and Prussians combined to defeat the Danes. Denmark lost the province of Schleswig-Holstein, which, after a tussle between Austria and Prussia, was united to Germany in 1865. Having manoeuvred to keep France out of the conflict, Bismarck then formed an alliance with Italy to fight against Austria. When Austria was defeated at the battle of Königgrätz in July 1866, Prussian domination of Germany was guaranteed. By this act, the unification of Germany was achieved by reactionary means, through the agency of Prussian militarism. This served to strengthen the position of Prussian militarism and Bismarck's Bonapartist regime, and sowed the seeds of new wars in Europe. *Thus, the way in which the national question is resolved, by which class and in whose interest, is by no means an unimportant question for the working class.* This alone is sufficient to explain why it is inadmissible to demand that we should merely act as the cheer-leaders for bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalists—even when they are carrying out a task that is objectively progressive. At all times the class standpoint must be maintained.

Objectively, the unification of Germany was, of course, a progressive development, which Marx and Engels supported. But this in no way presupposed that the German socialists should support Bismarck. The very idea would have been anathema to Marx. He always opposed the reactionary Bismarck, but when the latter succeeded in uniting Germany, Marx and Engels reluctantly were compelled to support it as a step forward, because it would facilitate the unification of the German proletariat. Thus, Engels wrote to Marx on 25 July 1866: "The thing has this good side to it that it simplifies the situation; it makes a revolution easier by doing away with the brawls between the petty capitals and will in any case hasten development...The whole of the petty states will be swept into the movement, the worst localising influences will cease and parties will at last become really national instead of merely local..."

"In my opinion, therefore, all we can do is simply to accept the fact, without justifying it, and to use, so far as we possibly can, the greater facilities for national organisation and unification of the German

proletariat which must now at any rate offer themselves."

Italian unification

An analogous situation existed in Italy. At the end of the 1850s, despite many attempts to achieve unification, Italy still remained hopelessly divided and subjugated to Austria, which had annexed its northern territories. In addition, several smaller states, including the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Southern Italy and Sicily) were protected against revolution by Austrian troops ready to intervene. The Papal states of Central Italy were under French "protection". Only the small kingdom of Sardinia, based on Savoy-Piedmont, was free of Austrian domination. Under the leadership of the able diplomat and statesman Count Cavour, the conservative ruling dynasty gradually expanded its sphere of influence and territories, expelling the Austrians from one area after another.

Side by side with the dynastic-conservative opposition to Austria of the Piedmontese, there was also a radical and revolutionary nationalist movement, involving a heterogeneous mixture of republicans, democrats and socialists. These forces were present in every state of Italy as well as in exile. The most visible representative of this trend was Mazzini, whose confused and amorphous ideas corresponded to the nature of the movement he represented. By contrast, Cavour, who stood at the head of the independent North Italian state of Piedmont, was a wily and unprincipled manoeuvrer. In a typical diplomatic intrigue, he first got the permission of Britain and France to join them in their Crimean expedition against Russia in 1855. Then, secretly promising the French emperor Napoleon III the territorial concession of Nice and Savoy, Cavour obtained a treaty pledging the French to come to the aid of Piedmont, in the event of hostilities with Austria. The war broke out in 1859 and was the starting-point for the unification of Italy. There were uprisings in all the Italian duchies and Papal states. Together with the French, the Piedmontese troops won a signal victory against Austria at Solferino. The unification of Italy seemed to be imminent. But that

did not correspond to the interests of Louis Bonaparte, who promptly signed an armistice with the retreating Austrian armies, thus abandoning the Piedmontese and revolutionaries to their fate.

Finally, the Italian war of liberation was saved by the uprising in Sicily which greeted the landing of Garibaldi's expeditionary force of 1,000 red-shirted volunteers. After winning the battle for Sicily, Garibaldi's rebel force invaded Southern Italy and made a triumphal entry into Naples. Italian unity was thus brought about by revolutionary means from below, but the fruits were harvested elsewhere. The perpetual intriguer Cavour persuaded London and Paris that it would be better to accept the rule of a conservative Piedmont over a united Italy than to wait for all Italy to fall under the control of revolutionists and republicans. The army of Piedmontese dynastic reaction marched into Naples unopposed. Garibaldi, instead of fighting them, opened the gates and greeted the King of Piedmont, Victor Emmanuel, on October 26, hailing him as "King of Italy". Thus, the people of Italy only won one half a victory, instead of the complete triumph over the old order which they had paid for with their blood.

Instead of a republic, Italy got a constitutional monarchy. Instead of a democracy, it got a limited franchise which excluded 98 per cent of the people from voting. The Pope was allowed to continue his rule in the Papal states (a concession to Louis Bonaparte). Yet, despite this, the unification of Italy was a giant step forward. All Italy was united, except for Venice, which remained under Austrian control, and the Papal states. In 1866, Italy joined Prussia in its war against Austria and received Venice as a reward. Finally, after the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war (1871) the French troops were withdrawn from Rome. The entry of the Italian army into that city marked the final victory of Italian unification.

By the latter half of the 19th century, the national question in Western Europe had largely been resolved. With the unification of Germany and Italy, after 1871 the national question in Europe appeared to be confined to Eastern Europe and, in a particularly explosive sense, in the

Balkans where it was inextricably entangled with the territorial ambitions and rivalries of Russia, Turkey, Austro-Hungary and Germany, a fact that led inexorably to the First World War. During the first period—approximately from 1789 to 1871—the national question still played a relatively progressive role in Western Europe. Even the unification of Germany under the reactionary Junker Bismarck was considered as a progressive development by Marx and Engels, as we have seen. But already by the second half of the 19th century the development of the productive forces under capitalism was beginning to outgrow the narrow limitations of the nation state. This was already manifested in the development of imperialism and the irresistible tendency towards war between the major powers. The Balkan wars of 1912-13 marked the completion of the formation of the national states of south-eastern Europe. The First World War and the Treaty of Versailles (which was held, incidentally, under the slogan of the "right of nations to self-determination") finished the job by dismantling the Austro-Hungarian empire and granting independence to Poland.

Part Two: Marx and Engels and the national question

The national question has a very long history in the theoretical arsenal of Marxism. Already in the writings of Marx and Engels, we can find some very interesting and penetrating remarks on the national question. Lenin later based himself also on those writings in working out his own classical theory of nationalities. For example, Marx examined in great detail the question of Poland and Ireland which throughout the 19th century occupied the attention of the European

workers' movement. It is interesting to see that Marx, who approached the national question not as a shibboleth, but dialectically, changed his position in relation to both issues.

The difference between revolutionary dialectics and abstract thinking was strikingly shown in the debates that took place on the national question between Marx and Proudhon at the time of the First International. Proudhon, the French socialist and precursor of anarchism, denied the existence of the national question. Throughout the history of the movement there have always been sectarians who present an abstract conception of the class struggle. They do not proceed from the concrete reality of society as it exists, but they move in the lifeless abstractions of their own imaginary world. The Proudhonists on the General Council of the First International considered the struggles of the Poles, Italians and Irish for national emancipation to be unimportant. All that was necessary was a revolution in France, and all would be perfect; everyone must wait. But oppressed people cannot wait, and they will not wait. In 1866 Marx wrote to Engels denouncing the "Proudhonist clique" in Paris which "... declares nationalities to be an absurdity and attacks Bismarck and Garibaldi. As polemics against chauvinism their tactics are useful and explicable. But when the believers in Proudhon (my good friends here, Lafargue and Longuet also belong to them) think that all Europe can and should sit quietly and peacefully until the gentlemen in France abolish poverty and ignorance—they become ridiculous." (Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Letter of June 7th, 1866. Henceforth referred to as MESC.)

On the General Council of the First International or International Workingmen's Association (IWA), Marx had to fight on two fronts; on the one hand against the petit-bourgeois nationalists like Mazzini, and on the other hand against the semi-anarchist followers of Proudhon who denied the existence of the national question altogether. On June 20th, 1866, Marx wrote: "Yesterday there was a discussion in the International Council on the present war... The discussion wound up, as was to be expected, with 'the question of nationality' in general and the

attitude we take towards it... The representatives of 'Young France' (non-workers) came out with the announcement that all nationalities and even nations were antiquated prejudices. Proudhonised Stirnerism... The whole world waits until the French are ripe for a social revolution..." But although Marx and Engels gave due consideration to the national question, as against Proudhon, *they always considered it as subordinate to "the labour question"*—that is, they always considered it exclusively from the point of view of the working class and the socialist revolution.

The Polish question

Like Lenin, Marx had a very flexible position on the national question, which he always approached from the standpoint of the general interests of the proletariat and the international revolution. At one stage in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, Marx advocated not just the right of self-determination for Poland, but outright independence. This was in spite of the fact that the independence movement in Poland at the time was led by the reactionary Polish aristocrats. But the reason why Marx took that position was not some sentimental attachment to nationalism, and least of all because he saw the right of self-determination as some kind of universal panacea.

In one of his last works, *The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsarism*, Engels points out that the Polish people, by their heroic struggles against tsarist Russia, on several occasions saved the revolution in the rest of Europe, as in 1792-94 when Poland was defeated by Russia but saved the French revolution. But there was another side to the Polish question. "First of all, Poland, completely disorganised, a republic of nobles, founded upon the spoliation and oppression of the peasants, with a constitution that made all national action impossible, and thus made the country an easy prey for its neighbours. Since the beginning of the century it had existed only, as the Poles themselves said, through disorder...; the whole country was commonly occupied by foreign

troops, who used it as an eating and drinking house...in which they usually forgot to pay." (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 27, p. 18. Henceforth referred to as MECW.)

Throughout the 19th century, the question of Poland occupied a central place in European politics and also deeply affected the working class movement. In January 1863 the Poles rose in revolt. The insurrection spread all over Poland and led to the formation of a national government. But the leadership of the insurrection was in the hands of the lesser nobility who were incapable of arousing the masses to participate in the revolt. When power passed into the hands of the big landowners, the latter, hoping for diplomatic intervention from France and Britain, reached a deal with the tsar—which he promptly broke. The movement was crushed by the Russians. Naturally, the British and French did not lift a finger. But the Polish revolt aroused the sympathy and solidarity of the workers of Europe. The First International was set up in 1863 directly as a result of an international initiative to assist the revolutionary movement of the Poles. Engels pointed out that the only hope for the Polish insurrection was the working class of Europe: "If they hold out," he wrote to Marx on 11 June 1863, "they may yet be involved in a general European movement which will save them; on the other hand if things go badly Poland will be finished for ten years—an insurrection of this kind exhausts the fighting strength of the population for many years." (MECW, p. 150.)

Marx's attitude to the Polish question was determined by his general revolutionary strategy for world revolution. At that time tsarist Russia was the main enemy of the working class and democracy—a monstrous reactionary force in Europe, particularly in Germany. Since there was no working class in Russia at that time, there was no immediate possibility of revolution in Russia. As Lenin later expressed it, "Russia was still dormant and Poland was seething". (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, February-May, 1914, vol. 20, p. 108.) Therefore Marx supported Polish independence as a means of striking a blow against the main enemy, Russian tsarism. But by 1851 Marx had

drawn pessimistic conclusions about "knightly-indolent" Poland, that is to say, he was sceptical about the prospects of success for insurrections led by the Polish aristocracy.

From this alone it is absolutely clear that for both Marx and Lenin the demand for self-determination and the national question in general always occupied a subordinate position to the class struggle and the perspective of the proletarian revolution. It was never an absolute obligation for Marxists to support each and every movement for self-determination. The same Marx who originally supported Polish independence was radically opposed to the independence of the Czechs and was also opposed to the so-called liberation movements in the Balkans in the latter half of the 19th century. These two apparently contradictory positions were, in fact, motivated by the self-same revolutionary considerations. Marx understood that, whereas a victory of the Poles would have represented a blow against Russian tsarism which would have revolutionary implications, the national movement of the South Slavs was used by tsarism as a tool of its expansionist policy in the Balkans. As so often occurs in history, the struggles of small nations were used as small change for the manoeuvres by a reactionary big power. Whoever fails to grasp this side of the national question will inevitably fall into a reactionary trap.

At the end of his life, Engels, with extraordinary far-sightedness, predicted revolutionary upheavals in Russia: "And here we come to the very kernel of the matter. The internal development of Russia since 1856, furthered by the Government itself, has done its work. The social revolution has made great strides. Russia is daily becoming more and more occidentalised; modern manufactures, steam, railways, the transformation of all payments in kind into money payments, and with this the crumbling of the old foundations of society are developing with ever greater speed. But in the same degree is also evolving the incompatibility of despotic tsardom with the new society in course of formation. Opposition parties are forming—constitutional and revolutionary—which the Government can only master by means of increasing brutality. And Russian diplomacy sees with horror the day

on which the Russian people will demand to be heard, and when the settlement of their own internal affairs will leave them neither time nor wish to concern themselves with such puerilities as the conquest of Constantinople, of India and of the supremacy of the world. The revolution of 1848 that halted on the Polish frontier, is now knocking at the door of Russia and it now has, within, plenty of allies who can only wait the right moment to throw open that door to it." (MECW, vol. 27, p. 45.)

What extraordinary lines! As early as 1890—15 years before the first Russian revolution, and 27 years before October—Engels was predicting these great events, and also linking the fate of the national question in Europe to the Russian revolution. Events showed that Engels was right. As Lenin later explained, from the 1880s onward the slogan of Polish independence was not an appropriate slogan because of the development of the working class in Russia raised the prospect of revolution in Russia itself.

The Franco-Prussian war

Under the influence of Marx and Engels the First International took a principled internationalist stand on all the fundamental issues. The International's position was not merely theoretical but also practical. For example, during a strike in one country, members of the International would agitate and explain the issues in other countries to prevent the use of foreign scabs.

As we have already seen, one of the central problems facing the working class in the first half of the 19th century was the unification of Germany. Marx and Engels were compelled to give critical support to the unification of Germany, even though this objectively progressive act was carried out by reactionary means by Bismarck. But in no sense did this signify a capitulation to Bismarck or the abandonment of a class position. The First International initially regarded the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 as a defensive struggle of Germany. That was undoubtedly correct. The reactionary Bonapartist regime of Napoleon

III was intent upon blocking Germany's national unification by the use of force. But he miscalculated. The Prussian army cut through the demoralised French forces like a hot knife through butter.

The case of the Franco-Prussian war is a good example of Marx's flexible and revolutionary position on the national question. He gave critical support to Prussia in the first phase of the war, when it had a strictly defensive character. Here Marx's position was determined, not by superficial or sentimental considerations (he hated the reactionary Prussian Bismarck), but strictly from the standpoint of the interests of the proletariat and the international revolution. On the one hand, the victory of Prussia would bring about the unification of Germany—an historically progressive task. On the other hand, the defeat of France would mean the overthrow of the Bonapartist regime of Louis Bonaparte, opening up the perspective of revolutionary developments in France. It would also represent a blow against Russian tsarism which was basing itself on the Bonapartist government in Paris to keep Germany weak and divided. That is why Marx initially supported Prussia in its war with France, despite the fact that a Prussian victory would have the effect of strengthening Bismarck—at least for a time.

But this general statement does not exhaust the question of the Marxist attitude to war. At all times it is necessary to approach the national question from a class point of view. Even when a particular national struggle has a progressive content, it is always necessary for the proletariat to maintain its class independence from the bourgeoisie. In the course of the war Marx changed his position. Once Louis Bonaparte had been overthrown (in October 1870) and a republic had been declared in France, the character of the war on Prussia's part changed from a war of national liberation to an aggressive campaign directed against the people of France. It ceased to have a progressive character and Marx therefore denounced it. The seizure of Alsace-Lorraine by Prussia was likewise a thoroughly reactionary act which could not be justified by referring to the progressive task of uniting Germany. It merely served to stir up national hatreds between France and Germany and prepare the ground for the imperialist slaughter of 1914-18.

The defeat of the French army led immediately to revolution in France and the glorious episode of the Paris Commune. Marx had advised the workers of Paris to wait, but once they took action he immediately threw himself into the defence of the Paris Commune. At this point the nature of the war was transformed. The national question for Marx was always subordinate to the class struggle (the "labour question"). The correctness of this position is revealed in mirror-image by the conduct of the ruling class in every war. No matter how great the degree of national antagonism between the ruling class of warring states, they will always unite to defeat the workers. Thus, the Prussian generals stood aside while their enemies, the reactionary Versaillaise forces, attacked Paris and slaughtered the Communards.

Marx on Ireland

As with Poland, so on the question of Ireland Marx's position was also determined exclusively by revolutionary considerations. While naturally sympathising with the oppressed Irish people, Marx always subjected the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders to an implacable criticism. From the beginning, Marx and Engels explained that the national liberation of Ireland was inseparably linked to the question of social emancipation, particularly to a revolutionary solution to the land problem. This far-sighted analysis has a great bearing on the national liberation struggle in general, and not only in Ireland.

In a letter to Eduard Bernstein dated June 26 1882, Engels pointed out that the Irish movement consisted of two trends: the radical agrarian movement that erupted into spontaneous peasant direct action and found its political expression in the revolutionary democracy, and "the liberal-national opposition of the urban bourgeoisie". This is true of the peasant movement in all periods. It can only succeed to the degree that it finds a leadership in the urban centres. Under modern conditions, that means either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. But the bourgeoisie has demonstrated throughout history its total inability to solve any of

the fundamental problems posed by the bourgeois-democratic revolution—including the problem of national independence. Ireland is the classic example of this.

At the heart of the position of Marx and Engels was *the perspective of a voluntary federation of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales*. And this perspective was always linked to the perspective of the workers taking power. This, in turn, demanded the unconditional defence of the unity of the working class. Thus, Engels wrote in January 1848:

"The Irish people must fight strenuously, and *in close association with the English working classes and the Chartists*, in order to win the six points of the People's Charter—annual parliaments, universal suffrage, vote by ballot, abolition of the property qualification for members of parliament, payment of MPs, and the establishment of equal electoral districts. Only after these six points are won will the Repeal [of the Union] have any advantage for Ireland." (Engels, *Feargus O'Connor and the Irish People*, 9 January 1848, our emphasis.)

From the very first, Marx and Engels waged an implacable struggle against the Irish middle-class nationalist liberals like Daniel O'Connell, whom they denounced as a charlatan and a betrayer of the Irish people. Later on, they gave critical support, for a time, to the petty-bourgeois Fenians. This was natural and correct at a time when the workers' movement did not yet exist in Ireland which remained an overwhelmingly agrarian society until the early years of the 20th century. But Marx and Engels never acted as the cheer-leaders of the Fenians but always adopted an independent class position. They severely criticised the adventurist tactics of the Fenians, their terrorist tendencies, their national narrowness and their refusal to accept the need to link up with the English workers' movement. Despite the fact that the Fenians were the most advanced wing of the Irish revolutionary democratic movement, and even showed socialist inclinations, Marx and Engels did not have any illusions in them. On November 29th, 1867, Engels wrote to Marx:

"As regards the Fenians you are quite right. The beastliness of the English must not make us forget that the leaders of this sect are mostly asses and partly exploiters and we cannot in any way make ourselves responsible for the stupidities which occur in every conspiracy. And they are certain to happen."

Engels was soon proved right. Just two weeks later, on the 13th December 1867, a group of Fenians set off an explosion in London's Clerkenwell Prison in an unsuccessful attempt to free their imprisoned comrades. The explosion destroyed several neighbouring houses and wounded 120 people. Predictably, the incident unleashed a wave of anti-Irish feeling in the population. The following day Marx wrote indignantly to Engels:

"The last exploit of the Fenians in Clerkenwell was a very stupid thing. The London masses, who have shown great sympathy for Ireland, will be made wild by it and driven into the arms of the government party. One cannot expect the London proletariat to allow themselves to be blown up in honour of the Fenian emissaries. There is always a kind of fatality about such a secret, melodramatic sort of conspiracy."

A few days later, on December 19th, Engels replied as follows: "The stupid affair in Clerkenwell was obviously the work of a few specialised fanatics; it is the misfortune of all conspiracies that they lead to such stupidities, because 'after all, something must happen, after all something must be done'. In particular, there has been a lot of bluster in America about this blowing up and arson business, and then a few asses come and instigate such nonsense. Moreover, these cannibals are generally the greatest cowards, like this Allen, who seems to have already turned Queen's evidence, and then the idea of liberating Ireland by setting a London tailor's shop on fire!"

If Marx and Engels could write in such withering terms about the Fenians just imagine what they would have said about the terrorist tactics of the IRA over the past 30 years, compared to which the "Clerkenwell atrocity" was mere child's play. The most reactionary feature about this individual terrorism, which does not weaken the

bourgeois state, but only strengthens it, is that it serves to divide the working class and weaken it in the face of the exploiters. This was undoubtedly the weakest point of the Fenians which Engels criticised when he wrote scathingly that "to these gentry the whole labour movement is pure heresy and the Irish peasant must not on any account be allowed to know that the socialist workers are his sole allies in Europe." (MESC, *Engels to Marx*, 9 December 1869.)

Naturally, Marx and Engels defended the Fenian prisoners against ill-treatment by the English state. They always defended the rights of the Irish people to determine their own destiny. But they did this from a socialist and not a nationalist standpoint. As consistent revolutionaries and supporters of proletarian internationalism, Marx and Engels always stressed the link between the fate of Ireland and the perspective of proletarian revolution in England. In the 1840s and 1850s, Marx thought that Ireland could gain her independence only through the victory of the English working class. Later, in the 1860s, he changed his mind and adopted the standpoint that it was more probable that a victory in Ireland could be the spark that ignited the revolution in England. Even the most cursory reading of Marx's writings on the Irish question shows that his defence of Irish independence after 1860 was determined exclusively by the general interests of the proletarian revolution, above all in England, which he considered the key country for the success of the world revolution. In a confidential communication to members of the General Council, written in March 1870, Marx explains his views thus:

"Although revolutionary *initiative* will probably come from France, England alone can serve as the *lever* for a serious economic revolution. It is the only country where there are no more peasants and where land property is concentrated in a few hands. It is the only country where the *capitalist form*, i.e., combined labour on a large scale under capitalist masters, embraces virtually the whole of production. It is the only country *where the great majority of the population consists of wages labourers*. It is the only country where the class struggle and organisation of the working class by the Trades Unions have *acquired* a

certain degree of maturity and universality. It is the only country where, because of its domination on the world market, every revolution in economic matters must immediately affect the whole world. If landlordism and capitalism are classical examples in England, on the other hand, the *material conditions* for their *destruction* are the most mature here." (See *The Minutes of the General Council of the First International*, 1868-70.)

From this point of view, the Irish national question was only part of the broader picture of the perspective of world socialist revolution. It is impossible to understand Marx's attitude to Ireland outside this context. The reason why Marx favoured Irish independence after 1860 was that he had come to the conclusion that English landed interests, which had their most important base in Ireland, could most easily be defeated by a revolutionary movement based on the Irish peasantry in which the demand for national self-determination was inextricably linked to a radical solution of the land question. In the same memorandum, Marx explained: "If England is the bulwark of landlordism and European capitalism, the only point where one can hit official England really hard is *Ireland*."

"In the first place, Ireland is the *bulwark* of English landlordism. If it fell in Ireland it would fall in England. In Ireland this is a hundred times easier since *the economic struggle there is concentrated exclusively on landed property*, since this struggle is at the same time national, and since the people there are more revolutionary and exasperated than in England. Landlordism in Ireland is maintained solely by the *English army*. The moment the *forced union* between the two countries ends, a social revolution will immediately break out in Ireland, though in outmoded forms. English landlordism would not only lose a great source of wealth, but also its *greatest moral force*, i.e., that of *representing the domination of England over Ireland*. On the other hand, by maintaining the power of their landlords in Ireland, the English proletariat makes them invulnerable in England itself."

"In the second place, the English bourgeoisie has not only exploited the Irish poverty to keep down the working class in England by *forced immigration* of poor Irishmen, but it has also divided the proletariat into two hostile camps. The revolutionary fire of the Celtic worker does not go well with the nature of the Anglo-Saxon worker, solid, but slow. On the contrary, in all *the big industrial centres in England* there is profound antagonism between the Irish proletariat and the English proletariat. The average English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers wages and the *standard of life*. He feels national and religious antipathies for him. He regards him somewhat like the *poor whites* of the Southern States of North America regard their black slaves. This antagonism among the proletarians of England is artificially nourished and supported by the bourgeoisie. It knows that this scission is the true secret of maintaining its power." (Ibid.)

And Marx concludes: "The General Council's resolutions on the Irish amnesty serve only as an introduction to other resolutions which will confirm that, quite apart from international justice, it is a *precondition to the emancipation of the English working class* to transform the present *forced union* (i.e. the enslavement of Ireland) into *equal and free confederation*, if possible, into *complete separation* if need be." (Ibid.)

