

# Nationalism, Nation States and National Liberation

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The national question has been an ongoing issue for Marxists since the middle of the 19th century. How can revolutionary socialists best answer the question of national oppression, something that is of particular relevance in the epoch of imperialism and globalisation when national oppression has again taken on a colonialist character, for instance in Iraq and Afghanistan? This work was produced by the League in the mid 90's and represents a thorough and comprehensive view of the struggle for national liberation across the world.

## Marxism and the National Question

Marx and Engels never gave a general, all-embracing definition of a nation. However, consistent with their general method?historical materialism?they considered that the nation had not existed throughout all epochs of human history. Rather, it was a product of socio-economic evolution and revolution. Specifically, the nation state was a product of the capitalist epoch during which production expanded from local to national level. This development was uneven, full of contradictions, drawn out, and not complete even in their lifetimes. Looking at the countries most advanced in terms of commercial and industrial growth, they approved of the "unity of great nations which, if originally brought about by political force, has now become a powerful coefficient of social production" (*Civil War in France*).

They recognised that the bourgeois class was a national class par excellence. While they supported its struggles against regionalism and localism they also predicted that the bourgeoisie's national limitations would in their turn become a fetter on the productive forces. Marx and Engels insisted that the proletariat, in contrast to the bourgeoisie, was able to transcend national limitations; in the famous words of the Communist Manifesto:

"The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, it is, so far, national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word".

This has been, as Trotsky said, often dismissed as merely an "agitational quip", that is, a graphic way of describing the fact that the proletariat has little or no material stake or say in the capitalist fatherland. The reformists, from Eduard Bernstein onwards, believed that the improvement of living standards, the creation of consumer co-operatives, municipal housing, and the winning of universal suffrage invalidated this statement. Bourgeois anti-Marxists have cited it to prove that Marx and Engels failed to appreciate the depth and reality of national consciousness within the working class, or that, since Marx and Engels' time, the proletariat has finally become nationally conscious.

But Marx and Engels' formulation is not a criticism of the workers' lack of a material stake in the

fatherland, let alone an appeal for them to acquire one. Nor is it a claim that the proletariat is immune to national feelings and ideology. It is an objective statement of the proletariat's historic interest, one of which it must become conscious and upon which it must base its actions if it is to cease to be deceived and exploited by the bourgeoisie. The working class must become internationalist in its outlook and actions if it is ever to liberate itself.

Based on this materialist conception Marx and Engels analysed national developments in Europe and beyond. From the 1848 revolutions on they defended what they called 'the old democratic and working class tenet' of the 'right of the great European nations to self-determination'. These nations were Spain, France, Britain, Italy, Germany, Hungary and Poland. 'The very first conditions of national existence [are] large numbers and compactness of territory', they claimed. They saw the resolution of the national question for these nations as a means of clearing the way to the class struggle:

'It is historically impossible for a large people to discuss seriously any internal questions as long as its independence is lacking? An international movement of the proletariat is in general only possible between independent nations? to get rid of national oppression is the basic condition of all healthy and free development.' (Engels' letter to Kautsky, 1882).

At the same time, Marx and Engels rejected the 'principle of nationalities', whereby every nationality or ethnic group could or should secede from the larger states and form their own. They considered this 'principle' to be a weapon of reaction used in the 1850s and 1860s by the Russian Tsar and Louis Napoleon of France—the twin pillars of the European counterrevolution. Thus Poland, a 'great nation', had been a state made up not only of Poles but also of Ruthenes (western Ukrainians, Lithuanians). If an independent Poland came into existence and all these nationalities were to secede under the protection of Russia then Poland would be a non-viable state. It would then be unable to play the role Marx and Engels ascribed to it of restricting and restraining Tsarism, defending the democratic and social revolutions in western and central Europe. For this reason they were opposed to recognising any general or universal 'right of nations to self-determination'. The generalised use of the slogan for oppressed nations was not to enter the Marxist programme until the 1896 London Congress of the Second International.

Alongside the 'great nations', Marx and Engels also believed that some would-be nations were in fact 'non-historic peoples'. Their controversial use of this Hegelian term must be put in context. first, Tsarism was considered to be the main danger to all democratic and proletarian struggles in Europe. It was the policeman of world reaction much as the USA was to become after 1945. Secondly, their view of capitalist development was that it led inexorably towards large compact nation states whose majority peoples and languages would simply absorb the 'fragments of peoples'. The Scottish and Irish Gaels, Welsh, Bretons, Basques, Catalans, Czechs, the South Slavs were 'doomed' to disappear; they would be 'absorbed by the larger nations or [could only] maintain themselves as ethnographic monuments without political significance'.

Their non-historicity was, for Marx and Engels, also evidenced by their 'failure' to form independent states during the immediately preceding centuries. Their lack of a modern bourgeoisie and proletariat meant that if they played any distinctive role it would only be as the tool of reaction, just as the Bretons had during the French Revolution (the Vendée). Historical progress was represented by a democratic revolution creating a greater Germany which unified the German speaking lands of the Habsburgs, and by the restored statehood of historic Hungary and Poland. These new states would not only block the road to the military intervention of Tsarism, they would launch a revolutionary war that would break up that reactionary colossus. Clearly this view had much to recommend it in the mid-nineteenth century when Britain and France were the only major developed capitalist states.

Towards the end of their own lifetimes, however, Marx and Engels began to modify their former views. They took into account the appearance of revolutionary social and political forces that could destroy Tsarism internally. In his later years, when Tsarist Russia began to develop internal contradictions and seemed pregnant with revolution, Engels noticeably changed his attitude to the future of the south Slav peoples and to the Ruthenes of Poland. In 1888 he foresaw that after Tsarism was overthrown:

"Poland will come to life again; Little Russia (the Ukraine) will be able to choose its political connections freely; the Romanians, Hungarians and the Southern Slavs will be able to regulate their affairs and their border questions free from foreign interference".

Whilst Engels never completed his re-assessment the fact that he had begun it opened the way to a deep discussion in the Second International.

Marx and Engels also modified their attitude to colonialism. They had originally given highly critical support to colonial expansion such as that undertaken in India and China by the British, in Algeria by the French and in northern Mexico by the United States. This support flowed from their desire to see the remains of Asiatic despotism or feudalism crushed and swept away by the forces of capitalism. Marx believed that "the conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact". But they substantially modified their position on national oppression meted out by modern capitalist powers as a result of their experience of the Irish national movement and its interrelationship with the class struggle of the British workers. Marx and Engels enunciated and repeated as a principle that, "The people which oppresses another is forging its own chains" (International Working Men's Association declaration on Ireland 1870). But the generalisation of this position to all oppressed peoples was a task left to the next generation of Marxists.

The general right of nations to self-determination, established by the London Congress of the Second international, was strongly supported by Karl Kautsky and also by the Russian Social Democrats. It was equally strongly opposed by Rosa Luxemburg. Both sides to the dispute, however, recognised that Marx and Engels' international perspective had to be changed. On the one side, Luxemburg argued that, in the new epoch of international capitalism and a world market dominated by the major capitalist powers, all national struggles had become utopian. In contrast, Kautsky and Lenin thought that there was no longer any danger of the national struggles of eastern Europe playing into the hands of Tsarism. Rather, there was the possibility that the national oppression of the Tsarist empire and the struggle against it would be a powerful contributory factor in the approaching bourgeois revolution. A deep and protracted debate took place within the Second International on the national question; this included a debate over the definition of what a nation was.

At the end of the nineteenth century the thought of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) began to have a renewed influence within the Social Democratic movement. Kant had stressed the autonomy, the self-determination of the individual as the basis of free moral choice. This moral law arises from within the individual as a "categorical imperative" decreeing certain courses of action which the individual must be free to follow (or not). At the social level, the self-determination of a collective of individuals applied to the nation. The nation is the unit of freedom. The neo-Kantians at the turn of the twentieth century were particularly strong in Germany and Austria where they challenged orthodox Marxism in the name of a more voluntaristic politics.

A fierce debate ensued on the national question. The opposing poles of this debate were Lenin and the Bolsheviks, on the one side, and Otto Bauer and the Austro-Marxist school on the other. Bauer's famous definition of the nation was fundamentally a subjective and idealist one concentrating on culture and consciousness. It took the nation as a trans-historical community, undergoing repeated transformations of its class character but nevertheless retaining its cultural distinctiveness. This can be seen in Bauer's famous definition of a nation: "The nation is the totality of men bound together through a common destiny

into a community of character". This definition subordinated and relegated to a second order the question of economic life, antagonistic classes, the state, language and territory. At the same time, it elevated a common psychological and cultural make-up to the first rank. Indeed, it reified national character, making it a key actor across centuries and even millenia. Far from seeking to transcend national differences?in as much as these constituted an obstacle to proletarian unity?this definition aimed to cement national unity. Bauer supported the Karl Renner non-territorial principle of national-cultural autonomy for the citizens of multi-national states and thereby favoured the preservation of these differences, and with them the hegemony of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces over the proletariat.