Note how carefully Marx chooses his words here, and how scrupulously he expresses the proletarian position on the national question. First, the Irish question cannot be seen in isolation from the perspective of the world socialist revolution, of which it is seen as an integral part. More particularly, it is seen as the starting-point for socialist revolution in England. And afterwards? Marx does not take it for granted that the national liberation struggle in Ireland will necessarily end in separation from Britain. He says that there are two possibilities: either an "*equal and free confederation*"—which he clearly regards as *preferable* ("if possible")—or "*complete separation*", which he considers as possible but not the most desirable outcome. Which of the two variants would

come into being would clearly depend, above all, on the conduct and attitude of the English proletariat and the perspective of a victorious socialist revolution in England itself.

Thus, the standpoint of Marx was always that of the proletarian revolution and internationalism. This, and this alone, was what determined his attitude to the Irish question, and every other manifestation of the national question. For Marx and Engels, the "*labour question*" was always the central one. It would never have occurred to them to reduce their propaganda and agitation on the Irish question to a simple, one-line slogan like "troops out!" or to act as the unpaid advisers to the nationalists. On the contrary, they waged a stubborn struggle against the harmful demagoguery of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois Irish nationalists, and for the revolutionary unity of the Irish and English working class.

History has shown that Marx and Engels were correct in their appraisal of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalists in Ireland. In 1922, the Irish nationalist bourgeoisie betrayed the national liberation struggle by agreeing to the partition between North and South. Ever since then the petty bourgeois nationalists have demonstrated their utter inability to solve the "border question". The tactic of individual terrorism, so sharply criticised by Marx and Engels, has been shown to be both counter-productive and impotent. After 30 years of so-called "armed struggle" in Northern Ireland, the unification of Ireland is further away than ever. The only way to solve what is left of the national question in Ireland is on the basis of a class, socialist and internationalist policy—the policy of Marx, Lenin and that great proletarian revolutionary and martyr, James Connolly.

Only the working class can solve the problem by uniting around a class programme to conduct an implacable struggle against the bourgeoisie in London and Dublin. The prior condition for success is the unity of the working class. This can never be achieved on nationalist lines. Petty bourgeois nationalism has done untold damage to the cause of workers' unity in Northern Ireland. The wounds can, and must, be healed. But

this can only be done on the basis of a clean break with nationalism and the adoption of class policies, by a revival of the spirit and ideas of Larkin and Connolly. *The national question in Ireland will be solved through the socialist transformation of society, or it will not be solved at all.*

The Second International

Launched in 1889 the Socialist International, unlike the First International, was composed of mass organisations in the form of the mass Social Democratic parties and the trade unions. The misfortune of the Second International was to be born in a period of prolonged capitalist upswing. In the period 1870-1900 world oil output rose two and a half times. The railways expanded two and a half times. Germany and the United States began to challenge the hegemony of Great Britain. A scramble began to divide the world into spheres of influence and colonies. The rapid growth of industry also meant a parallel growth of the working class and its organisations in the developed capitalist countries. In the last three decades of the 19th century the working class in the United States and Russia grew by more than three-fold. In Britain the trade unions grew by four times between 1876 and 1900. In Germany trade union membership grew from tens of thousands to millions. And parallel to this there was a steady growth in the membership, votes and influence of the mass Social Democratic Parties.

But from the outset, although in theory it stood for Marxism, the new International lacked the theoretical clarity that were guaranteed by the presence of Marx and Engels. A clear case of this was its attitude to the national question. The Second International did not really understand the national question, which received an unsatisfactory treatment at its congresses. In 1896 the London congress of the International passed the following resolution:

"The congress declares in favour of the full autonomy for all nationalities and its sympathy with the workers of any country at present suffering under the yoke of military, national or other despotisms; and calls upon the workers of all such countries to fall into

line, side by side with the class-conscious workers of the world, to organise for the overthrow of international capitalism and the establishment of international social-democracy." (Quoted in E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 423.)

However, the position of the Second International on the colonial question was ambiguous and vague. The Left tended to an anti-colonialist position, but there were those who were prepared to justify colonialism on the grounds of its alleged "civilising mission". Thus in the debates on the colonial question in the Amsterdam congress of 1904, the Dutch delegate van Kol openly defended colonialism. He moved a resolution that stated:

"The new needs which will make themselves felt after the victory of the working class and its economic emancipation will make the possession of colonies necessary, even under the future socialist system of government." And he asked the congress: "Can we abandon half the globe to the caprice of peoples still in their infancy, who leave the enormous wealth of the subsoil undeveloped and the most fertile parts of our planet uncultivated?" (*Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary Party*, p. 5.)

The congress gave an enthusiastic welcome to Dadabhai Naoroji, founder and president of the Indian National Congress, but in its resolution on India, while calling for self-rule, specified that India would remain under British sovereignty. It neither endorsed nor rejected the views of van Kol. In the debate on immigration, a racist resolution was moved by the American Hillquit and supported by the Austrians and the Dutch. But it caused such a storm of protest that it had to be withdrawn. Nevertheless, the fact that such a resolution could be moved in an International congress was a symptom of the pressure of bourgeois and nationalist ideas on the Socialist Parties.

The Russian revolution of 1905 gave a mighty impulse to the colonial revolution, inspiring the masses to act in defence of their national aspirations in Persia, Turkey, Egypt and India. This served to sharpen the differences in the ranks of the Socialist International on the colonial

and national question. At the Stuttgart congress of 1907, where Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg moved their famous amendments on war, there was a sharp struggle between the Lefts (in reality centrists) represented by Lebedour and the Right, led by the revisionist Eduard Bernstein, on the colonial question. The Dutch delegates, typical petty bourgeois imperialists, were again the most outspoken defenders of colonialism. The Left was in a minority in opposing it. In the course of a heated debate, Bernstein made the following comments:

"We must get away from the utopian notion of simply abandoning the colonies. The ultimate consequences of such a view would be to give the United States back to the Indians (*Commotion*). The colonies are there; we must come to terms with that. Socialists too should acknowledge the need for civilised peoples to act somewhat like the guardians of the uncivilised." (Ibid., p 10.)

Rebutting the arguments about the "civilising" role of colonialism, the Polish delegate Karski (Julian Marchlewski) replied: "David has asserted the right of one nation to exercise tutelage over another. But we Poles know the real meaning of this tutelage, since both the Russian tsar and the Prussian government have acted as our guardians ("Very good!")... David quotes Marx to support his view that every nation must go through capitalism, but he is not right to do so here. What Marx said was that countries that had already begun capitalist development would have to continue the process through to completion. But he never said that this was an absolute precondition for all nations...

"We socialists understand that there are other civilisations besides simply that of capitalist Europe. We have absolutely no grounds to be conceited about our so-called civilisation, nor to impose it on the Asian peoples with their ancient civilisation. ("Bravo!") David thinks that the colonies would sink back into barbarism if left to themselves. In India's case that hardly seems likely. Rather I picture that if independent, India would continue to profit from the influence of European civilisation in its future development and it would grow in this way to its fullest potential." (Ibid., p. 11.)

In the end, the resolution on India was not put to the vote.

Although the leaders of the International tried to paper over the cracks by all kinds of diplomacy, the end result of this was the catastrophe of August 1914, when every single one of the parties of the Second International—with the exception of the Russians and the Serbs—betrayed the principles of internationalism and supported the imperialist war. The absence of a real revolutionary internationalist policy was starkly exposed in the Summer of 1914 when the Second International collapsed along the lines of social-chauvinism.

'National-cultural autonomy'

A peculiar variant of the national question in the Second International was put forward by the Austrian Social Democrats before the First World War. They defended the theory of so-called national-cultural autonomy. The same position was adopted in Russia by the Jewish Bund. At the Brno Conference of the Austrian Social Democrats (1899) the idea of national-cultural autonomy defended by the South Slavs was rejected. Instead, the Conference adopted the slogan of *territorial* autonomy, which, while insufficient, was certainly better. Later, under the influence of the centrist theoretician Otto Bauer and his comrade Karl Renner (who wrote under the pseudonym of Rudolf Springer), the Party changed its position and adopted the line of national-cultural autonomy.

Rejecting the link between nation and territory, Bauer defined a nation as "a relative community of character". (Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalfrage and die Sozialdemokratie*, Vienna 1924, p. 2.) But what is national character? Bauer defines it as "the sum total of characteristics which distinguish the people of one nationality from the people of another nationality—the complex and spiritual characteristics which distinguish one nation from another." (Ibid., p. 6.) The threadbare nature of this definition is glaring. It is a pure tautology: a national character is what makes one nation different from another! And what makes one nation different from another? "The character of a people is determined by nothing so much as by their fate... A nation is nothing but a community

of fate [determined] by the conditions under which people produce their means of subsistence and distribute the products of their labour." (Ibid., p. 24.)

A nation, according to Bauer, is thus "*the aggregate of people bound into a community of character by a community of fate*". (Ibid., p. 135.) Renner defined it as follows: "A nation is a union of similarly thinking and similarly speaking persons, [it is] a cultural community of modern people no longer tied to the soil." (R. Springer, *Das Nationale Problem*, Leipzig-Vienna, 1902, p. 35.) This approach to the national question was not scientific, but subjective and "psychological"—not to say, mystical. It was an unsuccessful and opportunist attempt to seek a solution for the national question in the Austro-Hungarian empire by making concessions to bourgeois nationalism. By contrast, Marxism approaches the national question from a historical-economic point of view.

In contrast to the Bolsheviks, who sought a solution to the national problem through the revolutionary overthrow of tsarism, the Austrian Social Democrats approached the question in the spirit of petty reforms and gradualism. Bauer wrote: "We therefore first assume that the Austrian nation will remain in the same political union in which they exist together at the same time, and inquire how the nations within this union will arrange their relations among themselves and to the state." (Quoted in Stalin, *The National Question and Marxism*, p. 23.)

Once the link between nation and territory is broken, the demand was put forward of grouping the members of different nationalities who live in different areas into a general inter-class national union. The members of different national groups would come together in conferences and vote to decide which nationality they belonged to. Germans, Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, etc., would then vote for their own National Council—a "cultural parliament of the nation", as Bauer styled it. By such means the Austrian Social Democrats tried to avoid an open clash with the Hapsburg state and reduced the national question to a purely cultural-linguistic affair. Bauer went so far as to assert that

local autonomy for the nationalities would be a stepping-stone to socialism which would "divide humanity into nationally delimited communities" and "present a chequered picture of national unions of persons and corporations".

This philosophy is entirely at variance with the class standpoint and internationalist principles of Marxism. It represents petty bourgeois nationalism disguised with "socialist" phrases. For this reason Lenin was scathing about it. He was particularly hostile to the idea of separate schools for different nationalities. On this, Lenin wrote: "'Cultural-national autonomy' implies precisely the most refined and, therefore, the most harmful nationalism, it implies the corruption of the workers by means of the slogan of national culture and the propaganda of the profoundly harmful and even anti-democratic division of the schools by nationalities. In short, this programme undoubtedly contradicts the internationalism of the proletariat and is in accordance only with the ideals of the nationalist petty bourgeoisie." (LCW, *The National Programme of the RSDLP*, 15 December 1913, vol. 19.)

Nowhere is the harmful effect of this petty-bourgeois theory clearer than in the field of education. Thus, Lenin was opposed to any privileged status for language, but, in opposition to Otto Bauer and the advocates of "national-cultural autonomy", *vehemently opposed to setting up separate schools for the children of different nationalities*: "The practical execution of the plan for the 'extraterritorial' (outside of, unconnected with, the territory on which a given nation lives), or 'cultural-national' autonomy, would mean only one thing: *the splitting of educational affairs according to nationality*, i.e., the introduction of national curiae into school affairs. It is sufficient to envisage clearly the real substance of the celebrated Bund plan in order to understand its utterly reactionary character, even from the standpoint of democracy, let alone that of the proletarian class struggle for socialism." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December, 1913, vol. 20.)

Here we see the fundamental difference between Leninism and petty bourgeois nationalism. Marxists will fight against any form of national oppression, including linguistic oppression. It is impermissible that a man or woman be deprived of the right to speak his or her language, to be taught in it, to use it in a court of law or any other official function. In general, there is no particular reason for the existence of an "official" language, or for any special privileges to be given to one language over another. But to separate children on a national, linguistic or religious basis, is utterly reactionary and retrograde. The segregation of schools played a reactionary role in South Africa and the USA. And the separation of Catholic and Protestant children in Northern Ireland in so-called religious schools plays a no less pernicious role. Religion has no place in the educational system and should be radically separated from it. If the churches wish to teach their doctrines, they must do it in their own time and with their own funds, raised from their congregation, not the state. And while schools must cater for the needs of different linguistic groups, and funds must be found for this purpose, it is entirely unacceptable to separate children on national-linguistic lines and thus create the basis for prejudice and conflicts in later life.

The hostility towards French among the Flemish population in Belgium is the product of generations of discrimination of the Flemish language and the forcible imposition of French. However, there can be all sorts of cross-currents on this question. In South Africa the teaching of native languages in the schools (instead of English) was a measure of national oppression. In the same way the representatives of the non-Russian nationalities themselves strove to teach their children Russian. For example, in the Armenian church schools, the children were taught Russian, although it was not obligatory. What the Bolsheviks opposed was discrimination against any language, to forcible assimilation and the forcible imposition of a dominant language and culture. But there is no reason why any language should have a monopoly. In Switzerland there are not two, but three official languages. Now with modern technology, there is no reason why people cannot receive education and

communicate in parliament or in a court of law in any language they choose. But what is not acceptable is the introduction of nationalist or religious poison into the schools:

"The Marxists, dear nationalist-socialists, have a *general* school programme which demands, for example, absolutely secular schools. From the point of view of the Marxists, a departure from this general programme is never permissible in a democratic state anywhere (and the question of introducing any 'local' subjects, languages, and so forth into it, is determined by a decision of the local inhabitants). From the principle that education 'should be withdrawn from the purview of the state' and transferred to the nations, however, it follows that we the workers must allow the 'nations' in our democratic state to spend the peoples's money on clerical schools! Without being aware of it, Mr. Liebmann has clearly exposed the reactionary nature of 'cultural-national autonomy!'" (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

On this, as on every other aspect of the national question, while resolutely combating *all* manifestations of oppression and discrimination without exception, Marxists take a class position. Thus, in Belgium, where the Flemish and Walloon nationalists have tried—unfortunately with some success—to divide Belgian society and the Labour Movement on national lines using the language question, the Belgian Marxists worked out transitional demands on the language issue. Where, for example, a worker was compelled to learn Flemish or French by the employers, they demanded that they be given time off from work on full pay and courses paid for by the bosses under the control of the workers' organisations, and moreover, should be entitled to extra payment for learning new skills.

From all this it is clear that Lenin always insisted on the need to approach the national question strictly from a class point of view. "The slogan of workers' democracy," wrote Lenin, "is not 'national culture',

but the international culture of democracy and of the world working class movement." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

And again: "The national programme of workers' democracy is: absolutely no privileges for any one nation or for any one language; the settlement of the question of the political self-determination of nations, i.e., their state secession in an absolutely free and democratic way; the passing of a law covering the whole country and proclaiming unlawful and null and void every measure...which in any way grants privilege to any one nation, which violates the equality of nations or the rights of a national minority—and by virtue of which law every citizen of the state will have the right to demand the repeal of such a measure as unconstitutional and the criminal prosecution of those who proceed to carry it out." (Ibid.)

The divisive nature of "cultural-national autonomy" was clearly shown by its harmful effects on workers' unity in Austria itself. Following the Wimberg Congress, the Austrian Social Democratic Party began to break up into national parties. Instead of one united workers' party in which all the nationalities were present, six separate parties were formed—German, Czech, Polish, Ruthenian, Italian and Yugoslav. This encouraged the spread of chauvinist sentiment and national antagonisms within the workers' movement, with negative results: the Czech Party would have nothing to do with the German Party, and so on.

As always happens, the so-called practical policies of reformism achieved the opposite results to those intended. The programme of national-cultural autonomy was intended to prevent the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire, but had precisely the opposite effect. The overthrow of the Hapsburgs could have led to a proletarian revolution, as did the February revolution in Russia. But the failure of the working class to take power led directly to the disintegration of Austro-Hungary on national lines, whereas Lenin's policy of the right of nations to self-determination had the effect of uniting the workers and peasants of

most of the oppressed nations, and thus creating the conditions for a soviet federation. This, not separatism, was the position of Bolshevism. It was brilliantly vindicated after 1917.

Part Three: Lenin on the national question

"Whereas in nationally homogeneous states the bourgeois revolutionaries developed powerful centripetal tendencies, rallying to the idea of overcoming particularism, as in France, or overcoming national disunion, as in Italy and Germany—in nationally heterogeneous states on the contrary, such as Turkey, Russia, and Austro-Hungary, the belated bourgeois revolution released centrifugal forces." (L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 890.)

Pre-revolutionary Russia was an extremely backward, semi-feudal country, heavily dependent on foreign imperialism. Thus, it was very similar to many Third World countries today. Moreover, the problem of nationalities occupied a central place in Russian political life. Although tsarist Russia liked to disguise its expansionist policy under the cloak of protecting small oppressed nations on the Balkans, it was a prison-house of the nationalities. Forty three per cent of the population of tsarist Russia consisted of the dominant Great Russian nationality, whereas 57 per cent were made up of Ukrainians, Georgians, Poles, Finns and other oppressed nationalities.

Seventy million Great Russians dominated about ninety million non-Russians and all were dominated and oppressed by the bureaucratic-caste tsarist state. To make matters worse, at least in Russia's western territories, the economic and cultural level of the subjugated peoples was generally higher than in Russia proper. Whereas it can be argued

that Russia's eastward expansion into the Caucasus and particularly Central Asia played a certain progressive role, this was emphatically not the case in Poland, Finland and the Baltic states. As old Engels commented: "Finland is Finnish and Swedish, Bessarabia Roumanian, the kingdom of Poland Polish. Here there is no longer any question of the union of scattered and kindred races, all bearing the name of Russians; here we see nothing but barefaced conquest of alien territory by brute force, nothing but simple theft." (MECW, vol. 27, p. 28.)

The Bolshevik party from the very beginning had a scrupulous position on the national question. This was essential in order to win over the masses, particularly the peasantry. The national question normally affects not so much the working class, but the mass of the petty bourgeoisie, especially the peasantry, and historically speaking the national question and the agrarian question were linked very closely. Sometimes even quite educated Marxists fail to grasp this question. In order to gain the ear of the petty bourgeois masses and win them for the cause of the revolution, the use of democratic and other partial demands, such as the demand for the right of self-determination, was absolutely necessary. But the use of such slogans only made sense as part of the struggle for the proletariat and its party to win the leadership of the masses in direct struggle against the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties and trends. The prior condition for the success of the revolutionary wing is therefore an implacable struggle against the nationalist petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. And in order to conduct such a struggle, a clear position on the national question is necessary.

Like Lenin, Trotsky also wrote extensively on the national question. Of particular interest is the marvellous chapter on the national question in *The History of the Russian Revolution* which, better than anything else, sums up the position of the Bolshevik Party on this subject. But it was above all Lenin who developed and extended the Marxist position on the national question. Summing up the Bolshevik position, Trotsky wrote:

"Lenin early learned the inevitability of this development of centrifugal national movements in Russia, and for many years stubbornly fought—most particularly against Rosa Luxemburg—for that famous paragraph 9 of the old party programme which formulated the right of nations to self-determination—that is, to complete separation as states. In this the Bolshevik Party did not by any means undertake an evangel of separation. It merely assumed an obligation to struggle implacably against every form of national oppression, including the forcible retention of this or that nationality between the boundaries of the general state. Only in this way could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities.

"But that was only one side of the matter. The policy of Bolshevism in the national sphere had also another side, apparently contradictory to the first but in reality supplementing it. Within the framework of the party, and of the workers' organisations in general, Bolshevism insisted upon a rigid centralism, implacably warring against every taint of nationalism which might set the workers one against the other or disunite them. While flatly refusing to the bourgeois states the right to impose compulsory citizenship, or even a state language, upon a national minority, Bolshevism at the same time made it a verily sacred task to unite as closely as possible, by means of voluntary class discipline, the workers of different nationalities. Thus it flatly rejected the national-federation principle in building the party. A revolutionary organisation is not the prototype of the future state, but merely the instrument for its creation. An instrument ought to be adapted to fashioning the product; it ought not to include the product. Thus a centralised organisation can guarantee the success of a revolutionary struggle—even when the task is to destroy the centralised oppression of nationalities." (Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 890-1.)

What is a nation?

In the period before the First World War Lenin devoted a great deal of time to the national question, and in particular to answering the revisionist theories of Otto Bauer. In the period 1908-10, Lenin was in exile and almost entirely isolated. Given the lack of contact with Russia and the scarcity of collaborators, he greeted the arrival of Stalin, a young Georgian virtually unknown to him, with enthusiasm. As usual, Lenin spent a lot of time encouraging the newcomer, as he always did with young comrades. As an additional bonus, Stalin was a Georgian, that is a member of an oppressed nationality. Lenin seized the opportunity to lecture his pupil—who proved extremely diligent—on the fundamental lines of his policy on the national question. The result was a lengthy article which appeared at the end of 1912 in the pages of the magazine *Prosveshcheniye* ("Enlightenment") under the title *The National Question and Marxism*.

In 1914 the article appeared in the form of a pamphlet entitled *The National Question and Marxism*. It was published in volume two of Stalin's works. For years it was regarded as the standard Party work on the national question, and in fact, in spite of a somewhat formalistic presentation, it is not a bad article. This, however, was not a result of Stalin's theoretical genius. In fact, this article was not Stalin's work at all. As E.H. Carr points out: "External and internal evidence shows it to have been written under Lenin's inspiration." (E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol., 1, pp. 425-6.) The ideas in this article are entirely those of Lenin.

The introduction to this article, written at the height of the anti-Semitic agitation around the notorious Belyss case, warns of "the wave of nationalism swept onward with increasing force and threatening to engulf the working-class masses". And it adds: "These crucial times laid a high mission upon the Social-Democratic Party—to resist nationalism and to protect the masses from the general 'epidemic'. For the Social Democrats, and they alone could do this, by bringing against nationalism the tried weapon of internationalism, the unity and indivisibility of the class struggle." (J.V. Stalin, *Marxism on the National and Colonial Question*, p. 8.)

The central issue was how a nation could be defined. This question is not at all as easy as it might appear. It is rather like defining time. Saint Augustine said that he knew what time was, but if anyone asked him to define it, he was unable to do so. It is just the same with a nation. Everyone thinks they know what it is, but if asked to define it, they would soon find themselves in difficulties. The pamphlet published with Stalin's signature attempts to provide such a definition. The result is probably the nearest one can get to a satisfactory formulation. As against Bauer's subjective definition, a nation is here defined in the scientific Marxist sense: "*A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.*" (Ibid.)

Thus, a nation must have a common language and territory, a shared history and culture, and also be united by powerful economic ties. So much for the general definition, which is undoubtedly correct and in any case infinitely superior to the "psychological" approach of Otto Bauer and the supporters of "national-cultural autonomy".

Nevertheless, as with all general definitions, this by no means exhausts the question. In real life one always finds concrete variants which may contradict the definition in one or more particulars. The question of what is a nation is notoriously slippery and has led more than one analysis to grief.

Take language, for instance. The importance of language for a nation is clear. It seems to be the most evident distinguishing mark of nationality. In his *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky expresses the importance of language thus: "Language," Trotsky wrote, "is a most important instrument of human communication, and consequently of industry. It becomes national together with the triumph of commodity exchange which integrates nations. Upon this foundation the national state is erected as the most convenient, profitable and normal arena for the play of capitalist relations." (Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 889.)

Yet there can be exceptions even to this most important rule. Few people, for example, would deny that the Swiss are a nation. The Swiss national identity has been forged during centuries of struggle to retain an individual national identity, mainly against Austria. Yet the Swiss do not have a common language, as Lenin himself points out:

"In Switzerland there are three state languages, but laws that are submitted to a referendum are printed in five languages, that is to say, in two 'Romance' dialects in addition to the three state languages. According to the 1900 census, these two dialects are spoken by 38,651 out of the 3,315,443 inhabitants of Switzerland, i.e., by a little over one per cent. In the army, officers and non-commissioned officers 'are allowed the widest freedom to speak to their men in their native language'. In the cantons of Graubünden and Wallis (each with a population of a little over a hundred thousand) both dialects enjoy complete equality." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

The key to the understanding of the question lies in the initial proposition that a nation is a "historically evolved" entity. Dialectics does not proceed from abstract formal definitions but from a concrete appraisal of living processes, of things as they develop, change and evolve. A nation is not something fixed and static. It can and does change and evolve. Nations can be created where none existed before. This is precisely how the modern nation states came into being. This was the case in France, Italy and Germany. Later, the Indian national consciousness was created—inadvertently, of course—by British imperialism. Now, with the decay of capitalism and the inability of the Indian bourgeoisie to offer a way out, there are clear signs of the weakening and fragmentation of this national consciousness which poses immense dangers for the future of India.

Historically, nations can be formed out of the available raw material under conditions of wars, invasions and revolutions which dissolve old connections and frontiers and create new ones. This historical re-shuffling can turn things into their opposite. What was yesterday an

oppressed nation or an enslaved colony can become transformed into the most monstrously oppressive and imperialist state. The best example is the USA itself, which was originally a colony of Britain and is now the mightiest and most reactionary imperialist state in the world. Similarly, bourgeois states that have only recently freed themselves from foreign domination and remain in a subordinate position vis-a-vis the big imperialist powers on a world scale nevertheless play the role of local imperialist powers, oppressing and exploiting weaker countries near to them. Thus, India plays an imperialist role in relation to Nepal, Assam and Kashmir. Tsarist Russia was one of the main imperialist powers before 1917, although it did not export capital and was a backward, semi-feudal country that stood in a semi-colonial relation to Britain, France and the other developed capitalist countries.

A class question

The national question, like all other social questions, is at bottom a class issue. This was Lenin's standpoint—and the standpoint of any genuine Marxist. In his work *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, Lenin explains this elementary proposition of Marxism with admirable clarity:

"Every national culture contains elements, even if not developed, of democratic and socialist culture, for in every nation there are toiling and exploited masses, whose living conditions inevitably give rise to the ideology of democracy and socialism. But every nation also has a bourgeois culture (and most nations also have a Black Hundred and clerical culture, too) that takes the form, not merely of "elements", but of the dominant culture. Therefore, the general 'national culture' is the culture of the landed proprietors, the clergy and the bourgeoisie." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

It is ABC for a Marxist that the ruling ideas of *every* nation are the ideas of the ruling class. Lenin insists that the acceptance of a "national culture" is neither more nor less than the acceptance of the domination of the bourgeoisie of every nation. The national question is a class

question. Marxists must not gloss over the class contradictions, but on the contrary, bring them to the fore. This is no less obligatory in the case of an oppressed nationality as in that of an oppressor nation. As Lenin explains in *Critical Remarks on the National Question* "On the boards of the joint-stock companies capitalists of different nations sit together, completely amalgamated with each other. In factories workers of different nations work side by side. *On all really serious and profound political issues sides are taken according to classes and not according to nations.*" (Ibid.)

In another work he writes: "The interests of the working class and of its struggle against capitalism demand complete solidarity and the closest unity of the workers of all nations; they demand resistance to the nationalist policy of the bourgeoisie of every nationality."

And again: "It makes no difference to the hired hand whether he is exploited chiefly by the Great Russian bourgeoisie, or by the Polish bourgeoisie rather than the Jewish bourgeoisie, etc. The hired worker who has come to understand his class interests is equally indifferent to the state privileges of the Great Russian capitalists and to the promises of the Polish or Ukrainian capitalists to set up an earthly paradise when they obtain state privileges...

"In any case the hired worker will be an object of exploitation. Any successful struggle against exploitation requires that the proletariat be free of nationalism, and be absolutely neutral, so to speak, in the fight for supremacy that is going on among the bourgeoisie of the various nations. If the proletariat of any one nation gives the slightest support to the privileges of 'its' national bourgeoisie, this will inevitably rouse distrust among the proletariat of the other nations; it will weaken the international class solidarity of the workers and divide them, to the delight of the bourgeoisie. And repudiation of the right of self-determination, or secession, inevitably means, in practice, support of the dominant nation." (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, February-May 1914, vol. 20.)

At all times the main element in Lenin's argument was the need to unite the workers and the oppressed masses against the bourgeoisie. Lenin points out that: "The national culture of the bourgeoisie is a fact (and, I repeat, the bourgeoisie everywhere enters into deals with the landed proprietors and the clergy). Bellicose bourgeois nationalism, which stultifies, fools and disunites the workers in order that the bourgeoisie may lead them by the halter—such is the fundamental fact of the present day.

"Whoever wants to serve the proletariat must unite the workers of all nations and fight bourgeois nationalism, 'home' and foreign, unswervingly." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

On this question Lenin was always implacable. Similar quotes could be reproduced from dozens of his articles and speeches.

Class independence

National demands have a democratic, not a socialist, character. National oppression does not only affect the working class, although the workers suffer most from it, as from all other kinds of oppression. The national question affects the whole people the whole of the masses and particularly the petty bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, as we have shown, Lenin always approached this from a class point of view, and we approach it in exactly the same way.

What strikes one forcibly when reading Lenin's writings is how profoundly and clearly the national question is expressed by Lenin. Of course, this question had a long history in the Russian workers' movement, starting with the debates with the Jewish Bund at the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903. How did Lenin deal with the national question? In effect, he held a *negative* position on this question. The Russian Bolsheviks, he explained a hundred times, were *against* all forms of national oppression. It is not a question of what you are *for* but what you are *against*. It is sufficient that we say what we are opposed to. We are

opposed to all forms of national, linguistic and racial oppression and we will fight against all forms of national oppression. And that is quite sufficient for a proletarian tendency which wishes to stand for a policy of consistent democracy, while maintaining its class independence.

What Lenin never said is that Marxists must support the national bourgeoisie or the nationalist petty bourgeoisie. *On the contrary, the fundamental premise of Lenin's position on the national question was of absolute class independence.* The first principle of Leninism was always the need to fight against the bourgeoisie—the bourgeoisie of both the oppressor and of the oppressed nations. In all of Lenin's writings on the national question there is an implacable criticism not just of the nationalist bourgeoisie, but that of the nationalist petty bourgeoisie also. This is no accident. The whole idea of Lenin was that the working class must put itself at the head of the nation in order to lead the masses to the revolutionary transformation of society. Thus in *Critical Remarks on the National Question* he writes:

"The awakening of the masses from feudal slumber, their struggle against all national oppression, for the sovereignty of the people and the sovereignty of nations is progressive. Hence, it is the *bounded* duty of a Marxist to uphold the most resolute and consistent democracy on all points of the national question. *The task is mainly a negative one. But the proletariat cannot go beyond this in supporting nationalism, for beyond it begins the 'positive' activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism.*" (Our emphasis.)

A little later he adds, for the sake of greater emphasis: "Fight against all national oppression—yes, certainly. Fight *for* any kind of national development, for 'national culture' in general—certainly not." (Ibid.)

Again, in *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, Lenin wrote: "That is why the proletariat confines itself, so to speak, to the negative demand for recognition of the right to self-determination, without giving any guarantees to any nation, and without undertaking to give *anything at the expense* of another nation." (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, February-May 1914, vol. 20.)

In another work Lenin writes of the harmful influence of nationalism in the workers' movement: "The conclusion is that *all* liberal-bourgeois nationalism causes the greatest corruption among the workers and does immense harm to the cause of freedom and the proletarian class struggle. It is all the more dangerous because the bourgeois (and bourgeois-serf-owning) tendency is hidden by the 'national culture' slogan. In the name of national culture—Great Russian, Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian, and others—the Black Hundreds reactionaries and clericals, and also the bourgeoisie of all nations, do their dirty work.

"Such are the facts of present-day national life, if it is examined from the standpoint of the class struggle, and if the slogans are tested according to the interests and policies of classes and not from the viewpoint of vapid 'general principles', declamations and phrases." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

Is this not clear? The workers are duty bound to oppose all forms of national discrimination and oppression. But they are also duty bound to *refuse to support nationalism in any shape or form*. What a contrast with those self-styled Marxists who lose no opportunity to act as flag wavers for the IRA, ETA, or the KLA, in the mistaken belief that they are pursuing a Leninist policy! To blur the line of division between Marxism and nationalism is a violation of everything Lenin ever stood for.

In order to combat the pernicious illusions peddled by the nationalists, Lenin warned that: "The proletariat cannot support any consolidation of nationalism, on the contrary, it supports everything that helps to obliterate national distinctions and remove national barriers, supports everything that makes the ties between nationalities closer and closer or leads to the amalgamation of nations. To act differently means taking the side of reactionary nationalist philistinism." (Ibid.)

This is the real position of Leninism in relation to nationalism. How different from the vulgar distortion that seeks to reduce everything to one "simple" slogan "for self-determination"! That is precisely to fall

into reactionary nationalist philistinism and abandon the Marxist—that is to say, the proletarian—standpoint. Far from glorifying nationalism and the creation of new barriers through separatism, Lenin, like Marx, had a very poor opinion of "small nation narrow-mindedness". Both were always in favour of the largest possible states—all other considerations being equal. He stood for the abolition of frontiers, not the erection of new ones. He stood for the mingling of populations and even assimilation (as long as it was voluntary) and not at all the glorification of the language and culture of one nation as opposed to another. Let him speak for himself:

"The proletariat, however, not only does not undertake to uphold the national development of every nation, but, on the contrary, warns the masses against such illusions, upholds the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse and welcomes every kind of assimilation except forcible assimilation, or such that is built on privilege."

And again: "*Bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism—such are the two irreconcilably hostile slogans that correspond to the two great class camps throughout the capitalist world and express two policies (more than that—two world outlooks) in the national question.*" (Ibid., our emphasis.)

There is no doubt whatever about this. Bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism are *two utterly incompatible policies, reflecting the incompatible world outlook of two hostile classes*. It is useless to twist and turn and try to disguise this obvious truth. Lenin stood firmly for proletarian internationalism and against nationalism in whatever form it masqueraded under. The fact that he opposed all forms of national oppression, and showed sympathy for oppressed peoples, should not be used to disguise this indisputable fact. *Lenin was the enemy of nationalism.*

Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg

Like Marx, Lenin had to wage a struggle on the national question on two fronts. It was necessary to fight against the influence of opportunist and revisionist ideas like those of Otto Bauer, which reflected the pressure of the nationalist bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie on the proletarian vanguard. But at the same time it was necessary to fight against those who denied the importance of the national question. Lenin conducted a sharp polemic against Rosa Luxemburg for many years on this question, in order to get the Party to adopt the correct position. Later, during the First World War he had to wage a struggle against Bukharin and Pyatakov who also claimed that the national question was no longer relevant and opposed the demand for self-determination. Rosa Luxemburg, it goes without saying, was a great revolutionary and a committed internationalist, but unfortunately her internationalism had a rather abstract character. Thus, she denied the right of the Polish people to self-determination and described the idea of a Ukrainian nationality as the invention of intellectuals.

Although the Polish Social Democrats had the wrong position, an abstract position, they were genuine internationalists and were motivated by the need to combat the reactionary petty bourgeois nationalism of Pilsudski's so-called Polish Socialist Party. The PPS (Polska Partija Socialistyczna) was really not a socialist party at all but a petty-bourgeois nationalist party founded in 1892. It stood for separatism and consciously strove to split the Polish workers from the Russian workers. Like all mass petty-bourgeois nationalist movements, there was a right and left wing in the PPS. In 1906, the two wings split apart. Later, during the First World War, the Left moved away from nationalism and ended up fusing with the Polish Social Democrats in December 1918 to found the Polish Communist Workers' Party. However, the right wing remained on the basis of chauvinism. During the First World War they organised the Polish Legion which fought on the side of Austro-German imperialism.

Lenin himself was a Russian, that is, a member of the oppressor nation, the Great Russians. Rosa Luxemburg was a Pole (and also Jewish). Lenin understood the need for extreme sensitivity towards the peoples

oppressed by Russian tsarism. He addressed himself to the Polish comrades approximately in the following terms: "Look, we understand your position. You are Polish Social Democrats. It is your first duty to struggle against the Polish nationalists. Of course, you must do this. But please do not tell us, the Russian comrades, that we must remove from our programme the slogan of the right of the Polish people to self-determination. Because, as Russian social democrats, our first duty is to fight against our own bourgeoisie, the Russian bourgeoisie and tsarism. For only in this way can we Russian Social Democrats, prove to the Poles that we have no desire to oppress them, and thus lay the basis for the unity of both peoples in the revolutionary struggle."

In a brilliant, dialectical way, Lenin's position of the right of nations to self-determination was not meant to divide Russian and Polish workers, peoples, *but on the contrary to bring them together.*

Unity of workers' organisations

Why did Lenin support the right of nations to self-determination? *He did so exclusively from the point of view of furthering the class struggle, of uniting the working class.* For the Bolsheviks, the national question represented not *only* a problem and an obstacle but also a *revolutionary potential.* Without a correct position on the national question, the October Revolution would never have taken place. But an integral part of Lenin's policy on the national question was his insistence, from 1903 onwards, *on the need to maintain the sacred unity of the working class and its organisations above all distinctions of nationality, language, race or religion.* Thus, he implacably opposed the attempts of the Jewish Bund to organise the Jewish workers separately and apart from the Russian workers. On this point he was most emphatic:

"In contrast to the nationalist bickering of the different bourgeois parties over questions of language, etc.," he wrote, "workers' democracy puts forward the demand: absolute unity and complete amalgamation of the workers of *all* nationalities in all workers' organisations, trade union, co-operative, consumers', educational and every other, to

counter-balance bourgeois nationalism of all kinds. Only such unity can safeguard democracy, safeguard the interests of the workers against capital—which has already become and is growing more and more international—safeguard the interests of mankind's development towards a new way of life to which all privileges and all exploitation will be alien." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

As Trotsky correctly points out, the right of self-determination was only half of Lenin's position on the national question. The other side of the coin was *an implacable opposition to any division of the workers movement along national lines*. We must clearly distinguish between these two elements. The right of self-determination is a democratic demand—or, more correctly, a bourgeois democratic demand. That half of the programme pertains to the nation as a whole. But as far as the proletariat is concerned, there was absolutely no question of dividing workers' organisations on national lines. Although Lenin was perfectly clear and ambiguous about this, today every single one of the miserable sects, calling themselves "Trotskyists" have not only supported, but actually advocated and carried out the criminal policy of splitting the workers' organisations on national lines, one way or another.

It is an absolute monstrosity that has nothing in common with Leninism to divide the trade unions on racial or national lines. Yet the sects in Britain, have actively participating in the setting up of black sections in the unions and Labour Party. In Scotland, they supported setting up a separate Scottish union for the oil workers, which is a crude violation of the most elementary principles of Marxism. Similar examples can be cited in every other country. Let us be clear: *the establishment of separate organisations for different national and racial groups is a criminal act that can only result in splintering and weakening the workers' movement*. It is one thing to combat racism and chauvinism in the majority nationality. It is quite another thing to split the working class on national, linguistic, religious or racial lines.

This was never the position of the Bolshevik Party, or the RSDLP before it. Not one of the tendencies of the Russian Social Democracy (if we exclude the leaders of the Jewish Bund) agreed with splitting the movement on national lines. The Mensheviks had the same position on this question as the Bolsheviks. The question was thoroughly debated from the earliest period, when the demand was raised of giving the Jewish Social Democrats a separate organisation within the RSDLP. The Bund (the Jewish Social Democratic organisation) which was very strong in the West of Russia and Lithuania, where there was a large Jewish population, demanded that it alone should have the right to speak in the name of Jewish workers and should also have the right to set up a separate Jewish Social Democratic organisation. This demand was resolutely rejected by Lenin and the Russian Marxists who insisted that there must be one party of the workers and one trade union. This remains our position today. The most important weapon in the hands of the working class is unity. This must be upheld at all costs. We are radically opposed to the division of the working class on lines of nationality, race, language, religion or anything else. In other words *we take a class position*.

The Jewish question

With tedious frequency, those who are in favour of splitting the workers' movement on lines of nationality, race or sex attempt to justify their position by resorting to blatant demagogy or tearful sentimentality, appealing to the plight of the oppressed and the monstrous injustices they suffer, as "proof" of the "impossibility" of uniting in common organisations Blacks and Whites, men and women, Protestants and Catholics, and so on and so forth. This spurious argument is refuted by the history of Bolshevism itself, as shown by Lenin's attitude to the Jewish Bund. The Jews in Russia were monstrously oppressed by systematic discrimination, forced to live apart in the Pale of Settlement, and subject to periodic bloody pogroms. Only a limited percentage of Jews was accepted into state service, and

the middle and higher schools belonging to the state. By 1917 the number of laws restricting the rights of Jews was 650. Here was an example of national oppression in its crudest and most brutal form.

Lenin always explained that it was the workers' duty to fight against their own bourgeoisie. That means *all* workers—even the most oppressed. For this reason the Russian Social Democrats always rejected the demands of the Bund. The fact that the Jews suffered from the most terrible oppression was no argument. The Bund put forward the slogan of national-cultural autonomy, filched from the programme of Otto Bauer and the Austro-Marxists. But this slogan made even less sense in the case of the Russian Jews than in Austro-Hungary. With their scattered population, the predominantly city-dwelling Jews could not point to a clearly-defined territory—one of the first conditions for a nation. The idea of national-cultural autonomy was to unite the scattered Jewish population around schools and other exclusively Jewish institutions. This demand, which Trotsky characterised as a reactionary Utopia, would have had the effect of deepening the alienation of the Jews from the rest of the population and increasing racial tension and frictions.

The Jews did not possess either a common territory or a common language. Although many Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe spoke Yiddish, many did not. In the advanced capitalist countries the Jews spoke the language of the country where they lived. Indeed, the Sephardic Jews who originated in Spain retained Spanish as their native tongue for centuries. After they had been expelled from Spain and were dispersed throughout the Mediterranean. Wherever the Jews had the chance to do so, they were assimilated into the population of the country where they resided. But the fanaticism and obscurantism of the medieval Catholic Church prevented this. The Jews were forcibly excluded and alienated from society. Forbidden from holding land, they were compelled to resort to other livelihoods on the margins of feudal society, including trade and money-lending. The enforced alienation of the Jews was even more blatant in backward tsarist Russia.

Even Lenin found it difficult to classify the Jews. The nearest he could come to a definition was a special oppressed caste, as the following passage shows: "The same applies," he wrote, "to the most oppressed and persecuted nation, the Jews. Jewish national culture is the slogan of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie, a slogan of our enemies. But there are other elements in Jewish culture and throughout the history of the Jews. Of the ten and a half million Jews throughout the world, a little over half live in Galicia and Russia, backward and semi-barbarous countries, which forcibly keep the Jews in the position of a caste. The other half live in the civilised world, and there the Jews are not segregated as a caste. There, the great world-progressive features of Jewish culture have clearly made themselves felt: its internationalism, its responsiveness to the advanced movements of the epoch (the percentage of Jews in the democratic and proletarian movement is everywhere higher than the percentage of Jews in the population as a whole)." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, October-December 1913, vol. 20.)

Although the Jews lacked the attributes of a nation, and Lenin did not consider them as such, nevertheless after the October revolution, the Bolsheviks offered self-determination to the Jews, granting them a homeland to which they could emigrate if they so wished (Biribaidjan) although few chose to do so. This was infinitely preferable to the setting up of a Jewish state in Palestine, on land that had been occupied by Arabs for over a thousand years, thus causing endless bloodshed and wars in the Middle East. The establishment of the state of Israel was a reactionary act which was opposed by the Marxist at the time. Trotsky warned in advance that it would be a cruel trap for the Jewish people. And the history of the past half century has shown this to be true. Nevertheless, Israel now exists as a state, and the clock of history cannot be turned back. Israel is a nation and we cannot call for its abolition. The solution of the Palestinian national problem (which we deal with later) can only be achieved through the establishment of a socialist federation of the Middle east in which Arabs and Israelis can co-exist with their own autonomous homelands and full respect for all national rights.

The supporters of Zionism in Russia were always a tiny minority. A considerable number of the cadres of the revolutionary movement in Russia were of Jewish origin, because the most advanced Jewish intellectuals and workers understood that their future depended on a revolutionary reconstruction of society. This was shown to be correct. In Russia after the October Revolution, the Jewish people achieved full civil emancipation and complete equality. They were satisfied with this and for this reason very few took up the offer of a homeland within the borders of the Soviet state.

Self-determination

The demand for the recognition of the right of nations to self-determination is central to Lenin's position on the national question. This is generally known. But as Hegel once observed, what is known is not necessarily understood. Lenin wrote extensively on the national question, and his writings set forth the basic Marxist position on this subject which he develops in a very rich, all-sided and dialectical manner. Yet even the slightest glance at the literature of groups that today lay claim to the heritage of Lenin is enough to convince one that nobody reads Lenin any more, and if they do read his articles, they do not understand a single word. In particular, the demand for the right of self-determination—without doubt one of the important elements in Lenin's thinking on the national question—has been wrenched from its proper context and presented in a mechanical and one-sided way, as if it were the only thing that Lenin was concerned with.

That Lenin defended the right of nations to self-determination is an ABC proposition for a Marxist. But after ABC there are more letters in the alphabet, and a schoolchild who constantly repeated "ABC" would not be thought to be particularly intelligent. Dialectics, as Lenin explained many times, deals with phenomena in an all-sided way. To abstract a single element in a complex equation, and to counterpose it to all the other elements, is a childish misuse of dialectics, known to the history of philosophy as sophism. Such abuses lead to errors of the crassest type in logic. In politics, and particularly the politics of the

national question, they lead directly to *the defence of reactionary nationalism and the abandonment of socialism*. The national question is a minefield, the crossing of which demands a reliable compass. The moment you depart just one centimetre from a class position, you are lost. Thus, many of those who today try to cite Lenin's defence of the right to self-determination fall into the trap of capitulating to the insistent pressure of petty bourgeois nationalism which is just the opposite of Lenin's position. Let him speak for himself:

"We are not in favour of preserving small nations at all costs;" he wrote, "*other conditions being equal*, we positively favour centralisation and oppose the philistine ideal of federal relationships." (LCW, *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination*, January-February 1916, vol. 22.) Lenin did not in every case support the right of small nations to self-determination. As he carefully explains, other things being equal, we always support larger national units against smaller, and centralisation, on a democratic basis, against decentralisation. But all other conditions are not necessarily equal. The fact of national oppression of one nation by another obliges the proletariat and its organisations to fight against national oppression and defend the right of nations to self-determination.

The right of nations to self-determination is a democratic demand and Marxists support it, as we support any other democratic demand. But the support for democratic demands in general has never been considered by Marxists as some kind of Categorical Imperative. Such demands are always subordinate to the interests of the working class and the struggle for socialism, as Lenin clearly explains: "In practice, the proletariat can retain its political independence only by subordinating its struggle for all democratic demands, not excluding the demand for a republic, to its revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie." (Ibid.)

This is nothing particularly new or startling. It is in line with the general Marxist position on democratic demands. For example, the right to divorce is a democratic demand, which we also support. What

does this right consist of? It means that a man and a woman can live together as long as they get on and both are happy. But if the relation between two people breaks down, then they have the right to separate. Nobody can force them to live together. Or let us consider the right to abortion. What does that consist of? A woman has a right to decide whether she has a child or not, for it is clear that a woman has the right to dispose of her body as she sees fit. We defend these democratic rights, but do we say that divorce or abortion is a good thing in itself? Do we say that everyone must have an abortion, or that every married couple must have a divorce? That would be absurd. Divorce and abortion are not good things, but under certain circumstances may be a lesser evil. What we defend is neither divorce nor abortion, but only the *right* to divorce and abortion. It is the same with the right to self-determination. There is a huge difference between supporting the right to self-determination and supporting self-determination as such. *It is the difference between a Marxist policy and petty bourgeois nationalism.* Lenin was very clear on this point: "In order not to infringe on our right to self-determination', therefore, we are duty bound not to 'vote for separation', as the wily Mr. Semkovsky assumes, but to vote for the right of the separating region to decide that question itself." (LCW, *The National Programme of the RSDLP*, 15 December 1913, vol. 19.)

This is the crux of the matter. For Lenin, the right to self-determination did *not* mean that workers were "duty bound to vote for separation", but *exclusively* to oppose all forms of national oppression and to oppose the forcible retention of any nation within the boundaries of another state—that is, to let the people decide freely on the matter. That is an elementary democratic right, which the Bolsheviks defended. But even then, the right was never considered as something absolute, but was always subordinate to the interests of the class struggle and the world revolution. Lenin's policy was not *separation*, but *voluntary union*. The slogan of the right to self-determination, far from implying support for separation, was *an integral part of the struggle against separation*. Lenin continues: "The recognition of the right to self-determination is, Mr. Semkovsky assures us, 'playing into the hands of

the most thorough-paced bourgeois nationalism'. This is childish nonsense since the recognition of the *right* does not exclude either propaganda and agitation *against* separation or the exposure of bourgeois nationalism. But it is absolutely indisputable that the denial of the right to secede is playing into the hands of the most thorough-paced Great-Russian Black Hundred nationals!" (Ibid.)

Let us take a modern example. The French-speaking population of Quebec feel nationally oppressed by Canada. The Quebecois nationalists are pressing for separation. A Marxist would say to the Quebecois: yes, you have the right to self-determination. We will defend that right. But we consider that separation will be to the detriment of the Quebecois and all the people of Canada. If there is a referendum we will certainly agitate and vote against separation. We stand for a socialist Quebec in a socialist Canada with full respect for national right as the only solution to our problems. This was approximately Lenin's position on the national question.