### **Stalin's contribution to the theory**

Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question" was Bolshevism's official reply to the supporters of Bauer within Russian Social Democracy. Stalin proposed what was to become the classic Marxist definition: "a nation is a historically formed stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." This was an enormous step forward compared to Bauer. Trotsky later endorsed it as a "theoretically correct and practically fruitful" solution of the problem since it pointed to a solution founded on a territorial and political basis. It was theoretically correct because it recognised the birth of nations as a necessary result of the development of the forces and relations of production. Only then does it go on to identify further specific historical and ideological determinants. It is practically fruitful because it puts forward a consistently democratic solution (self-determination, up to and including separation) which actually promotes the development of the class struggle.

In short, this starting point promotes the full range of democratic measures which facilitate the political and economic emancipation of the toilers. It liquidates all forms of national oppression which, while they exist, impede the proletariat's recognition that only through the social revolution can the working class end its exploitation. Stalin actually suggests that the best solution might be "the autonomies of such self-determined units as Poland, Lithuania, the Ukraine, the Caucasus" but this would only be achievable if the Great Russian proletariat fought to allow these nations to make their own unhampered decision about their future.

Certain weaknesses remain in Stalin's definition and it can be used in an eclectic manner. Stalin's work originated out of discussions with Lenin in Cracow where he worked on a first draft. Yet the project was developed and completed in Vienna where Bukharin played an auxiliary role. Trotsky believed that this role was considerable. Elements of Bukharin's method and views may thus have found their way into Stalin's definition. Bukharin was greatly impressed by bourgeois sociology. In Lenin's words Bukharin "never really understood or studied the dialectic". Stalin, possibly under Bukharin's influence, shows clear signs of being influenced by Bauer's emphasis on psychology and culture. In any case it was certainly from Bauer that these "factors" found their way into Stalin's famous definition. There was even a whiff of Bauer's "community of fate" in the proviso that a nation was a "historically constituted stable community". These elements were, indeed, formally linked to common territory, economic life and language in Stalin's definition, but the combination has an eclectic character, one that is made quite wooden and dogmatic by the addendum:

"It must be emphasised that none of the above characteristics taken separately is sufficient to define a nation. More than that, it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation. It is only when all these characteristics are present together that we have a nation."

This encouraged a normative, check-list approach to the characteristics of a nation. Many nations or nationalities would have to be, or have been, denied recognition on the basis of this. Stalin himself ruled

out the Jews. Lenin, on the other hand, referred to the Jews as "the most oppressed and persecuted nation in Russia". Lenin also had a far more dialectical view of national culture. He asserted that every "national culture" was in fact a contradictory whole, with "elements of democratic and socialist culture" alongside of, and subordinated to, a "dominant bourgeois culture". Therefore, the "general national culture is that of the landlords and the bourgeoisie", and of the clergy in many cases.

Lenin warned repeatedly that a very concrete analysis had to be made of each national question. In the light of this debate it is necessary to correct Stalin's definition and more importantly to use it in Lenin's dialectical and concrete manner. In short, it is necessary to take into account the specific economic conditions, the period and the struggles in any given case. Such a definition must, however, not be understood normatively. It is the method of Stalinism to claim that if a given claimant to nationhood lacks any of the suggested characteristics then it is not a nation and consequently forfeits the rights appropriate to one. Since nations come into being in struggle, it is very likely that in many concrete cases important elements of nationhood will indeed be lacking. Attaining these missing features will precisely be the key aim of a struggle. Of course, the absence of one or many of these features, may doom a given struggle to failure?making it utopian. If, for example, the conditions for independent nation-state existence cannot be won except by nationally oppressing another people, or by acting as the agent of a reactionary imperialist power, then this utopia can be a reactionary one which no sincere democrat, let alone socialist, could support. Nations are the product of real social struggles in concrete historical periods. They are also the product of the entire bourgeois epoch (from the transition from pre-capitalist society to the transition to socialism). Thus nations existed before the bourgeoisie gained political power and will exist after it loses it in one or even a whole series of countries.

### **Defining the nation and its political expression**

In the light of the weaknesses noted above, the following definition may serve: a nation is a product of the bourgeois epoch, that is, the rise and fall of capitalism. It is a community composed of classes, dominated by a privileged and/or exploiting class or caste. This community has a unifying territorial and economic basis, a common language(s) and culture, a common history (real and/or mythical). On the basis of these, a common self-awareness or national character has developed, with the political consequence that the nation has established, or aspires to establish, some state form for itself.

Lenin always insisted that a nation is a community of exploited and exploiting classes in the bourgeois epoch. The relationship of exploiting and exploited classes is necessarily an unequal one, one based on the preservation of exploitation. The exploiters are the dominant and ruling class within the national community. It has been objected that other classes or social forces, pre-or post capitalist, have led the struggle to create a nation and that this disproves the Marxist claim that national building is a bourgeois task. Likewise, it has been objected that there have been nations and national movements in which there was no highly developed bourgeoisie and where the peasantry played the central role. Naturally, for Marxists, the French revolution is the most highly developed form and model of how the modern nation and its state come into existence. Here the revolutionary bourgeoisie played a leading or hegemonic role. However, even in France, the petit-bourgeoisie and the sans culottes bloc of classes played a vital role and large sections of the bourgeoisie either rapidly moved into opposition to the revolution or lagged behind other classes in the struggle.

For Marxists, there is a dialectical, not mechanical, relation between the social character of a given revolution (bourgeois, proletarian) and the class forces which lead it. The "bourgeois revolution" does not have to be led by the bourgeoisie itself. Rather, it has to be the long term beneficiary of the subsequent changes in the relations of production and exchange. It is no mystery that the nation building aspect of the bourgeois revolution is very often not led by purely bourgeois forces, and sometimes not by bourgeois

forces at all. In early bourgeois revolutions (e.g. England), capitalist farmers, gentry, and even modernising aristocrats played a leading role. Once the bourgeois epoch and its economic and political forms were permanently established (from the Dutch and English and American revolutions to the French Revolution and its Napoleonic expansion) other national struggles, in more backward countries, were led by fragments of decomposing pre-capitalist classes (the peasantry and the gentry) or petty-bourgeois proto-capitalists.

In the centuries-long transition from pre-capitalist modes of production, the peasantry developed such proto-classes from within itself?ranging from prosperous exploiters of wage labour (kulaks, in Russian terminology) at one pole, to landless labourers at the other. In the Balkans, the national awakening of the Serbs was led initially by a rich peasant class. In certain circumstances, privileged castes?religious, military, cultural, academic or administrative?played a hegemonic role in the formation of the nation. These castes were, however, obliged to help introduce the bourgeois order, even if in many cases the motivation for their actions might have been the defence of ancient class or caste privileges, against a "modernisation" drive by the rulers of multinational or multi-ethnic empires (the Habsburgs, the Romanovs, the Ottomans). When, towards the end of the eighteenth century, "enlightened despotism" attempted to carry out some of the key tasks of the bourgeois revolution from above, by bureaucratic centralising measures, this often provoked old landowning elites and the clergy to espouse a modern national ideology in combination with ancient pre-capitalist claims.

If, in the early days of nation formation, pre-capitalist exploiting classes could play the role of founder and leader of the nation to the extent that they opened the way to capitalist exchange and production relations, so too in the period of capitalist decline, politically privileged bureaucratic castes (i.e. Stalinists) have played the role of nation builders or restorers. The cases of China, Vietnam and Cuba stand out here. Does the fact that they built states on post-capitalist property relations, invalidate the Leninist claim that nation-building is, in and of itself, a capitalist task? No, rather it confirms it from an unexpected angle. These bureaucracies, by defending their privileges through a political dictatorship over the proletariat, by sabotaging the international revolution and thus defending capitalist relations on a world scale, act as petit bourgeois agencies of the world bourgeoisie within degenerated workers' states. The Stalinists built these nations as local agents of the bourgeois world order and enemies of the proletariat. Much the same can be said of the growth of nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial states where it has fallen to a "state capitalist bureaucracy", one defending a highly stratified but nevertheless still capitalist, economy, to take the lead in nation-building.

Both these Stalinist and petit bourgeois nationalist regimes acted as enthusiastic builders of the nation, although that they often proclaimed it a new, socialist or classless nation. Their fostering of national culture and consciousness, their denigration of genuine internationalism, only served to foster a nationalism which would help to fragment these states and sweep away their post-capitalist economic conquests. A revolutionary internationalist leadership either under semi-colonial capitalism or in a healthy workers' state, would not, and could not, set itself the task of nation strengthening or nation creation. It could and would provide resources for all forms of cultural and linguistic expression that the masses themselves wished for, especially for hitherto oppressed nations or nationalities, but its goal would not be to reinforce national consciousness but to aid its ultimate transcendence.

As a second component of the revised definition a distinct national territory or homeland is essential for prolonged national existence. However, this has always been the subject of much semi-mystical ideology. For German nationalists, following Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the territory of the nation is itself a part of its physical, corporeal identity. Nations can no more be moved from one territory to another than persons can be moved from one body to another. This is, of course, complete nonsense. Nations, especially would-be nations, have moved around over extensive territories. The romantic, reactionary view of Fichte stems from

a refusal to see the nation as a social entity but, rather, to insist that it is an organism like a plant, an animal or an individual human being. This view is anti-rational, insisting on the sacredness of the homeland, its inalienability. This metaphysical approach has entered into most subsequent nationalist ideology and is the basis for claiming and recovering "lost" national territory, inhabited by another people, "lost" centuries or millenia ago (e.g. Serbian claims to Kosovo, Zionist claims to Eretz Israel). Marxists reject all such territorial mysticism.

Nevertheless, Marxists have always insisted that nations cannot be divorced from the question of a physical basis for their existence. As Trotsky expressed it: "the solution to the problem of each nation's fate must perforce be sought along the lines of changing the material conditions of its existence beginning with territory". The precondition for any nationality to establish its statehood is the possession of a distinct, contiguous national territory in which the members of the nation form a majority and which they regard as theirs. A territorial basis for the sovereignty of the nation is essential to its stable existence. This might seem obvious, but pre-capitalist states often did not possess such things as clear or definite borders. In feudal states, fiefs, lordships and suzerainties were laid one on top of another, were joined together or sundered by the marriage or death of their lords and princes. Economic, cultural and linguistic boundaries rarely coincided. Generally, only nations where ethno-linguistic boundaries coincided with long-established states and/or were physically well defined (by sea, mountain ranges, rivers, deserts) had little problem about claiming their right to the soil.

### **Nations and culture**

Against this Marxist emphasis, many present day admirers of Otto Bauer consider nationhood as an issue of cultural-linguistic identity. Scorn is heaped on the "crude", "vulgar Leninist" emphasis on distinct territory, on economic life and political (i.e. state) structures. Enormous hostility is also expressed towards Lenin's positive approach to the assimilation of minorities "so long as it is not based on fraud or force". For the modern Bauerites "national culture" in all its varieties is seen as the highest expression of which humanity is capable. The loving promotion of these national-cultural identities, especially when they can find no viable state form, is all part of the subjective idealism of "identity politics". Here, the Kantian autonomous individual must be free to choose, and if necessary even to create, their own cultural identity and then group together with all those individuals seeking a common lifestyle. This outlook is venomously opposed to class politics and class solidarity. It is rooted in the semi-national, and even racial, communities of the foremost settler-immigrant society—the USA, but these politics find new outlets in explaining similar "ethnic" communities created by mass economic immigration and waves of political refugees in many imperialist and semi-colonial countries. In addition, the rise of movements of indigenous populations within settler nations has added to this pressure to adopt a definition of a nation free of the earthy encumbrance of territory or the sordid world of economics.

Events in the Balkans and in the former USSR should have alarmed all post-modern utopians of the dangers of fostering, preserving or even creating national identities. This is playing with fire since it is naive, at best, to expect that such identities will not become the basis for struggles over territories and economic resources on which to found states. National identity is a political consciousness, in embryo at least. This identity may derive from various sources: a fading cultural memory of former political conditions; the state from which an immigrant came; the cultural remnants of a state or autonomous province now absorbed into a larger state. It requires only a serious change in politico-economic conditions for this identity to be the spur to seizing territory and proclaiming national rights. Faced with a deep and prolonged economic crisis, or the onset of political oppression, an elite within the community concerned can take the opportunity to mobilise a plebeian mass base to restore or enhance its position. The disintegrating bureaucracies of the moribund workers' states, together with the mafia businessmen emerging into the open from the former "black economy", have created movements to seize their own national territory. They

expertly focus mass despair and discontent on other nationalities or minorities that can be the scapegoats for economic hardship.

As soon as the national struggle ceases to be the exclusive concern of the intelligentsia (who, left to their own devices, have a tendency to deny the political and economic in favour of the cultural) and seizes hold of the masses, it necessarily becomes a political question and ultimately one of territory. This may pass through a series of stages?the demand for political privileges, for autonomy, for federal or confederal solutions?but if it is not resolved at this level, then the question of territorial division will become paramount. And where soil is concerned, blood is seldom missing either. Marxism recognises no historic claims, no sacred soil, no rights of conquest or settlement, nor of autochthonous existence. Marxists reject all such claims when and wherever they violate the expressed will for separate statehood by a given population, democratically expressed, which does not violate another nation's equal right to statehood.

Thirdly, a common economic life must unite the citizens of a state and provide the basis for a common identity. The capitalist period or epoch must be understood as beginning with the widespread development of capitalist exchange relations from the late fifteenth century onwards. As merchant and, later, manufacturing, capital came to dominate economic life in Western Europe, the bourgeoisie pressured the later feudal monarchs to meet its needs. Late feudal Absolutism, and enlightened despotism from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, formed the birth period of the nation state in Western Europe and beyond. Monarchs such as Louis XIV began to create more uniform state structures, armies, bureaucracies, tax and legal systems, creating a mould into which the French Revolution was to pour the molten metal of mass national consciousness. For a while the dynastic principle of feudalism continued to obstruct proto-national ideology?sometimes successfully. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the bourgeoisie itself took the lead in creating states which claimed to express the will of nations. In doing so it had to transcend all the remnants of feudal fragmentation and decentralisation that obstructed the development of the new forces and relations of production.

### **The Economy and the Nation**

The bourgeoisie's purpose in building nation states was to create a uniform national market. This required a common currency, weights and measures, a common legal system, and the reduction or abolition of all privileges for "parasitic" classes or castes like the nobles or clergy. The bourgeoisie used the national armies to defend its trade and investments abroad with the excuse that such trade was part of the nation's interests, not those of particular merchants or manufacturers. For the mass of the population, reduced to the status of propertyless labourers, business crises brought unemployment and the need to seek work throughout the national territory. This all speeded up the process of superseding local and regional consciousness. Mass changes in language (the near disappearance of Irish Gaelic, for example) were largely the product of these economic factors rather than the results of political persecution.

The economic pre-requisites for a viable state clearly changed over successive centuries. To start, with land and ports were necessary. Later, to these were added the natural resources for industry. Coalfields and iron deposits in the nineteenth century (Alsace-Lorraine and the Rhineland), oilfields in the twentieth, became the objects of conflicting national claims and major wars were fought over them. It is plain enough to all practical nationalist politicians that an independent nation state is impossible without an economic life that enables a normal degree of social stability internally and the capacity to hold their rival states at bay. The ruling class within the nation state has to provide the subaltern classes with sufficient satisfaction to continue to accept bourgeois leadership of the nation alongside the latter's continued exploitation of the majority. Without this "crude" material basis, no state could come into existence or long survive. Any prolonged and deep going economic collapse threatens not only open class war and revolution but also their internal fracture and break up. In such conditions, only the alleviation of economic pressures can

provide the ruling class with a way out; the pressure for expansionist or predatory "national" wars mounts. These are not only an ideological diversion for the masses but an attempt to solve the economic crisis of the state. This applies to all bourgeois states, semi-colonial or imperialist, although the predatory character of the latter's wars of expansion far exceed all others in scope and ferocity.

Language and culture are the means and material expression of national identity. Nationalists usually present their language as the primordial expression of the nation. Yet a national language, one spoken as "mother tongue" across all the population or territory of the claimed nation, is a late development associated with mass literacy. It is related to the emergence of the modern bourgeois state which needed a standardised national language and, eventually, a universal education system. All, or most, local and regional particularisms, local dialects and laws were then subordinated or suppressed.

Epic poetry and mythologised history are also pressed into service when necessary to bolster the claims for the longevity and continuity of a national language. This literature and history is linked to the emergence of the earliest form of the later national language (e.g. Old English or Old French.) These legendary origins were, however, not originally national myths but tribal, religious and dynastic myths, stories of ruling houses from the Dark and Middle Ages. In a period that stretches roughly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, these ancient myths were converted into national myths. Amongst the more recently formed nations of the twentieth century, a similar process has occurred but over a much shorter time making the "artificiality" of this process much more evident. National myth-making is a task of poets, dramatists historians, and latterly of film makers and novelists.

A national history, real and/or mythical, underpins the legitimacy of the claim to statehood and ideologically compels the present generation not to betray their forbears and to make enormous sacrifices for future generations. Again, a mystique of fate and care for a living organism surrounds all talk of a nation's history or culture?it is the credo of the secular religion of the bourgeois epoch. Longevity or, better, near immortality are such highly prized attributes of the nation that they have to be invented, though not usually out of nothing. The real history of states, tribes, cultures of many epochs it called up and remodelled.