Lenin by no means regarded the right of self-determinations as a panacea, universally applicable under all circumstances. This idiocy was later taken up by groups who pay lip service to Marxism and Leninism without possessing the slightest notion of what this is. Lenin did not regard the right of self-determination as an absolute right, outside time and space, but only as part of the struggle of the proletariat for power, and strictly subordinate to that struggle. In Stalin's article *The National Question and Marxism*, which was virtually dictated by Lenin, and which without any doubt expresses his views on the question, this idea is clearly expressed:

"A nation has the right to arrange its life on autonomous lines. It even has the right to secede. But this does not mean that it should do so under all circumstances, that autonomy, or separation, will everywhere and always be advantageous for a nation, i.e., for the majority of the population, i.e., for the toiling strata." (Stalin, op. cit., p. 20.) And it continues:

"But what solution would be the most compatible with the interests of the toiling masses? Autonomy, federation or separation?"

"All these are problems *the solution to which will depend on the concrete historical conditions in which the given nation finds itself.*

"Nay, more. Conditions, like everything else, change, and a decision which is correct at one particular time may prove to be entirely unsuitable at another." (Ibid., pp. 20-21, our emphasis.)

This is absolutely correct. The position which Marxists will take in relation to the demand for the right of self-determination cannot be established in advance. It depends on the concrete circumstances of each case and its implications for the cause of the proletariat and the world socialist revolution. That was always Lenin's position. Thus, in *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, he writes: "There can be no question of the Marxists of any country drawing up their national programme without taking into account all these general historical and concrete state conditions." (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, February-May 1914, vol. 20, p. 401.)

Arguing against the Polish Social Democrats who had an ultra-left position on the national question and denied the right of self-determination in principle, Lenin explains, amongst other things, that *it is not the duty of social democracy to support each and every struggle for self-determination.* Lenin says the following: "From the stand-point of general theory this argument is abominable, because it is obviously illogical, firstly there is not and cannot be any single democratic demand that does not give rise to abuses unless the specific is subordinated to the general. We are not obliged to support either any struggle for independence or any republican or anti-clerical movement." (LCW, *The Discussion on Self-determination Summed Up*, vol. 22, p. 349, our emphasis.)

There is one case where Lenin makes it clear that you do *not* support the right of nations to self-determination: when it means that it would drag the workers into a war. He regarded the demand to support self-

determination (even if it was justified in and of itself), if it meant dragging the big powers into a war as a *monstrous suggestion*. Whether the Bolsheviks supported the national struggle in a given case depended upon the concrete circumstances, and in every case Lenin approached the question, not from the standpoint of narrow nationalism, from the standpoint of the world revolution. In July 1916 Lenin warned the Poles not to launch a struggle for national independence. He explained that the fate of the struggle of the Polish people was inseparably linked to the perspective of the revolution in Russia and Germany: "To raise the question of Poland's independence today," he wrote, "under the existing relations of the neighbouring imperialist powers, *it is really to chase after a utopia, to descend to narrow-minded nationalism and forget that a necessary premise is an all-European or at least the Russian and German revolutions.*" (LCW, *The Discussion on Self-determination Summed Up*, vol. 22, p. 350, our emphasis.)

In the given situation, he recommended to the Poles that they subordinate their struggle for self-determination to the perspective of revolution in Russia and Germany. In the event, Lenin was shown to be correct. It was only the Russian revolution that created the conditions for the establishment of an independent Polish state, whereas every other attempt had ended in disaster. This is what Lenin meant when he warned against "chasing after utopias" and "descending into narrow-minded nationalism". What good advice Lenin gave the Polish people! And what a monstrous caricature of Lenin's position was it to advocate the break-up of Yugoslavia on the spurious grounds of self-determination! That was precisely to chase after utopias (and reactionary ones, at that) and to descend into narrow-minded nationalism of the worst kind.

Lenin and 'practicality'

One of the tricks frequently used by those petty bourgeois critics of Marxism who have capitulated to nationalism is to accuse the Marxists of utopianism. "Your talk of uniting the workers is utopianism"; "The

idea of a socialist federation is not practical"; "We must do something now!" and so on and so forth. How did Lenin answer this line of argument, which was well known to him?

"What does the demand for 'practicality' in the national question imply?" asked Lenin, and he replied:

"Either support for all national aspirations or the answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question of secession in the case of every nation, or that national demands are in general immediately 'practicable'."

And he continues: "Let us examine all three possible meanings of the demand for 'practicability'.

"The bourgeoisie, which naturally comes out as the hegemon (leader) at the start of every national movement, says that the support of all national aspirations is practical. But the policy of the proletariat in the national question (as in other questions) supports the bourgeoisie only in a definite direction; it never coincides with the policy of the bourgeoisie. The working class supports the bourgeoisie only in order to secure national peace (which the bourgeoisie cannot bring about completely and which can be achieved only with complete democracy), in order to secure equal rights and to create the best conditions for the class struggle. Therefore, it is *against* the *practicality* of the bourgeoisie that the proletarians advance their principles in the national question. They always give the bourgeoisie *only conditional* support. In national affairs the bourgeoisie always strives either for privileges for its *own* nation or exceptional advantages for it; and this is called being 'practical'. The proletariat is opposed to all privileges, to all exceptionalism. To demand that it should be 'practical' is to trail in the wake of the bourgeoisie, to fall into opportunism." (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, February-May 1914, vol. 20, p. 409-10.)

When Lenin wrote these lines in 1914, he still had the perspective of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia. The Bolsheviks were fighting as the extreme left wing of the bourgeois democratic camp. Their aim was to mobilise the masses under the leadership of the

proletariat, not for the transfer of power to the working class (Lenin only reached this conclusion in 1917) but to carry out the most radical type of bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia and thus create the most favourable conditions for the development of capitalism and the class struggle. Of course, Lenin's perspective did not end there. He envisaged that a victorious bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia would provide a mighty impetus to the socialist revolution in western Europe, and that this, in turn, would enable the Russian workers—together with the workers of Europe—to turn the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist one. But the immediate tasks of the revolution were bourgeois-democratic, and central to this was the agrarian revolution and the national question.

Even when Lenin still had the perspective of the bourgeois-democratic revolution he insisted on the need for the complete independence of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie. In the national question the workers must be independent of the nationalist bourgeoisie. They must fight against national oppression, but they must fight under their own banner, with their own policies and methods. Insofar as the national bourgeoisie took a step forward in the fight against the oppressor nation, the working class was bound to support them, of course. But, in the first place, this support was highly conditional, and by no means supposed that the workers were bound to support the national bourgeoisie in all cases. Lenin warned of the treachery of the national bourgeoisie, its selfish greed and reactionary tendencies, and urged the workers not to subordinate themselves to its nationalist demagogy for "unity".

The argument of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalists against the Marxist position on the national question is always the same: "This talk of socialism and the class struggle is utopian. We are suffering national oppression right now, and must take practical measures to solve our problems." Lenin answered this demagogy in advance:

"The demand for an answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question of secession in the case of every nation seems to be a very 'practical' one. *In reality it is absurd; it is metaphysical in theory, and in practice it leads to subordinating the proletariat to the interests of the bourgeoisie.* The bourgeoisie always places its national demands in the forefront. It advances them categorically. *For the proletariat, however, these demands are subordinate to the interests of the class struggle.*" (Ibid., our emphasis.)

Again: "The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations will call upon the proletariat to support its aspirations unconditionally on the plea that its demands are 'practical'. The most practical procedure is to say a plain 'yes' in favour of the secession of a particular nation rather than in favour of all nations to secede!

"The proletariat is opposed to such practicality. While recognising equality and equal rights to a national state, it values above all and places foremost the alliance of the proletarians of all nations and assesses every national demand, every national separation, from the angle of the class struggle of the workers. This call for uncritical acceptance of bourgeois aspirations." (Ibid., our emphasis.)

From these lines it is absolutely clear that Lenin did not consider that the proletariat was duty bound to support each and every demand for self-determination; that he called on the workers to resist the attempts of the bourgeois (and, we might add, petty bourgeois) nationalists to force them to support nationalism by appealing to their natural sympathies with a nationally oppressed people; that the national question is always subordinate to the general interests of the proletariat and the class struggle; and that it is necessary to take up a stand on self-determination *exclusively* on the basis that it furthers the cause of the proletariat and the struggle for socialism in the given case. In any other case, the proletariat, far from being obliged to support it, *must decisively reject it.*

In any event, Lenin's position on the national question evolved with time, just as his general view of the nature of the Russian revolution changed. After the February revolution Lenin abandoned his earlier view that the Russian revolution would be bourgeois-democratic in character ("the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry") and went over to the position defended by Trotsky since 1904-5. Trotsky explained that, although objectively the tasks of the Russian revolution were bourgeois-democratic in character, the revolution could only be led by the proletariat in alliance with the poor peasants. The Russian bourgeoisie had come too late on the scene of history to play a progressive role. Under the circumstances, the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution could only be carried out by the working class once it had taken power into its hands. But this was not the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" but the dictatorship of the proletariat. This perspective was brilliantly confirmed in October 1917.

Even before this, as we have seen, Lenin at no time advocated support for the national bourgeoisie—or, at least, only envisaged the most limited and conditional support under certain conditions, while always stressing the need of the proletariat to maintain its independence from the machinations of the so-called progressive bourgeoisie. But after 1917 he understood that the so-called national bourgeoisie in backward semi-colonial countries like tsarist Russia was completely incapable of playing any progressive role. At the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin demonstratively altered his attitude to the national bourgeoisie. From this point on he considered that the national bourgeoisie in the colonial countries was incapable of playing a progressive role. All of subsequent history has proved him correct on this question.

Part Four: The national question after October

"The various demands of democracy, including self-determination," wrote Lenin, "are not an absolute, but only a small part of the general democratic (now general-socialist) world movement, In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected. It is possible that the republican movement in one country may be merely the instrument of the clerical or financial-monarchical intrigues of other countries; if so, we must not support this particular, concrete movement. But it would be ridiculous to delete the demand for a republic from the programme of International Social-Democracy on these grounds." (LCW, *The Discussion on Self-determination Summed Up*, July 1916, vol. 22.)

This words show that the right-of self-determination is only a *relative* right. Whether the working class should support the demand for the right of self-determination depends on the specific circumstances in every separate case. It is a concrete question. It is not possible to take a general position, valid for all cases. Lenin certainly never took such a position. It is necessary to examine each concrete case and distinguish very carefully between what is reactionary and what is progressive. Otherwise you end up in a mess. And Lenin's position was shown to be correct in practice in 1917. *The national question was solved in Russia, not by the bourgeoisie, but by the socialist revolution.* That is a fact which all the slanderers of Bolshevism refuse to recognise. It is of fundamental importance from the standpoint of all those who really wish to understand the Marxist position on the national question.

As Lenin had predicted, the Poles only got independence as a result of revolution in Russia. The October revolution created the conditions for the breakaway of Poland. The PPS right wing was propelled to the head of the government, where they hastened to hand over power to the Polish bourgeoisie. The latter, egged on by Britain and France, declared war against Russia in 1920. The Bolsheviks not only defended themselves against the reactionary Polish bourgeoisie, but carried the

war into Poland. Was this a denial of the right to Polish self-determination? Lenin answered the question in advance in his article *The Discussion on Self-determination Summed Up*, written in July 1916:

"If the concrete situation which confronted Marx in the period when tsarist influence was dominant in international politics were to repeat itself, for instance, in such form that a number of nations started a socialist revolution (as a bourgeois-democratic revolution was started in 1848), while other nations served as the chief bulwark of bourgeois reaction—then we too would have to be in favour of a revolutionary war against the latter, of 'crushing' them, in favour of destroying all their outposts, no matter what small-national movements arose in them." (LCW, *The Discussion on Self-determination Summed Up*, vol. 22.)

These lines adequately convey Lenin's real attitude to self-determination. The national question (including self-determination) is always subordinate to the general interests of the proletariat and world revolution. The proletariat must support the national liberation struggles of oppressed nations, to the degree that the latter are directed against imperialism and tsarism. In this sense the national movement can be an ally of the proletariat, like the peasantry. But when such national movements are directed against the revolution, when small nations are used as the pawns of imperialism and reaction (as frequently occurs in history), then the attitude of the workers' movement must be one of *outright hostility, even to the point of waging war against such movements*. That is perfectly clear from Lenin's words.

The Bolshevik programme on the national question was intended as a means of uniting the workers and peasants of all the nationalities of tsarist Russia for the revolutionary overthrow of tsarism. Once the Russian workers took power, they offered the right of self-determination to the oppressed nationalities, but in the big majority of cases the people decided to stay together and to participate voluntarily in the Soviet Federation. It is true that Poland, and Finland split away,

and both set up reactionary dictatorships, hostile to the Soviet power. The Ukraine fell under German control. The Bolsheviks did not intervene against Finland and Poland, *not because of the right to self-determination, but because they were too weak to do so*. Later they did in fact intervene in Poland, the Ukraine and Georgia.

After the October revolution, on more than one occasion the Bolshevik government was obliged to wage war on reactionary nationalist movements, for example the Armenian Dashnaks and the Ukrainian Rada, which was merely a cover for foreign imperialist intervention against the Soviet Republic. In 1920, Lenin was in favour of a revolutionary war against Poland. Trotsky was opposed to this war, not on principle, and certainly not on the grounds of Polish self-determination (the reactionary Pilsudski regime in Poland was merely acting as the stooge of French and British imperialism which encouraged it in its aggressive stance towards Soviet Russia), but only for practical reasons.

When the Finnish nationalist bourgeoisie, for its own reactionary reasons, broke away from Russia after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks made no attempt to intervene. But this was a reflection of the weakness of the Soviet state at the time. The workers' government was fighting a life-and-death struggle on many fronts. Trotsky had to improvise the Red Army from nothing. Inside Finland a bloody civil war broke out between the bourgeois nationalist White Guards and the workers. If the Bolsheviks had had the Red Army, they would certainly have intervened to support the Finnish workers against the counter-revolutionary Finnish nationalist bourgeoisie. As it happens, intervention was materially impossible at the time, but this had absolutely nothing to do with the "right of self-determination" which, as Lenin explained time and again, was only a part—a relatively small part—of the general strategy of the world proletarian revolution. The former was always subordinate to the latter, in the same way that the part is *always* subordinate to the whole.

In 1922 in his book *Social Democracy and the Wars of Intervention* (sometimes referred to as *Between Red and White*), Leon Trotsky wrote the following: "The economic development of present-day society has a strongly centralist character. Capitalism has laid down the preliminary foundations for a well-regulated economy on a world scale. Imperialism is only the predatory capitalist expression of this desire to have the leading role in the management of the world's economy. All the powerful imperialist countries find that they have not enough scope within the narrow limits of national economy, and they are all seeking for wider markets. Their aim is the monopoly of the world's economy..."

"The fundamental task of our epoch consists in the establishment of close relationships between the economic systems of the various parts of the world, and in the building up in the interests of the whole of humanity, of co-ordinated world production, based on the most economic use of all forces and resources. This is precisely the task of socialism. It is self-evident that the principle of self-determination does not in any case supersede the unifying tendencies of socialist economic construction. In this respect, self-determination occupies, in the process of historic development, the subordinate position allotted to democracy in general. Socialist centralism, however cannot replace imperialist centralism, without a transition and oppressed nationalities must be given the opportunity to stretch out their limbs which have become stiff under the chains of capitalist coercion.

"The task and the methods of the proletarian revolution do not any means consist in the mechanical elimination of national characteristics or in the introduction of forcible amalgamation. Interference with the language, the education, the literature and the culture of various nationalities is certainly alien to the proletarian revolution. That is concerned with other things than the professional interests of the intellectuals and the 'national' interests of the working class. The victorious social revolution will give full freedom to all the national groups to settle for themselves all the questions of national culture, while bringing under one head (for the common good and with the consent of the workers) the economic tasks, which require handling in a

manner well-considered and commensurate with natural, historical and technical conditions not by any means with national groupings. The Soviet Federation represents the most adaptable and flexible state form for the co-ordination of national and economic requirements.

"The politicians of the Second International, in unison with their mentors from the bourgeois diplomatic chancelleries, smile sardonically at our recognition of the rights of national self-determination, *we take care to explain to the masses its limited historical significance, and we never put it above the interests of the proletarian revolution.*"

Lenin and Great Russian nationalism

Lenin knew and loved the national traditions, history, literature and culture of Russia. An internationalist to the core, he was nevertheless firmly grounded in Russian life and culture. Yet Lenin never made the slightest concessions to Great-Russian chauvinism, against which he waged a pitiless struggle all his life. The victory of the proletarian revolution, of course, did not mean the immediate disappearance of the age-old prejudices and habits of mind, or the liquidation of tradition, which, in the words of Marx, weighs on the human consciousness "like an Alp". One does not change the minds of men and women overnight merely by overthrowing the rule of the exploiters and nationalising the means of production. Society still bears the scars and deformations of the old order, not only on its back but also on its mind.

The establishment of real human relations between men and women, between formerly oppressed and oppressor nations can only change over a period, the length of which will be determined by the level of development of the productive forces, the length of the working day, and the cultural level of the masses. That is precisely the meaning of the transitional period between capitalism and socialism. In the case of Russia, where the revolution found itself isolated in conditions of the most frightful backwardness, the problems facing the Soviet power were immense. This has a direct bearing on the national question. On the eve of the First World War Lenin wrote:

"Even now, probably for a fairly long time, proletarian democracy must reckon with the nationalism of the Great-Russian peasants (*not with the object of making concessions to it, but in order to combat it*)." (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, February-May 1914, vol. 20, our emphasis.)

And he continues: "This state of affairs confronts the proletariat of Russia with a twofold or, rather, a two-sided task; to combat all nationalism and, above all, Great-Russian nationalism; to recognise not only equal rights for all nations in general, but also equality of rights as regards statehood, i.e., the right of nations to self-determination. And at the same time, it is their task to promote a successful struggle against nationalism of all nations, whatever its form, and preserve the unity of the proletarian struggle and of the proletarian organisations, amalgamating these organisations into a closely-knit international association despite bourgeois striving for national exclusiveness.

"Complete equality of rights for all nations, the right of nations to self-determination, the unity of the workers of all nations—such is the national programme that Marxism, the experience of the whole world and the experience of Russia, teach the workers." (Ibid.)

Lenin always showed great sensitivity in his dealings with the nationalities of the Soviet state. The Bolsheviks met all their obligations to the oppressed nations of the former tsarist empire. In the beginning, the very name of Russia disappeared from all official documents. The Bolsheviks just referred to "The Workers' State". Later there was a move to set up a Union of Soviet Republics. While obviously in favour of a voluntary federation, which was formed immediately after the October Revolution, Lenin was anxious to avoid giving any impression to the non-Russian nationalities that the Bolsheviks merely wished to re-constitute the old tsarist empire under a new name. He urged caution and patience. However, Stalin, who was made Commissar for the Nationalities because he was a Georgian, had other ideas. It is a well-established fact that members of small nations who rise to leading positions in the government of an oppressive majority nation tend to

become the worst great-power chauvinists. Thus, Napoleon Bonaparte, although a Corsican, became the most fanatical proponent of French centralism.

Stalin, the creature of the Bureaucracy, became an equally rabid Great-Russian chauvinist, despite the fact that he spoke Russian poorly and with a thick Georgian accent. In 1921, despite Lenin's objections, Stalin organised an invasion of Georgia, which was (theoretically) an independent state. Presented with a *fait accompli*, Lenin was obliged to accept the position. But he strongly advised caution and sensitivity when dealing with the Georgians, in order to avoid any hint of Russian bullying. At the time Georgia, a predominantly peasant and petty bourgeois country, was ruled by the Mensheviks. Lenin was in favour of a conciliatory policy, with a view to winning the confidence of the Georgians. He attached enormous importance to the maintenance of fraternal relations between the nationalities, and insisted on the voluntary character of any union or federation. Stalin, on the contrary, wished to push through at all costs the union of the Russian Socialist Federation (RSFSR) with the Transcaucasian Federation, the Ukrainian SSR and the Bielorussian SSR. When Stalin's draft proposal was submitted to the Central Committee, Lenin subjected it to a serious criticism and proposed an alternative solution which was different in principle from Stalin's draft. Lenin, typically, stressed the element of equality and the voluntary nature of the federation: "We recognise ourselves to be the equals of the Ukrainian SSR and others," he wrote, "and together with them and on equal terms with them enter a new union, a new federation..." (Lenin, *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism*, p. 223.)

Meanwhile, behind the backs of the Party leadership, Stalin, aided by his henchman Ordzhonikidze (a Russified Georgian, like himself) and Dzerzhinski (a Pole) staged what amounted to a coup in Georgia. They purged the Georgian Mensheviks, against Lenin's specific advice, and when the Georgian Bolshevik leaders protested, they were ruthlessly pushed aside. Stalin and Ordzhonikidze trampled on all criticism. In other words, they carried out a policy that was precisely the opposite of

what Lenin advocated for Georgia. They bullied the Georgian Bolsheviks and even went so far as to use physical violence, as when Ordzhonikidze struck one of the Georgian Bolsheviks—an unheard-of action. When Lenin, who was incapacitated by illness, finally found out he was horrified, and dictated a series of letters to his secretaries, denouncing Stalin's conduct in the harshest possible terms and demanding the severest punishment for Ordzhonikidze.

In a text dictated on December 24-5 1922, Lenin branded Stalin "a real and true national-socialist", and a vulgar "Great-Russian bully". (See Buranov, *Lenin's Will*, p. 46.) He wrote: "I also fear that Comrade Dzerzhinski, who went to the Caucasus to investigate the 'crime' of those 'nationalist-socialists', distinguished himself there by his truly Russian frame of mind (it is common knowledge that people of other nationalities who have become Russified overdo this Russian frame of mind) and that the impartiality of his whole commission was typified well enough by Ordzhonikidze's 'manhandling'." (LCW, *The Question of Nationalities or 'autonomization'*, 13 December 1922, vol. 36, p. 606.)

Lenin placed the blame for this incident firmly at Stalin's door: "I think," he wrote, "that Stalin's haste and infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against the notorious 'nationalist-socialism' played a fatal role here. In politics, spite generally plays the basest of roles." (Ibid.)

Lenin linked Stalin's behaviour in Georgia directly to the problem of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state apparatus under conditions of frightful backwardness. He particularly condemned Stalin's haste in pushing through a Union of Soviet Republics, irrespective of the opinions of the peoples concerned, under the pretext of the need for a "united state apparatus". Lenin firmly rejected this argument, and explained it as the expression of the rotten Great-Russian chauvinism emanating from the Bureaucracy which, to a large degree, the Revolution had inherited from tsarism:

"It is said that a united state apparatus was needed. Where did that assurance come from? Did it not come from the same Russian apparatus, which, as I pointed out in one of the preceding sections of my diary, we took over from Tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil?

"There is no doubt that that measure should have been delayed until we could say, that we vouched for our apparatus as our own. But now, we must, in all conscience, admit the contrary; *the state apparatus we call ours is, in fact, still quite alien to us; it is a bourgeois and Tsarist hotchpotch and there has been no possibility of getting rid of it in the past five years without the help of other countries and because we have been "busy" most of the time with military engagements and the fight against famine.*

"It is quite natural that in such circumstances the 'freedom to secede from the union' by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is. *There is no doubt that the infinitesimal percentage of Soviet and sovietised workers will drown in that tide of chauvinistic Great-Russian riff-raff like a fly in milk.*" (Ibid., p. 605, our emphasis.)

After the Georgian affair, Lenin threw the whole weight of his authority behind the struggle to remove Stalin from the post of General Secretary of the party which he occupied in 1922, after the death of Sverdlov. However, Lenin's main fear now more than ever was that an open split in the leadership, under prevailing conditions, might lead to the break-up of the party along class lines. He therefore attempted to keep the struggle confined to the leadership, and the notes and other material were not made public. Lenin wrote secretly to the Georgian Bolshevik-Leninists (sending copies to Trotsky and Kamenev) taking up their cause against Stalin "with all my heart". As he was unable to pursue the affair in person, he wrote to Trotsky requesting him to undertake the defence of the Georgians in the Central Committee.

The documentary evidence of Lenin's last fight against Stalin and the bureaucracy was suppressed for decades by Moscow. Lenin's last writings were hidden from the Communist Party rank-and-file in Russia and internationally. Lenin's last letter to the Party Congress, despite the protests of his widow, was not read out at the Party Congress and remained under lock and key until 1956 when Khrushchev and Co. published it, along with a few other items including the letters on Georgia and the national question. Thus, Lenin's struggle to defend the real policies of Bolshevism and proletarian internationalism were consigned to oblivion.