The existence of ethnically distinct peoples in the distant past, (e.g. the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Aztecs, Incas) in no way proves the millennia-long existence of the modern nations which claim these ethnic groups as forbears. Whilst geographical compactness and linguistic homogeneity may have given these peoples an ethnic distinctness from surrounding peoples thousands of years ago, the ideological basis of the state and the common consciousness of its people were not based on national identity, let alone the concept of the sovereignty of the nation. Hence, there was a complete absence in these epochs of any such concept as the right of certain peoples to independent statehood. If this reflection within right/law was completely absent, this was because the socio- economic reality which might lead to it was also absent. Of course, most modern bourgeois historians, archaeologists and ethnographers, anachronistically use these concepts, transferring them back in time and inferring a level of consciousness that did not exist.

Most European and many Asian nations claim a continuous life much longer than the bourgeois epoch. In Europe, the beginnings of national history are usually located in the period of the establishment of barbarian kingdoms on the ruins of the western provinces of the Roman Empire. It is true that monarchies based on the settling tribal confederations, using written vernacular languages, first emerged in this period. These provided later nationalist historians with suitable figures as nation creators (Alfred the Great for England, Clovis for the French). Certainly, the word "nation" was used to describe the student groupings in the Medieval University of Paris or the caste-like foreign merchant corporations. It was used alongside gens, and populus with the implication that the population of a given area had a common descent. But its

meaning was not the same as the modern concept?namely, the citizens of a state speaking the same language, sharing a common conscious identity and so on. Sometimes it was used to indicate the subjects of a particular prince, regardless of the language these subjects spoke or their differing customs. At other times it meant the inhabitants of many states who shared common historical origins, or the same or similar languages and customs. Most frequently it referred to the feudal upper classes alone and not to the peasant masses they exploited. Certainly, any pre-capitalist concept of "nationhood" was not regarded as the basis for political structures or representation. The primary communal identity of the pre-capitalist human being was religious, class, (or rather, estate), local, and regional?but certainly not national. It was only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Western Europe that national themes appeared in vernacular literature, often produced by or for the non-noble classes. But with the bourgeois epoch certain of the old feudal and pre-feudal ethnic identities were claimed as national communities supposedly existing for centuries or even millenia.

Every concrete nationalism contains a legacy of pre-capitalist ideology, sometimes entirely mythical. Examples include feudal dynastic folklore, religious ideology, tribalism or outright racism. In gaining a new function?that of nurturing a consciousness of a national character?these old ideologies are selected, purged and transformed. Elements are discarded by the nation builders, but often these continue a subterranean existence and can be resurrected in changed circumstances when faced with new struggles. Few national identities are single and exclusive. In times of crisis, old regional ethnic loyalties can rise to claim "national" status and challenge and break up the ruling nation's unity. Last but not least the onset of a profound revolutionary crisis can undermine the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, expose the falsity of its claims to defend the interest of the majority of its citizens and encourage close collaboration between similar struggles across national frontiers.

The national myth-makers treat ethnic origins as an independent driving force. They do so in order to displace and obscure the real class motive forces which led to the formation of the nation. Modern Jewish nationalism (including Zionism) has to transform the religious history of the Jewish merchant/artisan centred communities into the history of a 3,000 year old nation. Religious ideology has played an important part in the nationalism of oppressed nations like the Poles and the Irish. It remains a resource for nation-creators or dividers as in the Indian sub-continent. Likewise, tribal-confederation identities (Africa) can serve as a starting point for nation creating. It can generally be stated, however, that the more predominant these pre-capitalist elements are in an actual or aspirant "national consciousness", the more reactionary will this be. Any religious element will strengthen clerical influence and morality. All preservation of pre-capitalist institutions and customs, with the claim that they are an essential part of the national character, gives points of support to anti-democratic as well as anti-working class forces.

In sum, nationalism is the central political ideology of capitalism and, indeed, of the entire bourgeois epoch. It is, as Lenin said, "a broad and very deep ideological current". Neither religion, philosophy, democratism, nor vulgar political economy, useful as they all are to various capitalist classes in varying proportions, have the power or anything approaching the universality of nationalist ideology. Deeply linked to the emotive language of family and home and to their "defence", it creates an alienated community consciousness in a society which is largely devoid of community or solidarity.

Capitalism is a society in which all former communities (village, local or regional) have been weakened or destroyed and in which the old patriarchal extended family has been reduced in size, if not obliterated. Indeed, though nationalism often bemoans this destruction, without it the population would not need or yearn for the "imagined community" of the nation. For those who have not formed collective class organisations, economic and political crisis calls out for an imaginary, fantastic, community. In it the individual can be located between the past and the future, so that she/he belongs to it. And this community

is not primarily a voluntary, rational, "artificial" one but is the very basis on which the state rests.

The power of nationalism at a social-psychological level is derived from this sense of community. It is a power that rivals religion in its ability to mobilise millions, often against their own real individual and class interests. It is a power that has played a major part in sweeping away two proletarian internationals this century and in undermining the degenerate workers' states. At the same time, it has motivated struggles against imperialist domination and exploitation as well as Stalinist oppression. It has motivated acts of unbelievable cruelty and inhumanity as well as acts of courage and resistance to repression.

### **Nationalism and internationalism**

The scope of nationalism?revolutionary and reactionary?during this century has provoked both Marxists and non-Marxists to claim that scientific socialists have "never understood" or consistently "underestimated" the power of nationalism. They claim that national consciousness has shown itself far stronger than class consciousness. However, the repeated triumph of national consciousness during a series of reactionary imperialist and/or progressive national wars does not prove that class consciousness is incapable of transcending national consciousness. Marxism is, on the contrary, quite capable of understanding the profound hold it has without falling victim to its mystique or failing to recognize the material contradictions which make it possible for proletarian internationalism to vanquish it.

Nationalism is the dominant ideology of the capitalist class, the ruling idea of the ruling class. It cannot be dethroned until the capitalist class' economic and political rule itself begins to crumble. Revolutionary Marxists cannot expose nationalism's falsity, even to the vanguard elements, by theoretical explanation and by propaganda alone. This is the viewpoint of rationalist "enlighteners". As scientific socialists, we can and must develop tactics to deepen and explode its inner contradictions, in order to bring about the downfall of the bourgeois nation state and to create an internationalist world order.

Only in revolutionary conditions will it be possible to overcome the bourgeois national consciousness of the broad masses. Even then, it will be a question of the ruling classes having demonstrated in practice that their claim to embody the well-being and self defence of the exploited classes is entirely bogus and that they do not represent the interests of the nation as a whole. The question of transcending bourgeois nationalism amongst the proletarian vanguard is another question. But, at the outset of a war, for example, it is a near certainty that such an internationalist vanguard will find itself isolated from the masses' consciousness for a whole period. However, since nationalism is a false consciousness for the exploited classes, (an ideology in the strict sense of the term), one in contradiction to a world founded on class exploitation, it is riddled with contradictions.

Nation states are "the typical normal state form for the capitalist period" (Lenin). Unlike the monarchs and the nobility, the emerging class of merchants, lawyers and manufacturers could not claim to derive their power either from ancient custom, from royal descent or from God. Since it was plain that they had acquired their power by revolutions made by the subordinate and exploited classes, they had to acknowledge this in some way. They maintained that all political power derived from the people, that is, the Nation, of which they were now the leading and representative part. The state thus had to express the sovereignty of the nation. In turn its citizens had to be patriots.

These nation states were a new phenomenon in human history, although the bourgeoisie could not present them as such. Rather, it had to present them as a re-birth of something which had up to that point been divided, usurped and obscured by feudalism or dynastic absolutism. But the economic, social, political and legal basis on which it created these states was fundamentally new. In some cases (France) it was able to build on the work begun by enlightened despotism, which was a regime obliged to rest partly on the support of the nascent bourgeoisie and, thus, to carry out some of the latter's tasks. The French Revolution

(and all other bourgeois revolutions before and after it) did not have to smash the absolutist state but rather purge it of its feudal elements and complete the development of a centralised army, state bureaucracy and a uniform system of national administration. This either necessitated a constitutional/legal conversion of the monarch's role from being the bonaparte of moribund feudalism into a vestigial figurehead, or led to the monarchy's total abolition and the creation of a republic.

Citizenship is supposed to be more or less identical with membership of the national community; namely, all those speaking the national language, sharing its distinctive national culture, possessing its "national character". This community was defined by bourgeois ideologists in two different ways, although pragmatic combinations of these were and are frequent. The first stresses the historic, the organic and the emotional; the second, the social-contractual and the rational. The former stressed birth into the national community on its historic territory, the latter treated the nation as a social contract from which the citizen received liberty in return for patriotic devotion. German nationalists (Herder and Fichte), generally adopted the "blood and soil" approach, whereas the French (the Jacobins, Renan) adopted the view that "a nation is a daily plebiscite" and "the people without liberty has no patrie". "What is a nation?" asked the Abbé Sieyès. "A body living under one common law and represented by the same legislature." The "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" proclaimed that: "The principle of sovereignty resides essentially in the nation; no body of men, no individual, can exercise authority that does not emanate expressly from it."

The endless multiplication of nation states or of states claiming to be nation states, in the twentieth century is cited as evidence of the universality and the natural character of nations. Nations may not always have existed, goes the argument, but they are the highest possible stage of the human community. A world of nations is, alongside capitalism and parliamentary democracy, part of the "end of history". But the twentieth century has not just seen a stable and harmonious pattern of nation formation on the West European model. Rather, the demand to be allowed to form a nation state has been used to fight against the inequality and oppression that are typical of the imperialist epoch. Also it has been used to lay claim to privileges and to exploit and oppress others. In fact, the relative instability of many of these nations, their vulnerability to fragmenting sub-national claims by their own constituent regions, or their rivalry for territory with other nations, gives good grounds for asserting that a long and stable epoch of nation states is as unlikely as the eternity of capitalism.

The nation?—like many characteristics of bourgeois society?cannot be abolished in the same way and at the same time as the means of production are seized by the proletariat. During this phase, as Marx said, the proletariat raises itself to the role of leading class of the nation. Various revisionists, including Rosdolsky, have interpreted this phrase to mean that there can be a whole period in which the proletariat, whilst it exercises hegemony in the struggle against national oppression, and even more when it succeeds in establishing its class rule within a national state, is justifiably national and even nationalist. There is no evidence that Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky ever held this view. Rather, this is a view close to those of Lassalle, Von Volmar, Bernstein and Stalin.

The proletariat struggles to establish its dictatorship not to "build the socialist nation", not to construct "socialism in one country" but to initiate the world revolution. From this point on, whilst obliterating all remnants of national oppression, it seeks to internationalise its rule. National "character" and national identity will, of course, wither away, not be abolished. But this withering should be understood not as the loss of the contributions to human culture of all these peoples but rather their pooling, their fusing into a common human culture. What will be lost will be parochialism, xenophobic fears and hatreds, the rejoicing in conquest and exploitation which are inseparable from all nationalism and all national history.

**From bourgeois revolution to colonialism: different paths of nation state development**

Britain, Holland, the United States of America and France played a key role in developing the first nation states, and outlined one path for others to follow. Later, Germany and Italy developed the model of national unification (1848-1871) and Italy and the Latin American states that of national liberation. In this sense, nation-building did indeed originate in the Americas and Europe with, and as a result of, the capitalist world market and mode of production. Its example spread with this mode of production and exchange, with the need of other states to compete militarily and economically with the more developed powers.

Colonialism played a crucial role in the development of capitalism and thus of the nation. The British, Dutch and French were amongst the first and the most successful colonial powers. They were the first colonial powers able to transform the wealth of the colonies (including those of the Spanish and the Portuguese) into capital. Climate and geography, as well as the lure of natural resources, were of vital importance for colonial powers. The fertile temperate and sub-tropical zones attracted mass settlement by Europeans. This resulted in the displacement and near genocide of the indigenous populations wherever their social development did not enable them to put up effective resistance. The result was the creation of new nations of white settler colonists;

Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, and Anglo-Boer South Africa. Some of these projects failed (Algeria) or today maintain a precarious or artificial existence (Israel, South Africa), usually because it proved impossible to wipe out or completely displace the original inhabitants. In some cases the settlers became restricted to a largely petit-bourgeois, labour aristocratic, or rich farmer strata and the broad masses of the population remained an oppressed and exploited peasantry and proletariat. Here, these latter classes went on to lead an anti-colonial, anti-settler nationalist revolt.

In the tropical zones, mass European settlement was rare. In countries which had experienced a long and extensive state formation ("Asiatic" mode of production) or, at least, a well developed tribal confederation before colonisation, it proved difficult or impossible to establish colonial settler nations. In some of these areas?Meso-America and the northern and central Andes?the indigenous population remained a large proportion of the population, nominally part of the new nations formed between 1811 and 1825, but often excluded from the "political nation" by criollo and later mestizo elites well into the twentieth century. Societies, such as Brazil, in which plantation economy, mining or infrastructural development was based on forced immigration and settlement by black slaves and/or by indentured Asian labour, present a partial exception in which socially stratified or mixed nations arose.

In North America, developments were different. Mass settlement from the most developed capitalist nations of western Europe, the absence of any feudal politico-economic fetters and the early boosts to primitive accumulation, all created a strong bourgeoisie. This class created a powerful federal state, capable of expanding westwards and southwards, purchasing or conquering most of the territories of the present USA by 1845. Built around a core of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant settlers, and a black slave population, waves of immigrants rolled in, first from Western and Northern Europe?Irish, Swedish and Germans; then from Eastern and Southern Europe?especially Jews and Poles.

Sections of the nation?blacks, the native Americans and the Mexicans of the south-west?were excluded in whole or in part from citizenship and civil rights. In addition, they were subjected to a virulent racism which took on a cultural and/or pseudo-scientific basis whereby these peoples were described as inferior, primitive or degenerate. This became intense after the failure of the Civil War and Radical Reconstruction (1867-77) to grant the former slaves economic equality and full citizenship, in particular by failing to give land to the black (and poor white) rural masses. Instead, a vicious apartheid was installed ("Jim Crow") that lasted until the 1960s. Social intermixing and intermarriage were repressed with great savagery. Consequently, whilst the "white" immigrant population tended to intermix and assimilate within a generation

or two, leaving only a typical double ethnic-national identity (e.g. "Irish Americans"), the excluded "races" remained unintegrated into the nation, pushed aside and alienated. Yet their aspiration to social advancement and individual freedom (the "American dream") remained such an attractive goal that, combined with huge internal migration and urbanisation, the oppressed sectors did not develop a territorial separatist goal?in short, a true nationalism. Black nationalism was either a utopian echo of Zionism (returnism) or an assertion of community worth?a claim to civic equality and integration into the American nation.

In the "Third World", four major impulses were given to the proliferation of national struggles in the second half of the twentieth century. first, the destruction of the colonial empires in the 1950s and early 1960s. Second, the extension of US economic and military hegemony in the semi-colonial world and the resistance of anti-imperialist movements. Third, the onset of an acute period of economic crisis in the semi-colonies in the 1980s and 1990s, led to a crisis of the post-colonial states, with powerful nationally disintegrative tendencies. Fourth, since 1988, we have witnessed the rapid development of secessionist nationalist movements within the moribund workers' states. These latter two movements characterise the present period and have created bloody wars and the context for imperialist intervention in the 1990s.

The collapse of the colonial empires after 1945 saw the creation of new independent states in a process ultimately controlled by imperialism. The states created were almost universally semi-colonies, formally independent but in fact subordinate either to their former colonial master or to the USA. Setting up states on the territories demarcated by the former colonies' boundaries meant a Balkanisation which divided peoples, created hundreds of national minorities and left systematic national or racial oppression intact. In some cases it simply reversed the positions of ethnic groups, turning formerly relatively privileged communities into oppressed minorities.

## **The National Question, Colonialism and Independence:**

### **The Indian sub-continent**

The British began massive expansion into India on the wreckage of the Mogul empire after defeating the French. But it was only after the suppression of the Indian Mutiny in 1858 that the wholesale "modernisation" of India began. Britain now had direct control of three-fifths of India, leaving two-fifths under the control of client rulers. The building of a huge railway network, aimed at pumping India's surplus product abroad, nevertheless had the effect of tying it together as a political and economic entity. It also led to the creation of a small modern bourgeoisie. The European-style education system produced an Anglicised state bureaucracy, the Indian Civil Service, and a growing intelligentsia. Many of these intellectuals?teachers, doctors, lawyers, writers?rapidly came up against a brick wall of discrimination built by the British authorities. Educated in nineteenth century European ideals and conceptions they responded to British racism and arrogance by taking up the most comprehensive, progressive, ideological weapon with which to fight the colonialists?modern nationalism. This enabled them to make a bourgeois democratic claim that it was difficult for the imperialists themselves to deny in principle. The British had already accorded home rule or dominion status to "white" colonies like Canada and Australia and the British were soon obliged to proclaim (hypocritically) their commitment to ultimate self-government for India.

Modern Asian nationalism, as a mass movement against oppression, was born in India and was to become a model for national movements throughout Asia and Africa. It came into being in 1885 in the form of the Indian National Congress. At first it was led by moderate leaders such as Naoroji, Bannerjea and Gokhale who sought to persuade the British to reform their rule. But there was always a militant wing too, that resorted either to mass actions (boycotts and demonstrations) or to individual terrorism. The first Congress leader to outline a policy of active resistance was B. J. Tilak, a fully modern nationalist inspired by

Garibaldi and Mazzini of the Italian Unification movement. Increasingly, the Congress was driven by British intransigence to mobilise mass campaigns to achieve its aims, especially after Gandhi assumed a leading role during and after the first World War.