'Socialism in one country'

Nationalism and Marxism are incompatible. But nationalism is the inseparable Siamese twin of Stalinism in all its varieties. At the heart of the ideology of Stalinism is the so-called theory of socialism in one country. This anti-Marxist notion could never have been countenanced by Marx or Lenin. As late as 1924, Stalin continued to support Lenin's internationalist position. In February of that year, in his *Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin summed up Lenin's views on the building of socialism thus:

"The overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a proletarian government in one country does not yet guarantee the complete victory of socialism. The main task of socialism—*the organisation of socialist production*—remains ahead. Can this task be accomplished, can the final victory of socialism in one country be attained, without the joint efforts of the proletariat of several advanced countries? *No, this is impossible.* To overthrow the bourgeoisie the efforts of one country are sufficient—the history of our revolution bears this out. For the final victory of Socialism, *for the organisation of socialist production, the efforts of one country, particularly of such a peasant country as Russia, are insufficient.* For this the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries are necessary.

"Such, on the whole, are *the characteristic features of the Leninist theory of the proletarian revolution.*"

That these were precisely the "characteristic features of the Leninist theory of proletarian revolution" was nowhere in dispute up to the first part of 1924. They had been repeated time and time again in *hundreds* of speeches, articles and documents by Lenin since 1905. Yet before the end of 1924, Stalin's book had been revised, and the exact opposite put in its place. By November 1926, Stalin could assert the *exact opposite*: "The party always took as its starting point the idea that the victory of socialism in that country, and that task can be accomplished with the forces of a single country."

These lines mark a complete break with Lenin's policy of proletarian internationalism. Stalin could never have expressed himself in this way while Lenin was still alive. Initially, the "theory" of socialism in one country reflected the mood of the rising caste of bureaucrats who had done well out of the October revolution and now wished to call a halt to the period of revolutionary storm and stress. It was the theoretical expression of a petty bourgeois reaction against October. Under the banner of Socialism in one Country, the Stalinist Bureaucracy waged a one-sided civil war against Bolshevism which ended in the physical destruction of Lenin's Party and the creation of a monstrous totalitarian regime.

The regime that was erected on the bones of the Bolshevik Party eventually destroyed every vestige of the October Revolution. But this was not evident in advance. After the Russian Revolution, the Communist International again defended a correct position on the national question. But with the development of Stalinism and the degeneration of the Third International all of the fundamental ideas were lost. Most of the leaders of the foreign Communist Parties blindly followed the line from Moscow. Those who tried to maintain an independent position were expelled. The Comintern was transformed from a vehicle of the world proletarian revolution into a passive instrument of Stalin's foreign policy. When it no longer suited him, Stalin contemptuously dissolved it in 1943, without even calling a congress.

Only one man explained in advance where the theory of Socialism in one Country would inevitably lead. As early as 1928, Leon Trotsky warned that if this theory was adopted by the Comintern, it would inevitably be the start of a process that could only end in the national-reformist degeneration of every Communist Party in the world, whether in or out of power. Three generations later, the USSR and the Communist International lie in ruins, and the Communist Parties have long since abandoned any pretence to stand for a real Leninist policy everywhere.

Trotsky and the Ukrainian question

For Trotsky, as for Lenin, the question as to whether one should support the demand for the right of self-determination was a concrete question, the answer to which was determined entirely by the interests of the proletariat and the world revolution. A good example of the method of Trotsky was his attitude to the Ukraine in the 1930s. The monstrous conduct of the Stalinist Bureaucracy towards the Ukraine seriously damaged the links of solidarity between Russia and the Ukraine established by the October Revolution.

Like Georgia, the Ukraine was a predominantly agricultural country with an overwhelmingly peasant population. A large country, with a size and population comparable to that of France, the Ukraine occupied a strategic importance for the Bolsheviks. The success of the revolution in the Ukraine was crucial for the extending of the revolution to Poland, the Balkans and, most important of all, Germany. In January 1919 Christian Rakovsky, the President of Commissars of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic stated that "The Ukraine is truly the *strategic nodal point of socialism*. To create a revolutionary Ukraine would mean triggering off revolution in the Balkans and giving the German proletariat the possibility of resisting famine and world imperialism. The Ukrainian revolution is the *decisive factor* in the world revolution." (Christian Rakovsky, *Selected Writings*, p. 24.)

The Soviet power was established in the Ukraine with some difficulty. This was only partly the result of foreign intervention. The main difficulty was the overwhelming predominance of the peasantry. This was aggravated by the national question. Although the Ukrainian language is quite close to Russian, and the two peoples shared a common history for centuries (Kiev was originally the capital of ancient Rus'), nevertheless the Ukrainians form a separate people with their own language, culture and national identity—a fact not always recognised by the Great Russians who traditionally referred to the Ukrainians as "Little Russians".

The national divide in the Ukraine coincided very largely with the class divisions in Ukrainian society. Whereas 80 per cent of the population were peasants who spoke Ukrainian, a large part of the urban population were Russians. Thus, the Bolsheviki had a strong base in the towns, but were extremely weak in the countryside. Upon the resolution of this problem hinged the fate of the Ukrainian revolution. The weakness of the Bolsheviki was that they appeared as a "Russian and Jewish" party. However, as the revolution took hold in the Ukraine, a class differentiation inevitably opened up within the peasantry and was reflected in splits in the old traditional Ukrainian national organisations. The most important development was the leftward evolution of the Borot'bists—who were really the Ukrainian equivalent of the Russian Left Social Revolutionaries. During the Civil War, the Borot'bists joined forces with the Bolsheviki to fight the Whites (Petlyura). Despite the doubts of the Ukrainian Bolsheviki, Lenin insistently demanded that they unify with the Borot'bists. After many difficulties, the Borot'bists finally fused with the Communist Party, thus giving the party for the first time a mass base in the Ukrainian peasantry. This was decisive for the victory of the revolution in the Ukraine.

It is true that thereafter there were many problems with a "nationalist" deviation in the Ukrainian party. But these were overcome by the patience and tact which always characterised the policy of Lenin and Trotsky on the national question. However, the rise of Stalin and the

bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state enormously exacerbated the growth of discontent in the Ukraine. At the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923, Rakovsky led the struggle against the growing tendency towards bureaucracy and Great Russian chauvinism. In a courageous speech at the congress, Rakovsky clearly identified the roots of the problem in terms that closely echoed Lenin's own: "Stalin has only remained on the threshold of the explanation," he declared. "There is a second, more important explanation, namely the fundamental discrepancy between our party and our programme on the one hand and our state apparatus on the other. This is the central, the crucial question." (Ibid., p. 33.)

And he went on: "Our central authorities begin to view the administration of the whole country from the point of view of convenience. Naturally, it is tiresome to administer twenty republics, and how convenient it would be if the whole lot were united. From the bureaucratic point of view, this would be simpler, easier, more pleasant." (Ibid.)

The concentration of power in the hands of a privileged new aristocracy of bureaucrats had a disastrous effect on the national question in the USSR. The bureaucratic adventure of forced collectivisation had devastating consequences throughout the Soviet Union, but nowhere more than in the Ukraine. Stalin's purges began earlier in the Ukraine than elsewhere because of the extent of resistance to this madness which drove the mass of Ukrainian peasants into opposition. This in turn was reflected in opposition in the ranks of the Ukrainian Communist Party. Between 1933 and 1936, the Ukrainian Party was decimated by Stalin. In one year alone, 1933, over half of all regional Party secretaries were purged. Many of those purged were supporters of Stalin, like Skrypnik, the Old Bolshevik and prominent Ukrainian Party leader who committed suicide in 1933 in protest at the purge. This was only the first blow. In 1938, at the height of the Moscow Purges, nearly half of all secretaries of Party organisations were purged yet again. This was a warning that only complete subservience to the Moscow bureaucracy would be tolerated.

From his foreign exile Trotsky followed these events with growing alarm. Noting that the Purges had hit the Ukraine far harder than any other Republic, he concluded that the oppressive measures of the Russian Bureaucracy would place an intolerable strain on the link between the Ukraine and the rest of the Soviet Union. The danger of a revival of counter-revolutionary bourgeois Ukrainian nationalism was clear to him. In the given circumstances, such a trend could get a powerful echo in the peasantry. Trotsky was already warning the world of the inevitability of a new world war in which Hitler would attempt to conquer the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances, the Ukrainian question assumed a burning importance for the future of the world.

It was under these specific conditions that Trotsky advanced the slogan of an independent Soviet Socialist Ukraine. His intention was quite clear: to cut the ground from under the feet of the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists who were striving to split off the Ukraine from the USSR on a reactionary basis, which would inevitably mean handing the Ukraine, with its colossal agricultural and industrial potential, to Hitler. Trotsky understood that a political revolution in the Ukraine would inevitably place on the order of the day the national question. And he understood that matters had gone too far to prevent the Ukraine from separating from a forced union which was now associated in the minds of the masses with violence, suffering and national humiliation. The task of the Ukrainian Bolshevik-Leninists was therefore to give the Ukrainian national movement a socialist, not a bourgeois, content.

A successful revolution in the Ukraine would have had a tremendous impact in Russia and in the neighbouring states—above all in the Western Ukraine, which was languishing under the heel of Pilsudski's Bonapartist dictatorship in Poland. The reunification of the Ukraine on the basis of an independent soviet socialist regime would have led to the downfall of Pilsudski and the beginnings of the socialist revolution in Poland. This in turn would have encouraged the German working class to turn against Hitler. As in 1919, the Ukraine was therefore "the key to the world revolution". Had the Ukrainian working class come to power, even if that led to a separation from Russia, the door would have still

been open for a federation with Russia later on. However, things worked out differently to what Trotsky expected. The Second World War cut across his perspectives.

When Stalin in 1939 signed the notorious Pact with Hitler and sent the Red Army to occupy part of Poland, including the Western Ukraine, Trotsky warned that Hitler would inevitably break his agreement and attack the USSR. In this situation, the national discontent in the Ukraine would pose a mortal threat to the Soviet Union: "Hitler's policy is the following: the establishment of a definite order for his conquests, one after the other, and the creation by each new conquest of a new system of 'friendships'. At the present stage Hitler concedes the Greater Ukraine to his friend Stalin as a temporary deposit. In the following stage he will pose the question of who is the owner of this Ukraine: Stalin or he, Hitler." (Trotsky, *Writings, 1939-40*, p. 90.)

He warned that the national oppression of the Ukraine by the Great Russian Stalinist Bureaucracy would drive the Ukrainians into the arms of Hitler. Precisely for this reason, and in a particular historical context, Trotsky advanced the slogan of an independent soviet Ukraine, as a means of combating reactionary Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism and winning over the Ukrainian workers and peasants to the idea of soviet power. On the eve of the Second World war he wrote:

"The pro-German orientation of a section of Ukrainian opinion will now simultaneously reveal both its reactionary character and its utopianism. Only the revolutionary orientation remains. The war will add a furious pace to the course of developments. In order not to be caught unprepared, it is necessary to take a timely and clear stand on the Ukrainian question." (Trotsky, *Writings, 1939-40*, p. 86.)

In 1941, exactly one year after Trotsky was assassinated by Stalin's agent, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, just as Trotsky had predicted. And as he had feared, many Ukrainians, especially the peasants, initially looked to Germany with a degree of hope, or at least resignation. But this soon changed as a result of the foul racist policies of the Nazis, with their madness of "inferior races". If the Soviet Union

had been invaded by American troops with cheap commodities in their baggage train, the outcome may well have been different. But Hitler's troops came not with cheap commodities but gas chambers. As a result, the mass of the population, not only in the Ukraine but throughout the USSR rallied to the fight against the Nazi invaders. In the end, the number of collaborators was relatively small, even in the Ukraine. Despite all the crimes of Stalinism, they saw it as the lesser evil.

It is important to see that Trotsky saw the Ukraine as a special case. He tentatively advanced the slogan of an "independent soviet Ukraine" for special reasons. He never advanced the same slogan for any other Republic of the USSR. Moreover, this slogan is no longer applicable to the Ukraine. After the collapse of the USSR the Ukraine—along with all the other former Republics—has gained independence. But after ten years' experience of the blessings of both independence and capitalism, the masses in the Ukraine now want neither. They have drawn their conclusions from the frightful economic and cultural collapse that resulted from this. There is now a powerful and growing mood in favour of returning to the Soviet Union. Of course, the Ukrainians want democratic rights, including autonomy to run their own affairs and respect for their just national aspirations, language and culture. They want to be treated like equals, not second-class "Little Russians". In other words, they want a genuine Socialist Federation, based upon Leninist principles. That is also our programme. To advance, under these concrete circumstances, the old slogan of an "independent soviet Ukraine" would be ridiculous. It would make us more backward than the average Ukrainian who understands that independence offers no solution.

Even more stupid was the attempt to apply Trotsky's old slogan in a mechanical way to Kosovo, as one sect tried to do. Having stumbled across a phrase in Trotsky's writings from the 1930s, they repeated it like parrots, without the slightest understanding of why Trotsky had put this slogan forward or what it meant. The dialectical method, used by both Lenin and Trotsky, sets out from the elementary proposition that "the truth is always concrete". We have already explained the specific

reasons why Trotsky in this particular instance (and only in this particular instance) tentatively advanced a particular slogan. *But the case of Kosovo, over half a century later, bears absolutely no relation to this case.*

We will explain elsewhere our attitude to the Kosovo question (we have already explained it many times before). *The dissolution of Yugoslavia—like the dissolution of the USSR—was an entirely reactionary development, which we cannot support.* And as always in the Balkans, behind each national movement there is always some big power or another pulling the strings. For the big powers, small nations are just so much small change to be cynically used and discarded at will. The decisive element in the equation was the manoeuvres of US imperialism, masquerading under the NATO flag. The KLA is an entirely reactionary movement which, in this case, acted as the local agency of American imperialism. In the given circumstances, as we repeated tirelessly from the beginning, the war in Kosovo—allegedly fought under the banner of "self-determination" for Kosovo—could only end up in the establishment of an American Protectorate in Kosovo. *And that is just what has happened.* If there is still anyone so blind that they are incapable of seeing this, we are sorry for them.

What has this got to do with self-determination, we would like to know? In what way does the present abomination assist the cause of the working class and socialism? The KLA, which is an organisation mainly of gangsters, involved in drug-smuggling, protection rackets and the systematic murder of Serbs, gypsies and other national minorities, is trying to install itself in power in the hope of getting independence later on. But this is impossible. *An independent Kosovo would mean war on the Balkans, involving not just Yugoslavia, but Albania, Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey.* For that reason the US imperialists are against it. But, as the saying goes, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread". What does it matter if this leads to all-out war on the Balkans? the sectarian shouts. All that matters is that Kosovo is independent!

Such madness would be bad enough. But then other sectarians, who are a bit crazier still, add a new and most original twist: "Independence, yes, but it must be soviet and socialist!"

It is really a pity that the writings of these wiseacres were not available to the general staff of NATO, who are doubtless in need of a bit of light entertainment from time to time. It would have the American generals helpless with laughter. The KLA was and is nothing without the US army behind it. It is, in effect, an auxiliary arm of the US military. As such, it has no independent significance. Only on the backs of the US army did the "heroic" KLA re-enter Kosovo. And only on US sufferance is it allowed to operate. If—as is possible—the KLA gets out of line, it will soon be dealt with. The reality of the situation is that imperialism now rules the roost in Kosovo, and that will remain the case for a long time, because they cannot easily withdraw. That is the concrete reality in Kosovo. This is the "self-determination" that has been brought about by American bombs. To have expected anything different was sheer stupidity. Yet there were those who called themselves Marxists who supported this action, nay, demanded it. One of these gentlemen (a "Marxist theoretician" if one is to believe what they say) actually wrote to Robin Cook, the British Foreign Minister, demanding that NATO bomb Yugoslavia. Yes, they were all in favour of "self-determination" and "independence" and even an "independent socialist Kosovo". But now, when confronted with the concrete reality of a new imperialist enclave in the Balkans and the gruesome spectacle of a formerly oppressed nationality murdering and oppressing other nationalities, what can they say?

The national question is precisely a trap for those who do not think things out to the end. Unless you have a firm class position, you will always end up exchanging one oppression for another. Kosovo is yet another example of this.

The national question and Stalinism

Lenin explained that the national question, at bottom, is a question of bread. The rapid economic development of the USSR made possible by the nationalised planned economy, signified a dramatic increase in the living standards and cultural level of all the peoples of the Soviet Union. The biggest improvement was achieved in the most backward republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Between 1917 and 1956, overall industrial production in the USSR increased by more than 30 times. But that of Kazakhstan increased 37 times, Kirghizia, 42 times and Armenia, 45 times. Similar growth was recorded in Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, etc. Yet despite these impressive achievements, national oppression still existed in the Soviet Union. The boasts of the Bureaucracy were unfounded. The following was typical:

"The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a type of multinational state never before known in history, is founded on the principles of fraternal co-operation and mutual trust. It is inhabited by socialist nations (?)—Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Uzbeks and others. These are nations of a new type (?) that have no parallel in history. They are nations of working people free from any kind of oppression and exploitation. They are linked together by moral and political unity and by genuine friendship of peoples building a new society. These nations have a new moral and political make-up that is manifested in a common culture, socialist in content and national in form. They have been educated by the Communist Party in the spirit of Soviet patriotism, friendship between the peoples and respect for the rights of other peoples, in the spirit of internationalism." (Introduction to Lenin's *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism*, p. 11.)

The sugary myths of the Bureaucracy that presented the relations between the peoples of the USSR in an idealised light bore little relation to the true state of affairs. This is not the place to deal in detail with the evolution of the Soviet Union after Lenin's death. We refer the reader to Ted Grant's book *Russia—from Revolution to Counter-revolution*, where the national question in the USSR is analysed at some length. Suffice it to say that the monstrous chauvinism of Stalin and the Bureaucracy served to undermine the solidarity that existed among the

different peoples of the Soviet Union, and thus paved the way for the break-up of the USSR which has been to the detriment of all the peoples. It is impossible to explain the speed with which the Soviet Union collapsed if one accepts the Stalinist propaganda that everything was just perfect. The truth is very different.

Under Stalin, the most monstrous acts were committed against national minorities in the USSR. The Purges finished the job began by Stalin in 1922—the liquidation of what remained of the Bolshevik Party. About the middle of 1937 an all-out assault was launched against the Communist Parties in every national Republic. A number of leaders of national Parties were included in the notorious show trial of Bukharin in March 1938. The leaders were usually accused of "bourgeois nationalism" and executed. After this, the way was open for mass arrests and deportations. The exact number of the victims of Stalin's Purges will probably never be known, but they were certainly numbered in millions. It was no comfort to the Ukrainians, Armenians and Georgians that the Russian people suffered no less grievously. Stalin's extreme Russian nationalism was summed up in a speech that was reprinted in Pravda on 25 May 1945, where he stated that the Russian people were "the most outstanding nation of all the nations of the Soviet Union" and the "guiding force" of the USSR. By implication, all other nationalities were second-class peoples who must accept the "guidance" of Moscow. Such a conception violates the letter and spirit of the Leninist policy on the national question.

The most monstrous crime committed by Stalin was the mass deportation of nationalities that was carried out during the Second World War. In the course of the War, no fewer than seven whole peoples were deported to Siberia and Central Asia under the most inhumane conditions. This was the fate of the Crimean Tartars, the Volga Germans, the Kalmyks, the Karachai, the Balkars, the Ingushi—and the Chechens. The NKVD—Stalin's secret police—rounded up everyone—men, women, children, old and sick, Communists and trade unionists—and ordered them onto cattle-trucks at gunpoint with whatever possessions they could carry. A large number died in transit

or upon arrival, from cold, hunger or exhaustion. Soldiers fighting at the front, even those who had been decorated for bravery, were likewise arrested and deported. The legacy of bitterness created by this act of cruel and arbitrary act of barbarity and national oppression has lasted till today. It is expressed in the break-up of the Soviet Union and the nightmare in Chechnya.

The drive to Russify the non-Russian peoples is shown by the composition of the leading bodies of the "Communist" Parties of the Republics. In 1952, only about half of all leading officials in the Central Asian and Baltic Republics were of local nationality. Elsewhere, the proportion was even lower. For example, in the Moldovian Party only 24.7 per cent were Moldovians, while only 38 per cent of recruits to the Tadjik Party in 1948 were said to be Tadjiks.

One of the most repulsive features of Stalinism was its anti-Semitism. The Bolshevik Party had always fought against anti-Semitism. Consequently, the Jews looked upon the October Revolution as their salvation. The Bolsheviks gave the Jews full liberty and equal rights. Their language and culture were encouraged. They even set up an autonomous republic, so that those Jews who wanted a separate homeland should have it. But under Stalin all the old racist filth revived. The Jews again became scapegoats. Already in the 1920s, Stalin was prepared to use anti-Semitism against Trotsky. Since Jews formed a large part of the Old Bolsheviks, they suffered disproportionately in the Purges. After the Second World War, there was an anti-Semitic campaign, only partially disguised by fig-leaves such as "Zionists" or "rootless cosmopolitans"—words which were merely code-words for "Jews". The notorious "Doctors' Plot" in which a number of Kremlin doctors were accused of trying to poison Stalin was the signal for a blatantly anti-Semitic campaign, since the doctors concerned were Jews. After the setting up of the state of Israel in 1948 (which was initially supported by Moscow), Jewish culture, hitherto tolerated, was severely repressed. All publications in Yiddish were closed down, as was the Yiddish theatre. In 1952, the year before Stalin died, virtually all the leaders of Jewish culture were shot, and a large

number of Jews arrested. Only the death of Stalin prevented a new Purge from taking place. Even today, elements of anti-Semitism are present in the so-called "Communist" Party of Zyuganov. This, in itself, is sufficient to demonstrate the abyss that separates Stalinism (and neo-Stalinism) from genuine Leninism.

Now, finally, all the chickens have come home to roost. The USSR has collapsed in a welter of wars and conflicts. "Life itself teaches", as Lenin was fond of quoting. And life itself has taught the peoples of the Soviet Union some very harsh lessons. The failure of Socialism in one Country has been carved on the noses of the Bureaucracy which is now busy transforming itself into a new class of capitalist exploiters. No-one can ignore the fact that in the modern epoch the world economy is the determining factor. "Socialism in one country" has been exposed as the reactionary utopia it is.

The present nightmare of economic collapse, wars and ethnic conflict are the poisonous heritage of decades of totalitarian bureaucratic rule from Moscow. However, capitalism offers no way out for the former Republics of the USSR. Formal independence has solved nothing for them. On the contrary. The disruption of the links that connected all of them to a common plan of production has led to a collapse of trade and economic growth, with terrible results for the masses. Most of the people would undoubtedly prefer the previous situation to the present misery. The reconstitution of the USSR would be a progressive step—but a return to the old bureaucratic system would not be a lasting solution. All the old contradictions would return and the result would be a new crisis. What is required is a return to the original programme and ideas of Lenin and Trotsky: a democratic regime of workers' (soviet) power in which the working people of all the Republics could establish a Socialist Federation based upon genuine equality and fraternity and no one nation predominated over the others.

Despite everything, the perspective of the socialist transformation of society still remains. In spite of the dreadful collapse of the past period, Russia is no longer the backward illiterate peasant country of 1917.

Once the working class take power into its hands, the prospect would exist of at least moving in the direction of socialism, although the final victory could only be achieved on a world scale. Nevertheless, Russia and the countries of the CIS have a gigantic productive potential, not least an enormous educated workforce—a key factor for the development of the new information-based technology. Capitalism has shown that it is unable to tap this potential. But a democratic nationalised planned economy could rapidly transform the whole situation.

On the basis of a modern economy, where the working class is now the overwhelming majority of society, a democratic socialist plan of production which would harness the immense natural, human and technological resources of such a huge territory would produce such abundance that in a relatively short time all the old national rivalries and suspicions would recede into insignificance, like a bad memory of the past. The road would be open for a free inter-mingling of the peoples in a free socialist Commonwealth, with all that would mean in terms of human cultural development. Such a vision of the future is infinitely more inspiring than the narrow and essentially misanthropic utopias of nationalism.

Part Five: The nation state today

In the classical period of the bourgeois revolution in Europe—that is, approximately, from 1780 to 1871—the establishment of the nation states played a relatively progressive role in breaking down local particularism, smashing the remnants of feudalism and laying the basis for the development of the productive forces on the ground of the national market. But in the present epoch, the situation has been

transformed. The means of production have long ago outgrown the narrow limits of the nation state. At the present time the nation state has ceased to fulfil any progressive role. Instead of developing the means of production it is an enormous brake on the means of production. That is implicitly acknowledged by the bourgeois themselves. The formation of the European Union was an admission on the part of the European bourgeois that the pigmy states of Europe could not compete in the past against the two giants of imperialist America and mighty Stalinist Russia. But the formation of the European Union has not abolished the nation state in Europe. On the contrary. The old national antagonisms continue to exist, in effect German imperialism at the present time dominates Europe with France as a second rate partner. But the national antagonisms continue to exist, and on the basis of a world slump they will be intensified.