The Amritsar massacre of 1919 drew a line of blood between the British and all the mass forces seeking change in India. But it also convinced Gandhi of the need to apply a policy of non-violent resistance, satyagraha. Whilst insisting on strict non-violence, Gandhi's campaigns were based on mass non-cooperation and a boycott of British goods. They inevitably aroused the masses to self-activity which went beyond what Gandhi intended. The British usually responded with bloody repression. The masses then began to break through the restraints of satyagraha and also to struggle actively for immediate social changes such as land reform, aimed first at the British plantation capitalists and then at the feudal landowners. This was particularly so after the Russian revolution (1917) and the appearance of a small but influential Communist Party in India with roots in the trade unions. The result of mass struggles which overflowed the banks of satyagraha was to terrify the Congress leaders and their bourgeois base, which had no desire to unleash a peasant war or to completely rupture their links with the princes or the British.

The great campaigns of 1920-24, 1929-31, 1942 (Quit India) all followed this pattern. Mass actions were abruptly ended and the leaders entered into negotiations with the British. The response of the imperialists to Congress agitation was to adopt a policy of divide and rule which was important for the future national fate of the Indian sub-continent. The Minto-Morley reforms of 1909 aimed at co-opting the Indian bourgeoisie and the professional middle class into accepting British rule via an elective legislative council. They were based on the division of India's electorate along religious-communal lines, primarily Hindu/Muslim. They had the long term effect of preventing the coalescence of a truly all-Indian bourgeoisie and national movement. This helped to divide the Congress and to create a Muslim League. Further British "reforms" in 1919 and 1935 sought to prolong their rule by creating governments and authorities dominated by the old princely rulers and reactionary religious-communal parties and movements.

Though the British strategy failed in the end to preserve their rule in India they did achieve the splitting of the mainly Muslim north-west provinces and East Bengal away from the new state in 1948-49, thus creating Pakistan on a religious-communal basis. This all tended to give Indian nationalism, despite its declarations of secularism, a strongly Hindu cultural bias. Other religious and cultural communities have tended to create regionalist and communalist parties wherever and whenever the class movements of the workers and the landless peasants were weak.

The Gandhi, and then the Nehru "dynasty", leadership of the Congress enabled the Hindu dominated Indian bourgeoisie to assume power and to preserve a nearly continuous bourgeois democratic rule after 1947. This was possible partly by playing a balancing act internationally between the Stalinist bloc and the West. Internally, it was facilitated by a highly state capitalist industrialisation programme on the basis of significant USSR aid, together with a land reform programme, undertaken "from above", which strengthened a peasant proprietor class. The Indian bourgeoisie was torn between needing a national ideology to weld together its state and justify its rule and the need to play off regional elites and weaken the unity of the working class. In creating a national consciousness the Indian bourgeoisie faced enormous problems. Not the least of these was to create a national culture. In a country of 197 languages (according to the official census) belonging to four separate language groups, this was difficult to do without alienating major parts of the nation. Thus despite adopting Hindi as the state language, English has remained the main lingua franca.

For over three decades, the Congress was able, at a national level, to maintain a near one-party state. But in the 1970s and 1980s economic unevenness, the crisis of the state capitalist dominated economy, and

the failure of the CP-led working class movement to break free of the bourgeois Congress, all led to the massive growth of nationalist, regionalist and religious-communalist movements of resistance to the capital (Delhi). In turn, the central state machine responded with ever greater regional and India-wide states of emergency. The "green revolution", which turned the Sikh farmers into a wealthy and ambitious stratum in Punjab, promoted calls for autonomy, and then even independence for the Sikh dominated parts of the province. Government resistance to these claims first strengthened the moderate nationalist movement, the Akali Dal. Mrs Gandhi tried to undermine it by promoting Sikh "extremists" around Bhindranwale to undermine the Akali Dal provincial government. The result was that the Khalistan movement grew enormously. This movement was in itself triply reactionary; it framed its "national" (Khalistan) claims in religious-communalist terms which would destroy the secular basis of the state; it made territorial claims that would lead to the oppression or expulsion of millions of Hindu and Muslim Punjabis; and its formation would promote the Balkanisation of the Indian state to the benefit of imperialism. Nevertheless, systematic oppression by the central government, including the denial of the Sikh majority areas to express their wishes democratically, could actually crystallise the Sikh population into an oppressed nationality which could formulate a claim to autonomy and separate statehood in a relatively progressive form and not as a claim for privileges or the "right" to oppress others.

The appearance of nationalist movements as a result of the attempt to repress religious and communalist movements is an increasing phenomenon. Other movements have been based on economic backwardness of regions, discrimination and the settlement of ethno-linguistically different territories by immigrants from the Hindi and Bengali speaking zones. The change of economic policy which began under Rajiv Gandhi and his successors, towards an "open door" neo-liberal policy will increase the growing unevenness of the sub-continent and thus the resort by local and regional elites to "nationalist" and separatist slogans. The consequent use of increasingly bonapartist measures by the Federal regime will give a further twist to this vicious circle. Only the proletariat of the sub-continent can develop a consistent nationality policy as part of the programme of proletarian revolution. This must include the goal of a voluntary Socialist Federation of the whole Indian sub-continent. Only the widest scope for developing the productive forces on a planned basis can overcome the backwardness and misery in which imperialism has locked India for nearly two centuries. Its constitution must provide for the unconditional right to secede, if any oppressed nationality democratically expresses the wish to do so. The boundaries of its constituent states or provinces must be drawn according to the wishes of its peoples, assuring all minorities full and equal rights. Only the proletariat, leading the urban and rural poor, can solve the national question of the Indian sub-continent on the solid foundation of class unity. This class unity can only be achieved on the basis of consistent internationalism, a resolute struggle against all national privileges and all national oppression.

## **Africa**

Sub-Saharan Africa has been transformed by contact with foreign powers during three distinct phases. The immediately pre-capitalist epoch, dominated by merchant capital, brought the large scale slave trade. The epoch of free trade, of capitalism proper, began the wholesale seizure of the coastal regions of the continent and the systematic exploration of the interior. Lastly, the imperialist epoch has seen both the colonisation of the entire continent at one time or another and its de-colonisation since 1945. During all these three phases the continent has seen its human and natural resources plundered on a massive scale. It has been estimated that 150 to 200 million Africans were "exported", largely to the plantations of the new world or perished in Africa as a result of the slave trade. To this untold exploitation and suffering must be added the sucking out of Africa of vast wealth in the form of various industrial raw materials, rare and precious metals and gems. This incalculable forced "contribution" to the development of capitalism in Europe and North America led to Africa's near exclusion from capitalist development itself, except in South

Africa and in regions with concentrations of extractive industries and cash crop agriculture.

The speed and totality of European conquest in the nineteenth century was due in large measure to the economic and military disparity between the European powers and the level of Africa's political and economic development. Some important states had developed before the European onslaught; Benin and Asante in the west, Great Zimbabwe in south-east and Ethiopia in north-east Africa. Cities like Mali, Timbuktu and Kano had highly developed artisan production and metal working culture. In general, these states were based on continued communal land ownership but with a well-developed class system. Powerful monarchies existed in both west and east Africa long before the Europeans arrived. Outside of these, there existed tribal confederations which were evolving state structures but which, by the time the Europeans arrived in force, had not transcended varieties of the Asiatic mode of production and feudalism. Their relative isolation from intercontinental trade and its wars left them economically and militarily vulnerable to plunder and conquest. The massive distorting effect of the slave trade turned these states and tribal confederations against one another, weakened them economically and militarily, and tied their rulers to the European traders.

The success of England's South African settler colony after the discovery of diamonds and gold led the way to the "scramble for Africa" from 1885 to 1896. The entire sub-Saharan continent was colonised, apart from Ethiopia. The Europeans' new colonies rarely if ever coincided either with previous kingdoms or the territory of tribal confederations. They had little or no linguistic or ethnic homogeneity. Their borders were rarely "natural frontiers"; rather they reflected agreements struck between the negotiators of the European powers?straight lines drawn on a map in Berlin in 1885 and at subsequent conferences. Yet, after 1945, these were to be the boundaries of the new nations of Africa. The colonial divisions drawn up in this way were only the beginning of the process of establishing the colonies. The traditional societies of Africa put up an heroic resistance to the white invaders. Momentary successes such as that of the Zulus over the British at Isandhlwana or the Mahdi at Khartoum were followed by larger and overwhelming forces. Nevertheless, revolts continued to occur well into the twentieth century.