The apologists of capitalism like to present a rosy picture of so-called globalisation, a world free from contradiction, blissfully moving towards ever greater freedom and liberalisation. But the truth is very different. The world has not become globalised in the way that they pretend. On the one hand it tends to break up into three rival imperialist blocks. The USA controls Canada and South America. In Asia there is the weaker yen block dominated by Japan. The European Union, dominated by Germany, also dominates large section of the colonial world in Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Caribbean. The antagonism between these rival imperialist blocks is as intense now as at any other time in history. In fact, at any other historical period it would have meant war between these blocks. A world war now appears to be ruled out because the advent of horrific means of destruction—nuclear, bacteriological and chemical weapons—means that the great powers would run the risk of mutual annihilation. But there is a ferocious struggle for markets, which is inevitably leading to wars in one region of the world after another. It is sufficient to mention the struggle for spheres of influence, markets and access to the fabulous mineral wealth of the region which has led to the catastrophic epidemic of wars in Central Africa. These are generally presented as the result of tribalism and mere barbarism on the part of the Africans. But in

practice behind most of these conflicts we can see the effects of the struggle between the USA, France and Britain to gain a foothold in Africa using their stooges in one camp or another.

The world described in Lenin's *Imperialism* is a fairly accurate reflection of the present world situation. There is an intense struggle for markets between the imperialist powers, even for the smallest market. This is very different to the cosy picture of a nice globalised world in which all the contradictions have been resolved. In reality the imperialist powers are fighting like dogs over a bone. One only has to glance at a map of Africa to see how the crimes of imperialism have brutally distorted the life and evolution of millions of human beings. Here frontiers are straight lines drawn on the map with the aid of a ruler. The Economist gives quite an accurate description of what really happened: "European bureaucrats casually agglomerated perhaps 10,000 different tribes and nations into just a few dozen colonial almost states." The present wars that are taking place in Central Africa are, in part, the heritage of this monstrous carve-up which cut across all natural geographic, linguistic and tribal divisions. There is horror without end in a whole series of countries: the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone with elements of barbarism. An article in The Economist referred to the war in Sierra Leone: "Children kill their parents, cannibal gangs roam the countryside, chaos rules, barbarism flourishes, Sierra Leone is the latest African country to dissolve into bloody chaos. And the outcome could be the worst yet."

The imperialist carve-up of Africa was a monstrous act. But now, over a hundred years later, a series of national states have been established in Africa. The task of giving a genuinely democratic, rational and progressive character to the different states of post-colonial Africa is a task that can only be carried out by the proletariat once it has finally overthrown the domination of imperialism and its local office boys. True independence and the ability to stand up against all attempts at foreign domination can only be achieved by uniting the divided body of Africa on the basis of a common socialist plan of production. The joint exploitation of the enormous natural wealth of the continent, its vast

agricultural potential and mineral resources, can transform the lives of the peoples and thus put an end to the nightmare of tribal and ethnic strife. However, the attempts to reshuffle the pack on a capitalist basis, to alter the existing frontiers through war, can only have the most destructive results and even lead directly to barbarism. To hold out the perspective before millions of desperate people that by altering the frontiers it is possible to solve their most pressing problems, is a vile deceit.

Nowhere is the reactionary nature of the misuse of the slogan of self-determination clearer than in Africa. The slogan of self-determination in Africa has been repeatedly manipulated for reactionary purposes, to weaken certain states by breaking away provinces rich in mineral resources which can then be more easily dominated by foreign powers and big multinational companies. In every single case there is an involvement of the imperialists. There is a titanic battle between the American and French imperialists for markets in Africa. And, imitating the big wolves, the little British poodle is also trying to get involved in Sierra Leone, although, predictably, with not much success.

For all the pretty speeches about liberalisation and democracy, the fact of the matter is that imperialism is carrying on the most ferocious oppression and exploitation of the ex-colonial peoples. The low price of raw materials has been an important component part in the economic growth of the West in the last 50 years. This itself shows the limitations of the nation state. The fact is that on the basis of capitalism, the achievement of formal independence, while in itself a progressive development, can solve nothing. The colonial nations, theoretically masters in their own house, are in practice entirely subordinate to the world market—that is, to imperialism.

After the Second World War we have seen an enormous upswing of the colonial revolution. This was perhaps the biggest movement of the oppressed people in human history. This was an enormous awakening of the colonial peoples, of China, of Africa, of the Middle East, Indonesia, of India, of Pakistan, This was an inspiring movement in

which countless millions of former colonial slaves rose against their masters, fighting for their national emancipation. The reasons why all Marxists supported the colonial revolution are obvious. It was a revolutionary movement, a blow against imperialism it aroused the masses and advanced the class struggle. Yet 50 years later, if one takes for example India and Pakistan, what has been resolved by the bourgeoisie? They have formal independence, but under capitalism, this turns out not to be independence at all. The ex-colonial countries are chained to the chariot of World Imperialism through the mechanisms of the world market. In fact, they are more enslaved now than they were 50 years ago. The only difference is that in place of the military, bureaucratic rule there is indirect rule, through the terms of trade—that is, the exchange of more labour for less—and through indebtedness.

Falling commodity prices and debt

The collapse in Asia found its reflection in world markets in a general fall of commodity prices including oil. In the course of 1998 alone, the price of oil fell from approximately \$20 a barrel to less than \$10 a barrel. This is a finished recipe for revolution in every single oil producing country. True, the price of oil has recovered since as a result of Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing countries agreeing to restrict production. But the effect of this cannot be long-lasting, especially as most of these countries depend exclusively upon oil for their foreign earnings. They have no other source of income. The whole history of cartels shows that sooner or later one country will start trying to get an advantage by selling more oil, and the whole thing breaks down. The same thing is true for all raw materials.

The ex-colonial countries are subjected to a dual exploitation. There are two points of the scissors. Through the debt the metropolitan countries also squeeze the colonial people. 10 years ago the accumulated debt of the Colonial World was approximately 800 billion dollars. All of that has been paid. From 1990 to 1997 just in the servicing of the debt, that's interest rates, the Colonial World paid 1.8 trillion dollars. That is more

than twice the original sum that was owed. And what has happened to the accumulated debt? In 1994 it stood at 1.4 trillion dollars and in 1997, it stood at 2.1 trillion dollars. That will never be paid.

In Nigeria oil is 95 per cent of foreign income. In 1997 Nigeria earned 12 billion US dollars from the sale of oil. In 1998 it was reduced to 6.8 billion. This horrendous decline has not been compensated for by the subsequent rise in oil prices. The instability that arises from the wild swings in the price of oil is mirrored in growing social and political instability. In any case, the poorest sections of society derive no benefit from the increased price of oil, but suffers the worst consequences when it falls. Nigeria, which used to be one of the richest countries in Africa is now one of the poorest countries in the world, according to the United Nations. This situation gives rise to dire social consequences which find their most acute expression in the growing antagonisms between different regions and ethnic groups.

If the workers do not succeed in taking power and transform Nigeria on socialist lines, a nightmare will be prepared. There are at least 120 ethnic groups in Nigeria, including the three main nations—the dominant Hausa in the North who are Islamic in religion and have traditionally dominated the state and oppressed the other two main nationalities, the Yorubas and the Ibos in the South and East of the country. The war of Biafra, in which the imperialists were involved in an attempt to split away the Ibo area, led to a terrible blood bath. If Nigeria was to break up on national lines it could be an even more ghastly slaughter, which would make the Biafran war seem insignificant by comparison. To advocate in such a situation the demand of self-determination not just for the main nations of Nigeria, but for tribal groups, as one sect has advocated, is the height of irresponsibility.

In Indonesia also the national question is very important and a correct position on this will be as important to the Indonesian Marxists as it was to the Russian Bolsheviks. If the proletariat of Indonesia does not succeed in showing a way forward through socialist revolution, the break-up of Indonesia will become a real possibility. Given the

explosive mixture of races and religions, the consequences would be too horrible to contemplate. The bloody events in East Timor were a warning to all the peoples of Indonesia. Now we see the emergence of murderous inter-ethnic strife in Aceh, Molucca and other islands. The forces of reaction in the tops of the army, the landowners, capitalists and members of the old regime, faced with the loss of their power and privileges will not hesitate to plunge Indonesia into a nightmare of chaos and bloodshed in order to divide and disorient the mass movement. Only by skilfully combining a programme that recognises the national rights and aspirations of all the peoples of the Archipelago with the programme of uniting the workers and poor peasants of all nationalities and religions to expropriate the landlords and capitalists, can a way out be found.

The colonial revolution today

The reason why the colonial revolution has taken such a distorted form, with monstrous aberrations like proletarian Bonapartism, is because of the delay of the proletarian revolution in the West on the one hand and on the other hand the absence of strong Marxist parties. If such parties existed, it would have been entirely possible to carry through the revolution on classical lines. After all, Russia in 1917 was an extremely backward country, a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country and at the same time an imperialist power. In a country of 150 million people, there were only 3.5 million industrial workers, 10 million if we take all sections of the class, transport, mining etc. And yet Lenin based himself on the working class and carried through a classical revolution in Russia.

There is no doubt that when strong Marxist parties are built in countries like Pakistan, or Mexico, there will be no question of the movement being side-tracked into guerrillaism and proletarian Bonapartism. The peasant war in underdeveloped countries should be an adjunct of the proletarian revolution, but it cannot play the main role. However, the masses in the underdeveloped countries cannot wait until mass parties are created, or until the British or French workers

take power. Therefore, violent outbreaks, uprising, even guerrilla wars, as we see in Colombia, are inevitable in the present epoch. In the absence of a Bolshevik party, the colonial revolution can take all kinds of peculiar forms. It goes without saying that Marxists will support any movement of the oppressed people against imperialism, especially where it leads to the abolition of landlordism and capitalism. But the only way in which the problems of the colonial peoples can be solved is through the soviet system brought into existence by Lenin and Trotsky in Russia in 1917. Under capitalism there is no way forward. The working class must take power into its own hands. By nationalising the means of production, under the democratic control and administration of the working class, a start can be made immediately to solve the most pressing problems of society.

However, under modern conditions this is insufficient. An internationalist policy is a fundamental requirement. Nationalism can offer no way forward. For example, if the workers and peasants of Ecuador take power—and this is entirely possible, as we saw in the magnificent movement last January—US imperialism will not remain with its arms folded. Washington does not want to get involved in a war on the ground in Latin America (or anywhere else) for fear of the effects at home. But it would undoubtedly do everything in its power to sabotage and wreck the revolution. Not only would it organise an economic blockade and support counter-revolutionary forces within Ecuador, but it would also incite neighbouring states to intervene against the revolution. There has already been one war in the past few years between Ecuador and Peru. US imperialism would not hesitate to prod Fujimori into a new armed conflict against the Ecuadorian revolution, if that became necessary.

The key to success is therefore a correct policy. That presupposes a Bolshevik leadership, standing firmly on the basis of proletarian internationalism. The founders of scientific socialism already pointed out in *The Communist Manifesto* that, *although national in form, the proletarian revolution is always international in essence*. This means that, although the workers of a particular country can and must first of

all settle accounts with its own bourgeoisie, it cannot remain on the basis of a purely national revolution. It must take steps to spread the revolution beyond its own frontiers, or face the prospect of defeat and destruction. For that very reason, nationalism and the socialist revolution are diametrically opposed and mutually incompatible concepts.

The only way, for example, that a revolutionary Ecuador could confront its enemies would be by immediately making an appeal to the workers and peasants of Peru, Venezuela, Colombia and the whole of Latin America to come to its aid. Such an appeal would not fall on deaf ears! The whole of Latin America is in a deep crisis. This is a most graphic expression of the reactionary character of private property of the means of production and the nation state. Once the revolution starts in any country of Latin America it will tend to spread. This process would be immeasurably assisted by a conscious internationalist policy. In reality, the national states of Latin America are of an artificial character. By perpetuating the division of people who share a common history, culture and, with the exception of Brazil, a common language, we are perpetuating the Balkanisation of Latin America, that is, the prior condition for the enslavement of millions of people and the plundering of a potentially prosperous and advanced continent by the imperialist robbers.

Long ago Simon Bolivar advanced the prospect of a united Latin America. On a capitalist basis that idea remained an unattainable dream. But on the basis of workers' power, a Socialist Federation of Latin America would mean the pooling of all the vast resources of the continent for the benefit of all its peoples. This, in turn, would have an electrifying effect on the workers of North America where 20 per cent of the population of the USA are now Hispanic. The basis would be laid for the victory of socialism, north and south of the Rio Grande, and therefore on a world scale.

The Palestinian Question

The national question is crucial to the Middle East, above all the Palestinian question. After decades of national oppression at the hands of the Israeli imperialists, the Palestinian masses have a burning sense of injustice, expressed in the desire for their own homeland. That is their inalienable right, which Marxists will uphold and fight for. However, the experience of the last thirty years should provide us with some necessary lessons. The petty bourgeois nationalist leaders of the PLO held out the idea that they could obtain self-determination by means of a so-called armed struggle against Israel. In practice this boiled down to simple acts of individual terrorism, bombings, kidnappings, hijacking aircrafts, etc. These actions did not weaken Israel in the slightest degree. On the contrary. To the degree that they persuaded ordinary Israelis that the intention was to "drive the Jews into the sea", they pushed the population into the arms of reaction. Far from weakening the Israeli state, they strengthened it.

The tactics of the PLO leaders led the Palestinians to one defeat after another. First, they were crushed by King Hussein of Jordan in 1970, although they could easily have taken power in that country. Subsequently they repeated the same story in the Lebanon, and helped to provoke a bloody civil war and Israeli and Syrian intervention into the bargain. And while they continued to meddle with the disastrous tactics of individual terrorism, they had no strategy for an uprising of the masses on the West Bank itself. When the Intifada finally broke out, Arafat and the PLO leadership played no real role in it. The Palestinian youth had to face the might of the Israeli military machine, unarmed except for sticks and stones. Despite this, the mass movement on the West Bank did more for the Palestinian cause in a few months than Arafat and co. had achieved in thirty years.

The "concessions" offered by Tel Aviv were not at all the result of the actions of the PLO exiles. They were partly the result of the Intifada, which shook Israeli society and attracted the sympathetic attention of the whole world. But they were also the reflection of the new world situation. Since the collapse of Stalinism, the world balance of forces has been changed. The USA has achieved a crushing dominance on a

world scale. This means that Washington is no longer so dependent on Israel as during the Cold War. US imperialism has vital economic and strategic interests in the Middle East, which means that it has an interest in shoring up Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia, and in maintaining stability in the region. Therefore Washington has put pressure on Tel Aviv to reach a compromise with the Palestinians and the neighbouring Arab states. And Arafat jumped with alacrity to accept what was offered. Having failed for decades to advance the Palestine cause one step, the PLO leaders were greedy to enjoy the "fruits of office" which had been conquered by the people. *What they accepted amounted to a betrayal of the national struggle of the Palestinians.*

Washington hoped to establish stability in the area by forcing through a compromise. However, the national question is notoriously volatile and complex, and explosive situations created by imperialism in the past cannot always be easily defused by imperialism when it changes its mind. Just as British imperialism created a Frankenstein monster in the North of Ireland, which it cannot now control, so the American imperialists now find that, having built up a client state in Israel, the puppet does not always dance when the strings are pulled. The Israeli ruling class has its own interests, which may, or may not, correspond to those of the USA. Thus, the so-called Peace Deal in the Middle East is in serious difficulties. None of the fundamental problems have been solved.

As predicted by the Marxists, the deal signed by Arafat with the Israelis was a trap for the Palestinian people. This is not self-determination but only a miserable caricature and a fraud. The new Palestinian entity is a truncated abortion, with Gaza separated from the West Bank and Jerusalem still firmly under Israeli control. There are all sorts of humiliating conditions attached. To make matters worse, large numbers of Jewish settlers remain and act as a continual provocation to the Palestinians. In effect, the so-called Palestinian Authority is just a tool of Israel, which in practice, continues to dominate. The conditions of the Arab masses on the West Bank and Gaza are probably worse than before, with mass unemployment, especially among the youth. Israel

can turn the screw at any time by closing the border, thus depriving the Palestinians who work in Israel of employment and bread. To make things worse, Arafat and his gang have formed themselves into a privileged bureaucratic elite who act as policemen for Tel Aviv, while filling their pockets at the expense of ordinary Palestinians.

The deal that was brokered with a fanfare of trumpets under the pressure of Washington is breaking down. With the fall of Netanyahu and the election of a Labour government, Washington hoped that it would finally succeed in imposing its will. But the pressure of the Jewish settlers, as we predicted, has led to one crisis after another. The government of Tel Aviv, having failed to make any progress with the Palestinians, attempted to negotiate a deal with Syria over the Golan Heights. But no sooner was the question of handing back the Golan heights raised than there were mass demonstrations in Israel against it. The talks with Syria broke down, leading to a new outbreak of hostilities in South Lebanon.

Most seriously, the growing discontent of the masses on the West Bank and in Gaza threatens to provoke a new Intifada. This is implicit in the situation. A new Intifada would contain a clear revolutionary potential, on one condition: that it possesses a firm revolutionary leadership that stands for an internationalist solution. On the basis of nationalism, no solution is possible. A far-sighted leadership would strive to link the revolutionary movement of the Palestinians with the movement of the Israeli working class. It would explain that the common enemy of both Arab and Israeli working people are the Israeli bankers and capitalists. It would make clear that the Palestinian revolutionary movement is not directed against ordinary Israeli citizens. It would systematically seek points of support in Israeli society: among the students and progressive youth, in the factories and army barracks. The central idea must be the necessity for a fundamental transformation of society, not only in Palestine but also in Israel, as the only way out of the impasse.

The fate of the Palestinians has been a terrible tragedy. For more than 30 years, the Palestinians have been fighting for self-determination and where has it led on a nationalist basis? *To a complete catastrophe and a betrayal.* The lesson is clear and must be learnt: the national problem in Palestine cannot be solved on a capitalist basis. The only way to solve that problem would be by revolutionary means, by a socialist revolution in Israel and socialist revolutions in all the surrounding Arab countries, beginning with Jordan where the PLO could have taken power 30 years ago, if the PLO leaders had not betrayed the revolution. The only way to solve that problem is on the basis of the Socialist Federation of the Middle East with full autonomy for the Palestinians and also for the Israelis.

Petty bourgeois cynics will say that this is not "practical". But have we not seen enough of the kind of "practical" solutions advocated by these smart-Alecs over the past thirty years—and not just in the Middle East. Everywhere, without exception, these "practical" policies—which boil down to the madness of individual terrorism and nationalist stupidity—have brought nothing but disasters and betrayals. We see this yet again in the capitulation of the Kurdish nationalists leaders of the PKK and the sell-out of Mandela and Mbeki of the aspirations of the black proletariat in South Africa. Lenin was a thousand times correct when he poured scorn on the so-called "practical" policies of the nationalists. The plain fact is that the only way out for the Palestinians is on the basis of a revolutionary, internationalist class policy. Any other solution spells new disasters. *The only really practical programme is the programme of socialist revolution.*

Self-determination as a reactionary slogan

Marxism has nothing in common with pacifism. We are not opposed to all wars in principle, and recognise that some wars are progressive. But "all that glitters is not gold". And not every war that is fought under the banner of self-determination has a progressive character. In each particular case, Marxists must examine the precise class content of a war, or national struggle, determine what interests lie behind it and

what implications it has for the cause of the working class and world socialism. Only then is it possible to determine our attitude to a war, to say whether it is progressive or reactionary, and to take up a position in line with this determination.

During the American Civil War, would it have been correct to support the Confederacy on the grounds of the right to self-determination? The question answers itself. Under the given conditions, the fight to maintain the Union had a progressive and semi-revolutionary character. By imposing its will on the South, the Northern states undoubtedly violated the South's right to determine its destiny freely. But such considerations are entirely secondary when compared to the fundamental issues, that is, the class issues. Who was behind the demand for self-determination in this case? The slave-owners of the South. The working class had to support the North, because the maintenance of the Union furthered the development of capitalism and therefore the proletariat. The freeing of the black slaves was a necessary and progressive step in this direction. This case is very clear and no sane person would argue with it. But there are many other instances in which the demand for self-determination is advanced for entirely reactionary purposes, and must be decisively rejected. For example, the demand of the Northern League in Italy that they should have the right to break away and constitute a separate state has a clearly reactionary character.

These examples are quite sufficient to establish the fact that national aspirations and the right to self-determination are not, and cannot be, absolute. Such a demand, in a given historical context, may have a progressive character. But it may be entirely reactionary and retrograde. It is necessary in each case to examine the concrete content, determine which class interests are involved, and work out what effects a particular movement would have on the general interests of the working class and the fight for socialism on an international scale. Although the national question is very complicated, it is usually sufficient to pose the question in concrete terms to arrive at the correct position. In 1991, at the very beginning of the collapse of Yugoslavia, the

authors of the present document participated in a debate with some self-styled Marxists, in the course of which one sectarian interrupted Ted Grant, with a shout from the back of the hall: "What's your position on self-determination for Croatia?" Ted swiftly retorted with an appropriate counter-question: "What do you mean? You mean, do we support the Ushtasi or the Chetniks?" (that is to say the Serb fascists or the Croat fascists). The heckler didn't ask any more questions.

Anyone who has any knowledge of the history of wars and diplomacy (the two things are closely related) will know that it is necessary to cut through the fog of lies and half-truths whereby one side or another attempts to fool public opinion in relation to the nature of a war, and to lay bare the real war aims of the contending parties. Woe betide the person who approaches a war from the standpoint of the slogans of diplomacy! The slogan of self-determination may have a progressive and revolutionary content, as Lenin explained. But not in every case. There have been many cases when the slogan of self-determination has been used for reactionary purposes, as a convenient disguise for imperialist intrigues. During the First World War, British imperialism sent its agent Lawrence of Arabia to stir up the Arabs against Turkey, promising them self-determination. London promised Palestine to the Arabs, and simultaneously to the Jews, and then promptly betrayed both of them by installing itself as the new colonial master after the War. The monstrous Treaty of Versailles that enslaved Europe and prepared the conditions for a new world war, also inscribed on its banner the right of nations to self-determination. Later, Hitler used the slogan of the right to self-determination of the Sudetenland Germans, Croats, Albanians and others to further his policy of imperialist expansion and enslavement of the peoples. His police chief Heinrich Himmler wrote: "...In dealing with the foreign peoples in the East we must foster as many single national groups as possible; Poles, Jews (sic!), Ukrainians, White Russians, Kashchuben and as many other small nationalities as can be found."

There is nothing particularly new in this. The Romans long ago worked out the simple formula later brilliantly used by the British ruling class everywhere it set foot: "Divide et impera"—"Divide and rule". The policy of dividing states, and of setting one nationality or race against another has long been an essential tool of imperialism. By contrast, the revolutionaries have striven to unite the working class and all oppressed people against the exploiters everywhere.

The national question today is much more complicated than in Lenin's day. Lenin used to give the example of Norway, which split away from Sweden in 1905. Norway had been ceded to Sweden as part of the reactionary settlement agreed by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon. This was not a voluntary union. The Norwegians opposed it and had to be forcibly incorporated by the Swedish army. Although the Swedish and Norwegian languages are fairly close, and the Norwegians enjoyed considerable autonomy, they still smarted under Swedish domination. In August 1905, the Norwegian parliament resolved that the Swedish king was no longer king of Norway and the people voted overwhelmingly in a referendum for separation from Sweden. Of this Lenin wrote: "This example shows us on what grounds cases of the secession of nations are possible, and actually occur, under modern economic and political relationships, and the form secession assumes under conditions of political freedom and democracy." (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, February-May 1914, vol. 20.)

The fact that the Swedish workers defended the democratic right of the Norwegian people to secede disarmed the Swedish reactionaries who, after some initial hesitation, decided not to intervene. This served to consolidate the solidarity between the Swedish and Norwegian workers. But, although Lenin regarded this case as a model of how the national question should be settled, it is, in fact, an historical exception. The form in which the national question presents itself at the present time has a different character altogether. And Lenin himself frequently pointed out that Marxists take up a position on this according to the concrete conditions of each case. What happened in Norway in 1905

was a simple matter, and child's play in comparison to situations like Northern Ireland, the Lebanon or the Balkans today. Norway was an ethnically homogenous country with no such complications. The Norwegians just passed a vote in the Parliament and they got independence. That was a simple matter. It bears no relation whatsoever to a situation like Northern Ireland, where the population is split and the withdrawal of British troops would have meant a religious war between Catholics and Protestants. An even clearer example is the recent history of the Balkans, as we shall see.

A malicious misrepresentation of Marxism

As we have shown, from the standpoint of Marxist theory, the national question is not something new that was invented yesterday. There is a huge volume of literature on the national question in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Yet, paradoxically, there is probably no area of Marxist theory that is so poorly understood and so maliciously misrepresented. It is better not even to talk about the Stalinists, whose theory of socialism in one country of itself signifies a direct abandonment of the Marxist standpoint. Incredible as it may seem, today every single one of the sectarian groups that call themselves Marxists and "Trotskyists" have a radically false position on the national question.

In the case of the Balkans almost all of the sects supported either one group of gangsters or another, allegedly on the basis of supporting Lenin's position on the national question. In particular, their alleged support of "self-determination" for Kosovo led most of these people to capitulate to US imperialism and become the most enthusiastic cheerleaders for the KLA. From the very beginning we warned that this stance would inevitably lead to the most reactionary conclusions. We predicted that, far from self-determination, NATO's reactionary war against Yugoslavia could only end up in the establishment of a US "protectorate" in Kosovo. Today we invite those ladies and gentlemen who so enthusiastically backed the KLA to indicate whether they consider that the present situation has advanced or harmed the cause of

socialism on the Balkans. *From a Marxist point of view there is not an atom of progressive content in all this.* Not only has US imperialism established a firm base for its operations in the Balkans, but the KLA has itself engaged in massive "ethnic cleansing" and pogroms against defenceless Serb men, women and children. To such monstrosities does the abandonment of a class position on the national question lead.

None of this is new, of course. In the case of Ireland these same self-styled "Marxists" supported the IRA in its campaign of individual terrorism for the last 30 years. This was an abject capitulation to nationalism, in complete violation of the most elementary principles of Leninism. And where has it all led? After a generation of so-called "armed struggle", with more than 3,000 dead, the IRA has not gained a single one of its aims. The working class in Northern Ireland is more bitterly divided now than at any time in the past. Catholic and Protestant children live and study separately. The two communities are separated by walls and razor-wire. And the prospect of the reunification of Ireland is further off now than ever.

In Afghanistan, the same people scandalously defended the so-called Mujahadeen "freedom fighters" in their war against the Stalinist regime in Kabul—once again alleging as an excuse the "right of self-determination" of the Afghan people. This same "right" was also defended by US imperialism and feudal-reactionary Pakistan, who armed and financed these counter-revolutionary gangsters. Now the affair has ended in the victory of Islamic-fundamentalist reaction in its most nightmarish form. In what way can the victory of undisguised reaction under the Taliban be justified by referring to the right of self-determination?

These are only a few examples to show where the abandonment of the Marxist position on the national question inevitably leads. The sum total of the wisdom of the sects amounts to a parrot-like repetition of the same phrase: "After all, didn't Lenin advocate self-determination?" Having read a couple of lines of Lenin these sectarians imagine themselves to be great geniuses. One is forcibly reminded of the old

English proverb "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing". They are like a not very bright schoolkid who shows off his knowledge by constantly repeating "ABC". But after "ABC" there are other letters in the alphabet. Lenin, as we shall see, was far from supporting the right to self-determination in each and every case, but carefully distinguished between what is progressive and what is reactionary, basing himself on a careful study of the concrete conditions.

Paradoxically, those who have long ago gone down that road, and ditched the class and internationalist position of Marx and Lenin in favour of petty-bourgeois nationalism, have attempted to criticise the genuine Marxists for allegedly departing from the "correct" line. To such critics we say only this: that we are proud of the fact that only the Marxist tendency represented by *Socialist Appeal* and *In Defence of Marxism* has kept its head and maintained the classical position of Marxism on this question—and on all others. Our record speaks for itself. We are not ashamed to re-publish today anything we have written for the past fifty years. The problem is that those who speak in the name of Lenin on this question merely demonstrate their ignorance of the position of the Bolshevik Party on the national question. The purpose of this document is to put the record straight. It is, of course, not addressed to the sects who are incapable of learning anything.

Marxists and the Irish question

As on the question of the Balkans, so on the question of Northern Ireland, the Marxist tendency can be proud of its record. For 30 years we have kept our heads and consistently defended a class position. The same cannot be said of others. When "the Troubles" exploded in Ireland in 1969 the Communist Party, the SWP, the Mandelites of the IMG, and all the other sects *supported the sending of British troops to the north of Ireland, on the grounds that they were going to protect the Catholics*. They would all prefer to forget this nowadays. But facts are stubborn things. The Marxists in the Labour Party were the only ones who denounced it. We were the only ones who moved a resolution at Labour Party Conference in the Autumn of 1969 opposing the sending

of British troops. We said that the British army could not play a progressive role, that the troops were being sent to defend the interests of imperialism.

These same ladies and gentlemen who supported the sending of British troops to Northern Ireland later went to the other extreme, forming the so-called Troops Out Movement. All of them capitulated to the individual terrorism of the IRA. This so-called armed struggle went on for three decades. In 1970, the IRA thought they could defeat British imperialism by force of arms and bomb Northern Ireland into accepting unity with the South. We pointed out at the time that this was impossible. A united Ireland could never have been achieved on this basis, because the Protestants were armed and would fight to resist it. If it came to a war between the Catholics and the Protestants, the IRA would be defeated and the Catholics would be driven out. All that would happen would be a re-drawing of the frontier. But this could not be done that peacefully. It would mean a terrible slaughter, on the lines of what we have recently seen in the former Yugoslavia. This would end up with a 100 per cent Protestant regime in the North, and a 100 per cent Catholic regime in the South. Under these circumstances both North and South would probably end up as military police dictatorships. That would be the only possible outcome of an attempt to solve the Irish question on a capitalist basis.

The lessons of Yugoslavia are a terrible confirmation of this. Precisely for that reason, there was, and is, no question of London withdrawing its troops from the North. It is an irony of history that British imperialism now has no interest in maintaining its hold on Northern Ireland. Unlike in 1922, there are neither economic nor strategic reasons for remaining there. But the problem is that withdrawal would provoke a bloody chaos which would spill over into the rest of the United Kingdom. This is the nightmare scenario which London cannot permit to happen. Therefore they are condemned to remain. And if the IRA continues to fight for another 30 years, it will have just the same result. The policy of the IRA has led to a complete impasse with negative results for the working class and socialism. What was the

result? Three thousand dead, a whole generation lost, the working class entirely split on religious lines. The western media talked a lot about the Berlin wall that divided Berlin. But nobody talks of the wall that divides Belfast between Protestants and Catholics. They do not speak to each other, they cannot meet. This is the so-called "peace line", the most monstrous expression of the madness of national divisions. This was the direct result of the IRA's campaign of individual terror.

The Marxist tendency stood on a class basis and fought for the unity of the working class. This was possible. In the factories in 1969 there was an instinctive movement of the workers for unity which could have succeeded, if a conscious leadership had been present. We demanded the formation of a workers' militia based on the unions—the only organisations which still united Catholics and Protestants. Of course, in the concrete circumstances, it would have to be armed for defence against the sectarian lunatics on both sides. Our slogan was a revolutionary slogan "For a united armed workers' defence force!" This was the only way to combat the sectarians. The ultra-lefts found this amusing. They always find the Leninist position funny. But then when Lenin was alive, the petty bourgeois nationalists also used to ridicule his position on the national question as utopian. Lenin answered these "practical" people with the contempt they so richly deserved.

And what do they now say about the situation in Northern Ireland? The IRA agreed to a truce, for the simple reason that the so-called "armed struggle" was getting nowhere. The idea that they could expel the British army by such means was completely unrealistic, as we pointed out from the beginning. And now where has it all ended? Like the leaders of the PLO in Palestine and Mandela and Mbeki in South Africa, the leaders of Sinn Fein exchanged the bomb and the gun for "politics"—that is to say, for a smart suit and a Minister's salary. They are quite prepared to abandon the cause for which their supporters sacrificed everything, for the sake of a nice career and bourgeois respectability. This is where the so-called "armed struggle" (i.e. individual terrorism) always ends up. The Russian Marxists always characterised the terrorists as "Liberals with bombs". Now we can see

the literal truth of this assertion. Thirty years later, the IRA was no further along the road of a United Ireland. Incredibly, the leaders of Sinn Fein (the political arm of the IRA) signed up to the Good Friday Agreement, which specifically ratifies the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. The "concession" of the so-called "Cross-Border Agreement" with the South was merely a sop to republican aspirations, since the North-South body has no significant powers.

Even this deal was too much for many Unionists, who finally dug their heels in over the so-called question of "decommissioning of arms" (in practice, disarmament by the IRA). This has caused a crisis, since the IRA has no serious intention of disarming. The guns are necessary, apart from any other consideration, because the Republican movement has a long tradition of splits and internecine feuds in which yesterday's leaders become today's customers for the undertaker. Already breakaway groups like the "Continuity IRA" have staged bombings to show that they are still in business. By demanding immediate disarmament, the Unionists were clearly engaging in a provocative action, which was bound to be rejected by the IRA. This has led to the breakdown of the Good Friday Agreement and the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the reintroduction of direct rule from London.

Our allegedly utopian policies in relation to Ireland correspond to those of Lenin and Marx which we have already referred to. A particularly shameful role in Ireland has been played by the sects in Britain and internationally on the question of Ireland. Pursuing a so-called "practical" policy, they shamefully tail-ended the IRA, completely abandoning any pretence of a class position and acting as the unpaid advocates for terrorism. This was all the more despicable because they ran no risks themselves. This amounted to a capitulation to petty bourgeois nationalism and individual terrorism, which in every single case led to a disaster on the national question. Lenin spoke with utter contempt about these alleged "practical" policies on the national question. Life itself has shown that the so-called practical policy of capitulating to the petty bourgeois is not a practical policy at all. It is a

shameful betrayal of the working class and in every case leads to disaster. Let us be clear about this. Marxists are for the unification of Ireland. *But the unification of Ireland now is further away than in the whole history of Ireland. That is the only result of the tactics of individual terrorism and petty bourgeois nationalism for the last thirty years.*

At the moment of writing, the situation is highly unstable. It is possible that, having looked into the abyss, both sides may draw back. Some compromise may be struck involving the handing over of some weapons by the IRA. If there is a renewal of hostilities, the British will crack down viciously. Moreover, such a development would be deeply unpopular with both sides of the sectarian divide. After 30 years of bloodshed, both Catholics and Protestants are war-weary. The IRA would run the risk of losing many people as a result of denunciations. It is not an inviting prospect. But the acceptance of a compromise will solve nothing fundamental. The question will inevitably be raised in the ranks of the republicans: "What were we fighting and dying for for the last 30 years?"

There will undoubtedly be the beginning of a ferment in the ranks of Republicanism. The most thinking elements, who are critical of the policies of the leadership but do not want to return to the blind alley of individual terrorism, will be more open to the alternative of class politics. The only way out is to return to the ideas of James Connolly, to the banner of socialism. That is the only banner that can unite the working class, Orange and Green, North and South, and also across the Irish Sea, in England, Scotland and Wales, in struggle against our common enemy: the banks, the monopolies and British imperialism. Not a return to the "armed struggle" but a return to the best traditions of Irish Labour, to Marxism—that is the way forward. In the past, the idea was put forward: "First solve the question of the border, then we'll talk about socialism!" But the experience of three decades has shown this to be a false way of posing the question. Now we are entitled to say: the solution of the tasks left over from Ireland's bourgeois democratic revolution—by which we mean Irish reunification—can only be solved

by the proletariat coming to power in both Ireland and Britain. The Irish bourgeoisie has shown itself to be incapable of solving the question. God knows they have had long enough to do so! It is time to look in an entirely different direction. Marx long ago explained that the fate of the revolution in Ireland and Britain were inextricably linked. Today that affirmation is more true than ever.

Euskadi

In Spain there is the national question of the Basques, Catalans and Galicians. For decades under the Franco dictatorship the languages, rights and national aspirations of these peoples were crushed underfoot. It was natural that the overthrow of the old regime should give a powerful impulse to the national movements of the nationalities. Not for nothing did Trotsky say that the nationalism of oppressed nationalities was only the outer shell of an immature Bolshevism. With correct policies, tactics and methods, it is possible to win the best of the nationalist youth for Marxism. But the prior condition is that a firm position must be maintained. While standing firm in defence of the oppressed nationality, it is necessary to criticise the confused ideas of nationalism.

A big part of the problem here is the collapse of the moral authority of Marxism on a world scale. Marx, Lenin and Trotsky had a correct position on the national question. This could easily find a response in the ranks of the militant nationalists. But the nationalist youth are repelled by the crass policies of the reformist leaders of the workers' organisations who inevitably adopt the line of the ruling class on the national question as on every other issue.

The Second International, as we have seen, had a very confused position on the national question. We saw the results of that in 1914. In Spain, the PSOE even in its best period had a very poor understanding of the national question, despite the fact that it had a solid base of support in the Basque Country. Now, of course, the right wing leaders of the PSOE have abandoned all pretence at a socialist position on the national question, just as they have abandoned it in relation to

everything else. When he was in power Felipe Gonzalez and other "socialist" leaders actively backed the dirty war conducted by the secret services of the Spanish state against ETA. No wonder the Basque youth are repelled by "Socialism" in this guise.

In the past it would have been natural for the militant nationalist youth to gravitate towards the Communist Party. The revolutionary banner of October and the Bolshevik Party offered a way out on revolutionary lines. But as a result of the crimes of Stalinism, the movement has been thrown back. The ideological decay of Stalinism has produced all manner of confused and grotesque distortions—Maoism, Castroism, guerrillaism—which have muddied the water and introduced the most frightful confusionism into the minds of the radicalised youth. Now with the collapse of Stalinism, if anything, the confusion is still greater, with the spread of all kinds of anarchist and terrorist moods. Ideas which belong to the prehistory of the movement and which were long ago answered by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, have re-emerged, disguised as "new and modern" theories, to further addle the brains of confused individuals.

To all this must be added the monstrous degeneration of the so-called Fourth International after the death of Trotsky. The complete abandonment of the most elementary ideas of Lenin and Trotsky by the so-called "Trotskyists" is nowhere clearer than on the national question. The sects have flirted with every petty bourgeois nationalist and terrorist outfit in the world, acting as cheer-leaders and unpaid (and usually unwanted) "advisors" to the IRA, ETA, PLO or ANC. In those (mercifully few) cases where they got some influence, they merely served to reinforce the prejudices of the youth and led them to disaster. This was the case, for example, in Argentina and Uruguay in the 1970s, when these elements played with terrorism and so-called "urban guerrillaism". The result of these adventures was the crushing of the movement and the victory of the most murderous military dictatorships. As a result, a large number of young cadres lost their lives and the revolution was set back for years.

Given the total lack of authority of Marxism, it is logical that young people in the Basque country, repelled by Stalinism and Social Democracy, look for an alternative in ETA and Herri Batasuna. There are some very heroic young people in the ranks of the radical Basque Nationalists. Our task is to establish a dialogue with these people and convince them that the only way to achieve their goal is by fighting for a socialist revolution. Inevitably, the best elements will come to this conclusion. We must help them to do so, by friendly and patient argument, and by uniting in action on all questions where we have principled agreement, while stressing the need for the unity in struggle of workers and youth throughout the Spanish state.

It seems to be a law that mass nationalist movements, like Herri Batasuna, when they grow to a certain size always tend to split along class lines. Such movements always have a heterogeneous composition. On the one hand there may be extreme right wing elements—usually, though not always, associated with the most "militarist" wing—but the left wing will contain many honest fighters and potential revolutionaries. About 30 years ago, at the sixth congress of ETA, there was a split to the left. In the absence of a real Marxist alternative the Mandelites oriented towards ETA and won many of them over. Thousands of good fighters moved towards Trotskyism. These were good people. With a correct policy and perspective a real Marxist organisation of 10,000 people in Spain could have played a crucial role. But with the false policies of the Mandelites, that position was lost. These petty bourgeois threw away an opportunity. and have paid for that crime. They no longer exist. They have been liquidated, along with all the other sects. Thus, the road is open for the development of a genuine Marxist tendency in Euskadi. It is clear that many of the best cadres for this will come from the ranks and the periphery of the abertzales (radical Basque nationalists).

With the signing of the truce, there has been a development in Herri Batasuna, they have changed their name to *Euskal Herritarrok* (Basque Citizens). This is quite a big movement. There was genuine enthusiasm for EH. But now things have begun to change. The political

leaders of EH opportunistically linked themselves to the party of the big Basque bourgeoisie, the PNV. As always, the petty bourgeois nationalists act as a mechanism to subordinate the working class to "our" bourgeoisie. But every Basque worker knows that the Basque bankers and industrialists are just as bad as the Spanish capitalists. There is nothing to choose between them. All honest members of EH must be repelled by this monstrous bloc with the PNV.

To make matters worse, the truce has now broken down. There is the prospect of more terrorist actions, met by more state repression and more political prisoners. The old infernal cycle that has poisoned Basque social and political life for decades without achieving its declared aims. On this road, there is no way out for Euskadi! Now that ETA has called off the truce, there must be a ferment of discussion in the ranks. Without doubt they will be looking for an explanation and a way out. It is necessary to explain to them in a firm but friendly way that there cannot be independence for the Basque Country on a capitalist basis. In order to succeed, there has to be a revolution in both Spain and France. And in order to achieve this, we must adopt a class and internationalist position and abandon the blind alley of individual terrorism.

The Marxists of the Spanish state have a very proud record of standing on a firm principled class position. They have consistently defended the national rights of the Basques—including the right to self-determination. Recently, they produced a very good document on the national question in Basque and Spanish. Our books which were both translated into Spanish were enthusiastically reviewed in Egin the daily newspaper of Herri Batasuna. This shows that there is a layer of the Basque Nationalists which are looking towards the Marxist tendency. It is possible that the Marxists can win over a sizeable layer of militant youth, on the basis of an energetic campaign.

From the standpoint of Marxism, the national problem is a challenge, but also an opportunity. Trotsky one said that the nationalism of oppressed peoples was only the "outer shell of an immature

Bolshevism". If we take a principled stand on the problems facing nationally oppressed people, energetically fighting against all forms of national oppression, while firmly linking the solution of the problem to the perspective of the socialist transformation of society, it will be possible to win the best of them to Marxism and build a strong organisation that can offer a real solution to the national problem of Euskal Herria on a revolutionary socialist basis.

The national question and the Balkans

The most appalling example of the consequences of a false position on the national question is the fate of the former Yugoslavia. The bloody morass of wars, chauvinist madness and "ethnic cleansing" in what was an advanced and developed European state ought to give food for thought to those who constantly beat the drum for so-called "self-determination" as a universal panacea. Unfortunately, it appears that some people are organically incapable of thinking about anything. On the question of the Balkans, the Marxist tendency represented by *Socialist Appeal* and *In Defence of Marxism* has kept its head over the past decade, taking a firm Leninist position in relation to Balkans. *We explained from the beginning that there was not one atom of progressive content in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia* (see *Crisis in the Balkans: a Marxist analysis* for a full collection of our texts on the issue). By contrast, every single one of the sects either supported the Croats, or the Serbs, or poor little Bosnia, like poor little Belgium, or ran around with KLA flags, *and every single one of them fell into a reactionary position.*

Western propaganda—whether in relation to Africa, or Russia or the Balkans—tries to portray these struggles, as the product of the national character, alleged backwardness, race etc. It is alleged that the Serbs, Croats, Bosnians etc. cannot live together, hate each other, and all the rest of it. This is a lie. During the Second World War, there was a terrible conflict between Serbs and Croats. In which, by the way, the Serbs were the victims, viciously persecuted by the Croatian fascist Ustasi regime whose brutality caused even the German nazis to

protest. Yet under Tito, the national problem in Yugoslavia was largely resolved. On the basis of the nationalised planned economy and the development of the productive forces and the fairly intelligent policy that Tito conducted, giving autonomy to each of the republics which tried to avoid one nationality having more power than another, the problem receded into the background. There was an intermingling of the peoples; the tensions between Serbs and Croats declined, almost to nothing. This was predicated upon an annual growth rate of 10-11 per cent rising living standards, because as Lenin explains, in essence, the national question is a question of bread.

With the crisis of Stalinism, the emergence of mass unemployment in Yugoslavia of inflation in the 1970s all the old demons began to re-emerge. Now, if one looks at the history of the last 50 years in particular one has to draw the conclusion that neither the bourgeoisie nor the Stalinists can solve the national question. Tito succeeded for a while, but chauvinism is an integral part of Stalinism. It is the Achilles heel of Stalinist regimes, like Ethiopia where the regime of Mengistu collapsed precisely on the basis of the national question. They cannot solve it.

Tito established different republics, each with its own national bureaucracy which played up the national question as a means of reinforcing its own power and privileges. There is an inescapable logic to this which flows directly from the theory of socialism in one country. This thoroughly anti-Marxist theory, nationalist to the core, played a fatal role in the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The nationalist tendencies of the Serb, Croat, Slovene and other rival bureaucracies enthusiastically embraced this "theory"—*for their own Republics*. They deliberately played up national differences: if you can have Russian "socialism", Chinese "socialism", and so on, why not have "socialism" also in Slovenia, and in Croatia and in Macedonia? With the economic crisis of the bureaucratic regime in Yugoslavia, the tensions between the Republics grew. Each regional clique strove to improve the position of "its" Republic at the expense of the others. This sowed the seeds for the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Particularly monstrous was the role of the reactionary and privileged bureaucracies of Croatia and Slovenia. Although their industry was built up by the labour and collective resources of all Yugoslavia, they wanted to keep it all for themselves. But this was only one element in the equation. The history of Yugoslavia and of the Balkans in general shows that all the national struggles for so called self-determination, that have taken place in the 20th century involved one or other of the great powers. Russian tsarism, German imperialism, British and French imperialism—all used the struggles of small nations as so much small change in their intrigues.

Trotsky on the Balkans

What was the position of the Marxists at the time of the Balkan wars of 1912-1914? Despite the fact that, at least initially, there was a semi-progressive content in the struggle of the Balkan Slavs for national emancipation against the Turks, you will look in vain in the writings of Lenin and Trotsky for any support for any of these nations. Trotsky, who was in the Balkans as a war correspondent, wrote many articles on the Balkan wars in which he denounced the barbarous conduct of all the belligerent powers. But there is no hint of support for any of these rival nationalist gangs. These were reactionary wars predatory wars on all sides. And if that was the case then, what would Lenin have said about the present position in Yugoslavia?

The sects who profess to be Marxist appear to suffer from a kind of nervous tic. As soon as a war breaks out, they immediately start shouting: "Who do you support?" As if Marxists were under some kind of absolute obligation to take one side or another in conflicts between warring ruling cliques! The position of Marxism on war was already clearly explained by Lenin. War is the continuation of politics by other means. Whether we support one side or another in a war depends on whether the war has a progressive or reactionary content. Such a judgement is determined, not by general proclamations of the "right to self-determination", but exclusively by the general interests of the proletariat and the world revolution.

The position of the Marxists in the Balkans wars of 1912-13 was not to take the part of one group or another but to fight for a *democratic federation of the Balkans*. That was the position of Lenin, Trotsky and that great Balkan Marxist and internationalist, Christian Rakovsky, who became a leading Trotskyist and was purged and shot on Stalin's orders in 1941. Rakovsky had a long history as a leading figure in the Balkan socialist movement. In 1903, the same year that the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, there was a similar split in the Bulgarian Party between the "Broad" and "Narrow" tendencies. The left wing ("tesnyaki") was led by the veteran Marxist Blagoev, together with the outstanding Balkan Marxist Christian Rakovsky. After the October Revolution the Communist International stood for a Socialist Federation of the Balkans. This idea was developed by Christian Rakovsky even before 1917. The Marxists always fought against the splintering of the Balkans into a host of petty states which inevitably became the pawns of one imperialist power or another. That is, *they fought against Balkanisation, for federation*. Before the Second World War, when Trotsky was a correspondent in the Balkans, following the situation very closely and at first-hand, he wrote:

"It is not its national diversity but the fact of its splintering into many states that weighs upon [the Balkans] like a curse. Customs frontiers divide it artificially into separate bits. The machinations of the capitalist powers are interwoven with the bloody intrigues of the Balkan dynasties. If these conditions continue, the Balkan Peninsula will go on being a Pandora's box." (Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, p. 12.)

When Austro-Hungary seized Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia was gripped with war fever and the thirst for revenge, the Serbian Social Democracy kept its head and stood firmly against the chauvinist hysteria. Likewise the Bulgarian Social Democrats opposed their own ruling clique and Russian meddling in the Balkans. A congress of Balkan socialist parties was held in Belgrade in January 1910 with representatives from the Social Democratic parties of Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the Yugoslav Social Democratic Parties of Austro-

Hungary and a small group of Social Democrats from Montenegro. In its programme the congress establishes as the objectives of the Balkan Social Democracy: "To free ourselves from particularism and narrowness; to abolish frontiers that divide people who are in part identical in language and culture, in part economically bound up together; finally, to sweep away forms of foreign domination both direct and indirect that deprive the people of their right to determine their destiny for themselves." (Ibid., p. 30.)