When the colonies were established, the best land was expropriated for European owned plantations or, in the more temperate zones, for European farmers using African labour. In the southern part of the continent, huge investment in mines rapidly created a proletariat, both of "poor white" immigrants and of black workers uprooted from the land. The latter grew steadily as a proportion of the workforce throughout the century whilst the white workers became a highly privileged labour aristocracy clinging fiercely to their racial privileges. Wherever, as in South Africa, the white settler population formed a sizeable minority, white racism became enshrined in a horrific legal framework not witnessed elsewhere except Nazi Germany. But, in the long run, such a political and social order, dependent on super-exploiting a huge and growing black proletariat, could not survive. Prosperity in the imperialist heartlands slowed the flood of white immigrants to a trickle. There was no chance of replacing the black population with a real white proletariat and the white population remained trapped in a colon situation?no matter how much repression they unleashed, the whites were steadily forced to create their own gravedigger in the factories and mines.

South Africa, uniquely, evolved into a minor imperialism in the post-second world war on the strength of its enormous role in world gold production. Elsewhere in Africa, capitalist development was weak and stunted. In most colonies, the big bourgeoisie was either absent or it was European. The large scale capitalist farmers were likewise Europeans except in parts of West Africa where feudal relations were being gradually transformed into large scale capitalist land ownership. There was a "native" merchant and commercial bourgeoisie and in some regions a layer of rich peasants. But, until long after independence, there was virtually no equivalent to the small industrial and large comprador bourgeoisie of India or China. The first modern classes of Africa were the agrarian and mining proletariat, transport workers (dockers and

railway workers) and the educated middle classes created by the imperialists to play a subordinate role in administering the colonies. Colonial, military and missionary schools and colleges turned out relatively large numbers of teachers, preachers, lawyers, administrators and a black NCO and, eventually, junior officer, caste.

It was overwhelmingly these strata that absorbed the idea of the European nation as the motor force of history. Taught the history and character of the "great nations" of Europe, they began to work towards the idea of a nationalism of their own as the only ideology that could provide a basis for both the modernisation of their homelands and for mobilising a movement to win independence from the colonialists. The late Italian colonisation of Ethiopia awakened the intellectuals of the whole continent who took pride in the one independent black state that had hitherto defied colonialism. Despite the importance of the young proletariat's struggles from the first world war period onwards, this petit and bourgeois nationalism did not meet a serious proletarian political challenge. In the 1930s Stalinism helped to discredit communism in the eyes of the proto-nationalist opposition to colonialism. The selling of Soviet oil to fascist Italy during its war against Ethiopia and opposition to anti-colonial movements in the colonies of the "democratic" imperialisms helped minimise the impact of class politics. These two factors, the extreme weakness of the African bourgeoisie and the political nullity of "communism", opened the way for a petit-bourgeois nationalism with a non-class "socialistic" colouration.

South Africa, after the Boer War (1900-1902) was a central breeding ground of nationalist ideologies. There were protest campaigns against the colour bar included in the Act of Union, a treaty which marked the reconciliation between the British and the Boers at the expense of the black population's political rights. The African People's Organisation was founded in 1902 by Abdul Abdurahman and the Bambatta workers' revolt of 1906 showed that the masses could and would take up the struggle against racism and exploitation. From the war well into the twenties, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union led by Clement Kadalie organised black workers against the racist employers and state. The South African Native Congress, later the African National Congress (ANC), was formed in 1911-12 alongside Gandhi's Indian Congress (1894). These were bourgeois liberal-reformist organisations and it was here that Gandhi developed the policy of non-violent protest.

The ideas of a pan-African liberation originated in the USA with the intellectual W E B. Du Bois and the popular agitator Marcus Garvey. The latter's slogans "Back to Africa!" and "Africa for Africans!" gained wide support in the years 1916-25. Du Bois was at the centre of organising six Pan Africanist Congresses in Europe between 1900 and 1945. Later, in the 1930s, George Padmore and Eric Williams from the West Indies stressed again the idea of a liberated and united Africa. The Algerian national liberation struggle in the 1950s also exerted an influence on writers such as Frantz Fanon. His ideas were to influence radicals in the later 1960s and 1970s. In South Africa, more conservative, often reactionary, ideas of cultural *négritude* were to inspire the Pan African Congress (a split from the ANC in 1958) and, later, the Black Consciousness movement.

The movements founded by Du Bois and Garvey either failed to become a mass force or quickly withered. It was the leaders and movements of the separate colonial states that were decisive in the history of African nationalism after the Second World War. Pan-African unity became a rhetorical aspiration, included in the ideology of most of the separate liberation movements. It had a progressive side, in that it posed the need for unity against imperialism, but, in reality, the bourgeois nationalists took no common actions against imperialism, especially after they came to power. They turned their backs on leaders like Patrice Lumumba when the Congolese state collapsed almost on independence as the Belgians and the UN intervened. In reality, the existence of the colonial states, with their economies oriented to the metropolitan centres, with their elites speaking the colonial languages, with the influence of liberalism and reformist

socialism from the "mother" countries, ensured that no real pan-African movement ever prospered. Despite the fact that the borders of these states cut across ethno-linguistic groups, despite the fact that each had some sort of poisoned legacy of imperialist divide and rule, the new regimes did little or nothing to overcome this legacy. They were, by and large, unable to bring about any large scale industrialisation which would have welded the different "tribal" groups into a proletariat. The political movements, often fused into the state on gaining power, rapidly ceased to be parties in any meaningful sense but rather instruments of patronage and clientilism. The independence leaders adopted grotesque personality cults and assumed bonapartist powers.

Kwame Nkrumah of the Gold Coast provides a typical case history. He was not only the leader of a reformist mass independence movement but an ideologue of pan-Africanism. In 1957, the British transferred the colonial state machinery to him, confident that he would safeguard British interests. Despite his later verbally radical critiques of neo-colonialism, after he was ousted in a coup in 1966, in power he had kept the ex-colony tied to the mother country. In short, he was, and remained, a thorough bourgeois nationalist and, at all decisive moments, a servant of imperialism. Other, even more verbally radical leaders were active throughout the continent; the self-proclaimed Marxist Sekou Touré, Léopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere. But their "Marxism" or their "African socialism" was of a completely petit bourgeois utopian sort and those of them that took power merely used it to serve the British, French and US multinational companies that continued to exploit Africa.

The imperialists' attitude to colonies where the workers or the peasants took direct and even armed action to overthrow their tormentors, was unforgiving. Kenya was one colony which witnessed a militant fightback after the Second World War because here the white settlers were still expropriating the best farm land. Jomo Kenyatta formed the Kikuyu Central Association in the 1920s and launched struggles against land robbery in the 1930s. But after the war, in 1952, the so-called Mau Mau peasant rebellion led by Dedan Kimathi demanded independence under the slogans "land and freedom". The Land and Freedom Army was some 30,000 strong. The British responded with the harshest repression. Thousands were killed and 80,000 Kikuyu placed in concentration camps. The war ended in 1956 with a British victory. But the defeat of the French and British over Suez in the same year, and the bloody Algerian Independence War, finally convinced leaders like de Gaulle and Macmillan that an organised retreat was necessary if they were not to provoke even more radical movements. Their foresight was confirmed negatively by those powers like Portugal who would not or could not pursue this policy. The "enlightened" outlook of France and Britain was also partly due to US pressure, which wanted an open market for its companies in Africa as elsewhere. It was also in part due to economic weakness and, in France's case, military weakness too. But a change to a policy of creating semi-colonies, politically independent but economically tied hand and foot, was possible because of the fact that the nationalist leaders were bourgeois in outlook and would prove reliable agents for imperialism.

The 1960s saw the granting of independence to all but the white self-governing settler colonies. At one pole stood pro-imperialist bonapartes, little more than tools of the former colonialists; "Emperor" Bokassa, Houphouet Boigny, Mobutu, or Banda in Malawi. At the other, the necessity of a long anti-colonial struggle in the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau produced radical?indeed, revolutionary?nationalist movements and leaders such as Agostino Neto and Amilcar Cabral. These movements gained valuable military support from Cuba and the Soviet Union but were ultimately conservatised by this support. In the 1970s, ?Marxist-Leninist? movements, or military regimes disguising themselves in Stalinist clothing, triumphed in Ethiopia and Somalia; in Eritrea victory came only in the 1980s. To some extent this was the also case in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) where Robert Mugabe took on a ?Marxist-Leninist? colouration. The decline and fall of their Kremlin backers, and the retreat of their Cuban advisers, doomed these regimes; either they unceremoniously dumped their Marxist disguise

or they were overthrown.