And again: "The requirements of capitalist development continually clash with the narrow limitations of particularisms in the Balkans, and federation has become an idea mediated by the ruling circles themselves. More than that; the tsarist government, unable to play an independent role in the peninsula, is trying to come forward as the instigator and patron of a Bulgaro-Serbo-Turkish league, with its point directed against Austro-Hungary. But these are only vague plans for a temporary alliance of the Balkan dynasties and political parties which by their very nature are incapable of guaranteeing freedom and peace in the Balkans. *The programme of the proletariat has nothing in common with all that. It is aimed against the Balkan dynasties and political cliques, against the militarism of the Balkan states no less than against European imperialism; against official Russia no less than against the Austria of the Hapsburgs. Its method is not diplomatic combinations but class struggle, not Balkan wars but Balkan revolutions.*" (Ibid., p. 30, our emphasis.)

How modern these lines are! And how relevant to the present crisis in the Balkans!

The Balkans were divided into midget states and crushed by the burden of militarism. In his article *The Balkan Question and Social Democracy*, Trotsky wrote:

"The only way out of the national and state chaos and the bloody confusion of Balkan life is a union of all the peoples of the Peninsula in a single economic and political entity, on the basis of national autonomy of the constituent parts. Only within the framework of a

single Balkan state can the Serbs of Macedonia, the Sanjak, Serbia, and Montenegro be united in a single national-cultural community, enjoying at the same time the advantage of a Balkan common market. Only the united Balkan peoples can give a real rebuff to the shameless pretensions of tsarism and European imperialism."

And Trotsky adds a prophetic warning: "State unity of the Balkan peninsula can be achieved in two ways: either from above, by expanding one Balkan state, whichever proves strongest, at the expense of the weaker ones—this is the road of wars of extermination and oppression of weak nations, a road that consolidates monarchism and militarism; or from below, through the peoples themselves coming together—this is the road that means overthrowing the Balkan dynasties and unfurling the banner of a Balkan federal republic." (Ibid., p. 40.)

This was always the position of the Marxists in relation to the Balkan question. Not the position of supporting one or other national clique on the alleged basis of "self-determination" but the revolutionary programme of a Balkans federation. Every one of the national groups in the Balkans always likes to present itself in the role of the victim and the aggrieved party, fighting against injustice for supposed "national rights" and "sovereignty". In fact, however, behind the slogan of "national rights" lurks the vested interests of the ruling clique, which is interested only in seizing the territories of other states and oppressing other, weaker nations. Thus, what is "national rights" for some always turns out to be national oppression for others. Moreover, behind each ruling national clique there always stands some "big brother" or other. Thus the supposed struggle for "national sovereignty" always turns out to mean the subordination of the nation to one of the big foreign powers:

"The policy followed by each of these pint-sized Balkan monarchies, with their ministers and ruling parties, has as its ostensible aim the unification of the greater part of the Balkan Peninsula under one king. 'Greater Bulgaria', 'Greater Serbia', 'Greater Greece', are the slogans of this policy. Actually, though, nobody takes such slogans seriously. They

are semi-official lies put out to win popularity among the people. The Balkan dynasties, artificially installed by European diplomacy and lacking any sort of roots in history, are too insignificant and too insecure on their thrones to venture on a broad policy such as Bismarck's when he united Germany by blood and iron. The first serious shock could sweep away for good the Karageorgeviches, Coburgs, and other crowned Lilliputians of the Balkans. The Balkan bourgeoisie, as in all countries that have come too late on the road of capitalist development, is politically sterile, cowardly, talentless, and rotten through and through with chauvinism. The peasant masses are too scattered, too ignorant, and too indifferent to politics for any political initiative to be looked for from them. Accordingly, the task of creating normal relations of national and state existence in the Balkans falls with all its historical weight on the shoulders of the Balkan proletariat." (Ibid. p. 40.)

The national question in the Balkans can only be solved by the proletariat, standing firmly on the programme of class independence, socialist revolution and internationalism. As Trotsky put it: "The historical guarantee of the independence of the Balkans and of the freedom of Russia lies in a revolutionary collaboration between the workers of Petersburg and Warsaw and the workers of Belgrade and Sofia." (Ibid., pp. 41-2.) And again: "Just as in Russia the main brunt of the struggle against the patriarchal-bureaucratic regime falls on the shoulders of the proletariat, so in the Balkans the proletariat alone is taking on the immense task of establishing normal conditions for coexistence and collaboration between the many peoples and races of the peninsula." (Ibid., p. 30.)

For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans!

The experience of Yugoslavia entirely confirms the Marxist position outlined above. It is only necessary to pose the question concretely to get the right answer. Eight years after the commencement of hostilities, what is the real balance sheet of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia? Has it led to a strengthening of the working class and the revolutionary

movement? Has it brought the peoples closer together? Has it resolved any of the problems? Has it developed the means of production? The questions answer themselves. *The break-up of Yugoslavia is an absolute catastrophe and a disaster from the standpoint of the working class.* And this crime against the working class can never be justified by references to the right of any nation to self-determination. And now we have the new monstrous struggle going on in Kosovo. Of course we support the self-determination for the Kosovars. They have a right to their own territory, they have a right not to be oppressed and slaughtered. But the thing is not so simple as that. One must always tell the truth. And the truth is this: that, once again the fate of a small people has been cynically manipulated and exploited by imperialism for its own purposes. As we predicted from the beginning, having used the Kosovars, NATO will abandon and betray them. Thus it was; thus it will ever be.

If Kosovo is allowed to be independent, it would inevitably tend to fuse with the Albanian state, thus creating the monster of Greater Albania—following in the footsteps of Greater Croatia, Greater Serbia, Greater Bulgaria, Greater Greece. The small Macedonian state is very fragile, and has a big Albanian minority. And if Macedonia breaks up, which would be inevitable under those circumstances, then it would mean war. And it would be a different kind of war to what we have seen so far in the Balkans. The war in Yugoslavia was in the main a war between militias. If Macedonia breaks up, the Serbs, the Albanians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks, and ultimately, the Turks, would all be involved. A war between Greece and Turkey—two members of NATO—would be a catastrophe for all the peoples and a nightmare for the Americans. This is something that Washington could not tolerate. They tried to put pressure on Milosevic to make concessions. When this failed, they blundered into a war with no plan or perspective. Clinton was informed by the CIA that bombing would bring Milosevic to his knees in a few days. This plan failed and the position of the USA was only saved when Russia put pressure on Milosevic to arrive at a compromise. But with what results?

The Kosovars have the right to self-determination, just as the Serbs have, or the Bosnians, or the Kurds, the Macedonians, the Palestinians. There is just one little problem. How is this self-determination going to be achieved? How is this right going to be exercised in practice? The Serbs will not voluntarily renounce control of Kosovo, they regard it as an inalienable part of Serb territory. The problem is that the Kosovars—or at least the KLA—looked to American imperialism to help them. What did NATO's military adventure in Kosovo solve? Nothing. It made the situation a thousand times worse, sowing the seeds of new wars and nightmares. Nationalism and chauvinism on the Balkans, as always, plays a pernicious role and leads to a bloody impasse. The reactionary leaders of the KLA, having been installed in positions of power by US imperialism, are now playing a most monstrous role. While murdering and oppressing Serb workers and peasants, they are striving to occupy all the key positions, while filling their pockets through plunder, extortion, drug dealing and assorted crime. But there are limits to what the KLA will be permitted to achieve. The Albanians of Kosovo will live to regret the trust they so blindly placed in the good faith of the imperialists.

Although Washington is desperate to get out of Kosovo, they are stuck there and will remain so for some time. Then there is the other "big brother" lurking in the background, Russia, which has an interest in that area. The contradictions between Russia and America are increasing all the time. Consequently, Moscow is now encouraging Milosevic to raise the question of Serb control of Kosovo again. Indeed, in international law, according to the compromise deal arrived at between Belgrade and NATO to end the hostilities, Kosovo remains formally part of the territory of Yugoslavia. For its part, NATO (that is, US imperialism) does not want an independent Albanian Kosovo, because it fears (not without reason) that this would lead to the formation of a Greater Albania, which would immediately destabilise Macedonia and Montenegro, sparking off new and even more destructive wars. This contradiction will inevitably mean that the Albanian Kosovars will enter into conflict with the NATO forces at a certain stage. We predicted this in advance, and it is already beginning,

as the clashes in Mitrovica show. Thus, the whole business has solved absolutely nothing and has turned into a nightmare for all concerned. Yet again, the attempt to solve the national problem on a capitalist basis has ended in a catastrophe.

Long ago, Engels explained that the prior condition for solving the national problem in the Balkans was the elimination of the interference of foreign powers. At that time he was thinking mainly of tsarist Russia. Later Germany and Italy played the same pernicious role. Now it is the USA and Germany. Only by the overthrow of capitalism is it possible to break the stranglehold of imperialism on the Balkans and permit a genuinely democratic alternative to the monstrosity known to history by the name of "Balkanisation". Only in this way can we reach the position where, as Engels wrote: "Magyars, Roumanians, Serbians, Bulgarians, Arnauts [the Turkish name for Albanians], Greeks, Armenians, and Turks, will then, at last, be in a position to settle their mutual differences without the interference of foreign Powers, to establish among themselves to their own necessities and wishes." (MECW, vol. 27, p. 47.)

There is only one way forward is to return to the position of Lenin. He was not afraid to tell the Poles in 1916 that independence was not the solution, that it was utopian that the only way they could get genuine independence is revolution in Russia and revolution in Germany. The same truth must be told to the Kosovars today. The attempt to solve their problems on a narrow nationalist basis has led nowhere. The only way out consists in the establishment of workers' power in Serbia and in the whole of the former Yugoslavia. This can only be achieved by the fighting unity of the workers and peasants of Yugoslavia.

The workers and peasants of Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia—and even Kosovo—must now be looking back wistfully at the period of Tito which must seem like a dream in comparison to the present bloody mess. The restoration of a federation of all the peoples, based on a nationalised planned economy, is an absolute necessity. But such a federation must be democratically controlled and administered by the working people

themselves, and not by cliques of privileged bureaucrats with a vested interest in playing on national differences in their own selfish interests—that is, a Socialist Federation of the Balkans. Only the working people have no interest in oppressing people of other nationalities. *That is why, as Lenin so often repeated, the solution of the national question can only be achieved by the proletariat taking power into its own hands. Any other solution will lead, at best to only a partial and unstable advance, at worst to a complete catastrophe. The fate of the former Yugoslavia is a grim warning to all workers in this respect.*

For an internationalist policy!

"He alone has a country who is a property owner or at any rate has the liberty and the means to become one. He who has not that, has no country." (Weitling)

"The worker has no country." (The Communist Manifesto)

The national question is such a vast subject that the present document does not pretend to do more than summarise the main points of the Marxist position. It is the starting-point of a more general debate on this question through which the labour movement can arrive at a clear and principled position. Through a serious discussion of the national question we can raise the level of advanced workers and youth, we can have a big impact on a world scale, and lay the basis for the building of an international movement on the solid rock of Marxist theory. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels point out that the first task of the proletariat is to "settle accounts with its own bourgeoisie"—to overthrow the bourgeoisie of its own country, and put itself at the head of the nation. But they added that "though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle". What does this mean? It is obvious that the working class must first conquer power in its own country. "Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word."

But, according to Marx, this is only the form and not the content of the socialist revolution. Once having conquered power in one country, the workers will be confronted with the opposition of the bourgeoisie of other countries. The inner meaning of the proletarian revolution is thus not national, but international, and cannot ultimately succeed until it has spread to the main countries of capitalism.

The uncompromising internationalism of *The Communist Manifesto* blazes forth from every line:

"National differences and antagonisms between peoples 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.

"The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action of the leading civilised countries, at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

"In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end."

Of course, for Marxists, theory is a guide to action. It is an elementary obligation to fight against each and every manifestation of national oppression, racism, discrimination and injustice. It is necessary to work out in each country a concrete programme of demands in this respect. Without the day-to-day struggle for advance under capitalism, the socialist revolution would be an utopia. The masses can only become trained and steeled for the final battle through participation in a whole series of partial battles and skirmishes—strikes, demonstrations, etc. It is obviously correct and necessary to struggle for every advance, no matter how partial, that tends to improve the conditions of the masses. That applies not only to social reforms, education, health and housing, pensions etc., *but also to democratic demands to the degree that these retain the slightest vitality.*

In Britain, for example, it is necessary to fight for the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords—those reactionary relics of feudalism. In every country we stand for the rights of women and will fight for the most advanced legislation in fields such as abortion and divorce. That also applies to the national question. The British Marxists give critical support to autonomy for Scotland and Wales. This is an elementary democratic demand, and it is, of course, obligatory for Marxists to support any democratic demand that has the slightest progressive content. Of course, the conceding of a parliament for Wales and Scotland will not solve anything fundamental, but it was nevertheless a partial democratic reform which no socialist could oppose.

However, this is not enough. *Under modern conditions, no reform, whether economic, social or democratic, can be long-lasting unless it leads to a fundamental change in society.* As long ago as 1920, at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin pointed out that the national question could only be solved by the victory of the proletariat, and he demonstratively removed from the programme of the International the slogan of the bourgeois-democratic movement, substituting it for the expression: "national liberation movements". The significance of this has been entirely lost on those sorry "Marxists" who have capitulated to the pressure of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalist leaders who demand that the working class set aside its struggle for socialism and subordinate itself to the "national struggle"—*that is, accept the leadership of the bourgeois and middle-class nationalist elements.* By contrast, Lenin explained that in the modern epoch the bourgeoisie was incapable of solving the national question. The Leninist position was summed up by Trotsky thus: "The right of national self-determination is, of course, a democratic and not a socialist principle. *But genuinely democratic principles are supported and realised in our era only by the revolutionary proletariat; it is for this very reason that they interlace with socialist tasks.*" (Trotsky, Writings, 1939-40, p. 45, our emphasis.)

That is the position of genuine Marxism which we defend. Under present-day conditions, it is necessary at every stage to link the struggle for democratic demands firmly to the perspective of the socialist transformation of society—to the expropriation of the bankers and capitalists. And the prior condition for this is the unconditional unity of the working class and its organisations. Our fighting slogan is not "nation against nation" but "Class against class!" Moreover, our goal is not confined to one nation. It is world-wide socialism. That was the position of all the great Marxists of the past. In 1916, in a period of black reaction when Europe was in the throes of a catastrophic war, Lenin wrote: "*The aim of socialism is not only to end the division of mankind into tiny states and the isolation of nations in all its forms, it is also the rapprochement of nations but also their fusion.*" (LCW, *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination*, January-February 1916, vol. 22, our emphasis.)

Despite all the evidence, the apologists of capitalism do not want to acknowledge what is increasingly evident to all thinking people: that the nation state itself now plays the same retrograde role that was played by the old feudal particularism, local barriers and toll-roads of the past. The further development of human culture and civilisation will only be possible through the total destruction of these archaic barriers and their replacement by the planned and harmonious development of the productive forces on a world scale. Not outmoded nationalism, but socialist internationalism is the only hope for the human race. As Leon Trotsky explained, the goal of socialists is not the erection of new frontiers—that is, new barriers in the way of human progress—but the abolition of all frontiers and the creation of a new socialist world order:

"All state frontiers are only fetters upon the productive forces. The task of the proletariat is not to preserve the status quo, i.e., to perpetuate the frontiers, but on the contrary to work for their revolutionary elimination with the aim of creating the Socialist United States of Europe and of the entire world." (Trotsky, Writings 1935-36.)

London, February 25 2000.

Appendix: Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions

The Second Congress of the Third (Communist) International:

June 5, 1920

1 An abstract or formal posing of the problem of equality in general and national equality in particular is in the very nature of bourgeois democracy. Under the guise of the equality of the individual in general, bourgeois democracy proclaims the formal or legal equality of the property-owner and the proletarian, the exploiter and the exploited, thereby grossly deceiving the oppressed classes. On the plea that all men are absolutely equal, the bourgeoisie is transforming the idea of equality, which is itself a reflection of relations in commodity production, into a weapon in its struggle against the abolition of classes. The real meaning of the demand for equality consists in its being a demand for the abolition of classes.

2 In conformity with its fundamental task of combating bourgeois democracy and exposing its falseness and hypocrisy, the Communist Party, as the avowed champion of the proletarian struggle to overthrow the bourgeois yoke, must base its policy, in the national question too, not on abstract and formal principles but, first, on a precise appraisal of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of economic conditions; second, on a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class; third, on an equally clear distinction between the oppressed,

dependent and subject nations and the oppressing, exploiting and sovereign nations, in order to counter the bourgeois-democratic lies that play down this colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's population by an insignificant minority of the richest and advanced capitalist countries, a feature characteristic of the era of finance capital and imperialism.

3 The imperialist war of 1914-18 has very clearly revealed to all nations and to the oppressed classes of the whole world the falseness of bourgeois-democratic phrases, by practically demonstrating that the Treaty of Versailles* of the celebrated "Western democracies" is an even more brutal and foul act of violence against weak nations than was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of the German Junkers* and the Kaiser. The League of Nations and the entire postwar policy of the Entente reveal this truth with even greater clarity and distinctness. They are everywhere intensifying the revolutionary struggle both of the proletariat in the advanced countries and of the toiling masses in the colonial and dependent countries. They are hastening the collapse of the petty-bourgeois nationalist illusions that nations can live together in peace and equality under capitalism.

4 From these fundamental premises it follows that the Communist International's entire policy on the national and the colonial questions should rest primarily on a close union of the proletarians and the working masses of all nations and countries for a joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie. This union alone will guarantee victory over capitalism, without which the abolition of national oppression and inequality is impossible.

5 The world political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day. World political developments are of necessity concentrated on a single focus—the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouped, on the one hand, the Soviet movements of the advanced workers in all countries, and, on the other, all the national

liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, who are learning from bitter experience that their only salvation lies in the Soviet system's victory over world imperialism.

6 Consequently, one cannot at present confine oneself to a bare recognition or proclamation of the need for closer union between the working people of the various nations; a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development of the communist movements in the proletariat of each country, or of the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries or among backward nationalities.

7 Federation is a transitional form to the complete unity of the working people of different nations. The feasibility of federation has already been demonstrated in practice both by the relations between the RSFSR and other Soviet Republics (the Hungarian, Finnish and Latvian in the past, and the Azerbaijan and Ukrainian at present), and by the relations within the RSFSR in respect of nationalities which formerly enjoyed neither statehood nor autonomy (e.g., the Bashkir and Tatar autonomous republics in the RSFSR, founded in 1919 and 1920 respectively).

8 In this respect, it is the task of the Communist International to develop further and also to study and test by experience these new federations, which are arising on the basis of the Soviet system and the Soviet movement. In recognising that federation is a transitional form to complete unity, it is necessary to strive for ever closer federal unity, bearing in mind, first, that the Soviet republics, surrounded as they are by the imperialist powers of the whole world—which from the military standpoint are immeasurably stronger—cannot possibly continue to exist without the closest alliance; second, that a close economic alliance between the Soviet republics is necessary, otherwise the productive forces which have been ruined by imperialism cannot be restored and the well-being of the working people cannot be ensured; third, that

there is a tendency towards the creation of a single world economy, regulated by the proletariat of all nations as an integral whole and according to a common plan. This tendency has already revealed itself quite clearly under capitalism and is bound to be further developed and consummated under socialism.

9 The Communist International's national policy in the sphere of relations within the state cannot be restricted to the bare, formal, purely declaratory and actually non-committal recognition of the equality of nations to which the bourgeois democrats confine themselves—both those who frankly admit being such, and those who assume the name of socialists (such as the socialists of the Second International).

In all their propaganda and agitation—both within parliament and outside it—the Communist parties must consistently expose that constant violation of the equality of nations and of the guaranteed rights of national minorities which is to be seen in all capitalist countries, despite their "democratic" constitutions. It is also necessary, first, constantly to explain that only the Soviet system is capable of ensuring genuine equality of nations, by uniting first the proletarians and then the whole mass of the working population in the struggle against the bourgeoisie; and, second, that all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and under-privileged nationals (for example, Ireland, the American Blacks, etc.) and in the colonies.

Without the latter condition, which is particularly important, the struggle against the oppression of dependent nations and colonies, as well as recognition of their right to secede, are but a false signboard, as is evidenced by the parties of the Second International.

10 Recognition of internationalism in word, and its replacement in deed by petty-bourgeois nationalism and pacifism, in all propaganda, agitation and practical work, is very common, not only among the parties of the Second International, but also among those which have withdrawn from it, and often even among parties which now call

themselves communist. The urgency of the struggle against this evil, against the most deep-rooted petty-bourgeois national prejudices, looms ever large with the mounting exigency of the task of converting the dictatorship of the proletariat from a national dictatorship (i.e., existing in a single country and incapable of determining world politics) into an international one (i.e., a dictatorship of the proletariat involving at least several advanced countries, and capable of exercising a decisive influence upon world politics as a whole). Petty-bourgeois nationalism proclaims as internationalism the mere recognition of the equality of nations, and nothing more. Quite apart from the fact that this recognition is purely verbal, petty bourgeois nationalism preserves national self-interest intact, whereas proletarian internationalism demands, first, that the interest of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world-wide scale, and, second, that a nation which is achieving victory over the bourgeoisie should be able and willing to make the greatest national sacrifices for the overthrow of international capital.

Thus, in countries that are already fully capitalist and have workers' parties that really act as the vanguard of the proletariat, the struggle against opportunist and petty-bourgeois pacifist distortions of the concept and policy of internationalism is a primary and cardinal task.

11 With regard to the more backward states and nations, in which feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominate, it is particularly important to bear in mind:

first, That all Communist parties must assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries, and that the duty of rendering the most active assistance rests primarily with the workers of the country the backward nation is colonially or financially dependent on;

second, the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries;

third, the need to combat Pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American Imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the Khans*, landowners, and mullahs, etc.;

fourth, the need, in backward countries, to give special support to the peasant movement against the landowners, against landed proprietorship, and against all manifestations or survivals of feudalism, and to strive to lend the peasant movement the most revolutionary character by establishing the closest possible alliance between the West-European communist proletariat and the revolutionary peasant movement in the East, in the colonies, and in the backward countries generally. It is particularly necessary to exert every effort to apply the basic principles of the Soviet system in countries where pre-capitalist relations predominate—by setting up "working people's Soviets", etc.;

fifth, the need for a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries; the Communist International should support bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks, i.e., those of the struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations. The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form;

sixth, the need constantly to explain and expose among the broadest working masses of all countries, and particularly of the backward countries, the deception systematically practised by the imperialist powers, which, under the guise of politically independent states, set up states that are wholly dependent upon them economically, financially

and militarily. Under present-day international conditions there is no salvation for dependent and weak nations except in a union of Soviet republics.

12 The age-old oppression of colonial and weak nationalities by the imperialist powers has not only filled the working masses of the oppressed countries with animosity towards the oppressor nations, but has also aroused distrust in these nations in general, even in their proletariat. The despicable betrayal of socialism by the majority of the official leaders of this proletariat in 1914-19, when "defence of country" was used as a social-chauvinist cloak to conceal the defence of the "right" or their "own" bourgeoisie to oppress colonies and fleece financially dependent countries, was certain to enhance this perfectly legitimate distrust. On the other hand, the more backward the country, the stronger is the hold of small-scale agricultural production, patriarchalism and isolation, which inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest of petty-bourgeois prejudices, i.e., to national egoism and national narrow-mindedness. These prejudices are bound to die out very slowly, for they can disappear only after imperialism and capitalism have disappeared in the advanced countries, and after the entire foundation of the backward countries' economic life has radically changed. It is therefore the duty of the class-conscious communist proletariat of all countries to regard with particular caution and attention the survivals of national sentiments in the countries and among nationalities which have been oppressed the longest; it is equally necessary to make certain concessions with a view to more rapidly overcoming this distrust and these prejudices. Complete victory over capitalism cannot be won unless the proletariat and, following it, the mass of working people in all countries and nations throughout the world voluntarily strive for alliance and unity.

(Theses passed—handing of contentious issues to commission.)

*1 Treaty of Versailles: Treaty signed by the Allies with Germany on 28 June 1919 which returned Alsace-Lorraine to France, deprived Germany of other territory in Europe plus all her overseas colonies, limited Germany's military strength, and provided for the payment of war reparations by Germany to the victorious powers. The aim of the treaty was to dismantle German economic and military strength, and its effect on the German economy was disastrous. The combination of anger and despair which it generated in Germany was one of the factors that helped bring Hitler to power.

*2 Junkers: Descendants of the Teutonic knights who settled on the east bank of the Elbe in the 13th century. They were the Prussian landed aristocracy, characterised by extreme militarism, nationalism, and anti-democratic, feudal views.

*3 Khans: Asian lords or princes.