The South African revolution went through a similar conservatising process. After the revolutionary period of 1984-6, the leadership of the bourgeois nationalist ANC aimed to cut a deal with their white rulers. This project was boosted by the direct diplomacy of Gorbachev in the USSR after 1985. The total bankruptcy of bourgeois nationalism in both its conservative and its radical forms is now manifest. It falls to the proletariat and its peasant and urban poor allies to take up the struggle against imperialism. In doing so it has already been obliged to struggle for democratic rights against the nationalist regimes. They will have to present a revolutionary answer to all the unsolved debris of the imperialist Balkanisation of Africa, sorting out equitably and according to the wishes of its peoples, where they wish borders to be. They must put an end to privilege and oppression, transcend "tribalism" and outline a practical solution to the goal of African Unity in the form of a Socialist Federation of Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Latin America**

The new republics formed in the "new world" during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, were creole states, that is, states created by the ruling stratum of the native born settlers, speaking the same language as the colonial power, but whose distinct class interests had come into conflict with the "mother country" as the world market changed. The Napoleonic destruction of the Bourbon monarchy in Spain unleashed a prolonged struggle (1810-25) for independence in the Spanish colonies. By no means all of the creole leaders were bourgeois as such, that is, merchants or lawyers, let alone manufacturers. Many were plantation slave-owners such as Simon Bolivar.

The plebeian movements of Hidalgo and Morelos in Mexico were unsuccessful whereas the great Haitian slave revolution had, by 1804, created the second independent republic in the new world. But, by and large, it was the colonial elites which, in South America, provided the leading cadre of the movements seeking independence from Spain. The original cause of their estrangement was, in the main, the fiscal crisis of the European colonial powers? Britain France, and Spain? brought on by enormous war expenditure. In the case of Spain, this crisis was intensified by the death agony of late feudalism. Each colonial power re-subordinated the commerce of the colonies to that of the mother country. Another important pressure on these local elites was fear of the revolts of oppressed and exploited masses and/or the indigenous inhabitants (the Tupac Amaru revolt of 1782 in Peru and the Haitian slave revolt of 1791).

The leaders of the Central and South American wars of independence were inspired by the examples of the English, North American and French revolutions, by Enlightenment theory and freemasonry. The leading figures, such as Simon Bolivar and José de San Martin, operated back and forth across several countries in South America. They had hopes of creating much larger states than in fact emerged (Bolivar's Gran Columbia, the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata) or of creating confederations of states and even a League of Spanish American Countries (Panama Congress of 1826). These pan-continental objectives did not materialise primarily because of the incapacity of the creole land owning and merchant capitalist ruling classes to break the economic and political straightjacket imposed on them by original conquest. It was not a result of post-independence "imperialist" intervention or any sort of forced Balkanisation.

The viceroalties and intendencies had been obliged to relate economically to Spain and often had little economic links to each other. The creole elites were formed on the basis of these provincial administrations. The semi-feudal, chattel slavery, or mercantile capital basis of the ruling classes presented serious obstacles to the dynamic development of the productive forces. A strong modern bourgeoisie was slow to make its appearance. These white creole elites tended to look down on, and exclude from power, the mestizo (mixed "race" population) while the indios were exploited and ignored, hardly seeming to be part of the nation either in their own consciousness or that of their rulers.

At the beginning of the imperialist epoch nationalism was weak in Latin America. The heroic years of 1808-26 when the Enlightenment and French revolution had inspired the national revolts against the Spanish, were now far behind them. These had created nation states but ones dominated by white creole elites and based on the export of agrarian goods. Urban classes in general were weakly developed and the masses of indigenous peasants were excluded from the new nations. By the end of the nineteenth century, the success of export trade stimulated the growth of the cities, creating a new middle class and a modern proletariat. These latter two classes, however, were excluded from the traditional patterns of authority and political representation. Further mass immigration from Europe, at the start of the twentieth century, increased the mass of those with little stake in the nation state.

Mexico, more than most Latin American states, could point to powerful movements of resistance to European and then United States intervention or interference. Under Benito Juarez' presidencies (1854-72), especially during the the fight against French military occupation, the seeds of a Mexican national consciousness spread beyond the criollo elite. But it was the Mexican Revolution (1910-20) that really brought the peasant masses?the Mexicans of mestizo and indio descent?into the political nation. In the 1920s, the generation of revolutionary leaders was wiped out in internecine fighting, a process which signalled the triumph of the more conservative elements in Mexico. It was mainly the poor peasants that lost out as they were cheated of their just demands for land. In the 1930s, there was a revival of radicalism culminating in the election of the left populist Lazaro Cardenas to the presidency in 1934. Relying on the support of the urban workers and poor peasants Cardenas carried out nationalisations of the railways and, in 1938, the oil companies. He handed over land to the peasant communes (ejidos) in a major land reform and promoted the growth of a trade union bureaucracy to which he gave a subordinate role in managing the state owned industries. At the same time, Cardenas encouraged a powerful current of Mexican cultural nationalism which emphasised the pre-Columbian roots of the Mexican people.

The roots of modern nationalist politics in South America can be traced to the development of urban middle class parties in the early part of the twentieth century. They challenged the monopoly enjoyed by creole elites over state power and they demanded wider suffrage, civil rights, clean elections and an end to privileges. Sometimes they formed alliances with workers' organisations. The University Reform Movement in Argentina was the centre of this new nationalism at the end of the 1914-18 war and it spread from there to other South American universities in the 1920s. It represented the yearnings of an anguished middle class that had been harmed by war time inflation and frightened by working class unrest. Their economic programme did not initially challenge the traditional pattern of trade but they sought more revenues to help regenerate the infrastructure of the country.

It was only with the failure of the agrarian export economic model, in the late 1920s, that this nationalist movement gathered momentum and radicalism. In the 1920s the post-war pattern of international trade did not change dramatically. The demand for raw materials and goods in short supply was high. But the great depression after 1929 discredited the existing model of development as it was recognised that Latin American economies were exposed to factors outside their control. A resurgence in anti-oligarchic nationalism emerged strongly in the 1930s. Up until then the mass of the population?poor whites, mixed blood, Indians and blacks?were excluded from political representation. Nationalism acted as a vehicle for their enfranchisement and acted to spread civil rights beyond the elite.

In Peru, Victor Raul Haya de la Torre founded the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) which cultivated the regional, radical student and middle class resentment against the imperialist companies which dominated Peru's mining industries. The APRA was a real mass party, with a radical, pan-Latin American, anti-imperialist ideology. As such it was ferociously repressed and blocked by the oligarchy and the majority of the military high command. This led to conflict within the army between Aprista and anti-

Aprista factions. Over the following three decades of conflict, its radicalism and pan-Latin American outlook gradually subsided but it contributed importantly to the ideal of Latin American unity, aimed at breaking the stranglehold of US and European domination of the continent which was exercised through the old oligarchies and the military high command.

Another factor in the 1920s and 1930s contributed to the rise in nationalism; namely, the increased dominance of the USA over the economic life of the continent. Before the first World War, Britain had been the major power but it dominated the continent through trade and finance. After the war the US greatly accelerated its ownership of natural and industrial assets in many Latin American countries and largely displaced Britain. The US had begun this process in the 1880s with Cuban sugar plantations and mills. After 1889, United Fruit converted the Central American republics into one-crop client states. After the war, the USA significantly expanded its investments. Chilean and Peruvian copper, Bolivian mining and Mexican oil all fell under US domination?in part or in whole?in the 1920s. This domination was bolstered by US military invasions to safeguard its interests: Cuba in 1898, Nicaragua between 1912-1933. Imperialism became more visible and profit repatriation grew, while the rate of growth in most countries slowed down. This whole development acted to turn cultural anti-Americanism into economic and political nationalism once the Great Depression finally sealed the fate of the export economies of the continent.

Nationalist parties were not strong enough to gain power through the ballot box. The creole elites resorted to manipulation and repression as well as an extensive system of patronage aimed at the rural masses to ensure their loyalty at election time. For this reason it was the army not the ballot box that lifted many nationalists in South America into power. Chile underwent the first experiment of a junior officer coup against the old oligarchy (1924-31). A coup in Argentina followed in 1930 but faltered quickly; the nationalist revolt of the army had to wait for success until Perón in 1943. Only in Peru did the ruling elite harness the military firmly to ward off the nationalists, until 1968 when the army under Valesco took power and implemented one of the most radical nationalist economic programmes of any military regime in the continent before or after the Second World war. It was in Brazil and Argentina in the 1930s that the military first enjoined nationalism to a new model of economic development?import substitution industrialisation (ISI). Nationalists had argued that it was the agrarian structure of the country which caused subservience to imperialism and the build up of manufacturing industry based on the home market was the way to end it. Being less dependent on imports, the argument continued, would make the countries more self-sustaining at times of international recession. The armies of Brazil and Argentina, anticipating the outbreak of war in Europe, demanded industrialisation as a way of getting their own arms industries and not having to rely on imports.

This required domestic iron and steel industries. The Second World War increased demand for Latin American raw materials and this in turn boosted their foreign reserves and investment funds. Once the war ended, the ISI model was generalised throughout the region.

In Argentina, the Labour minister in the 1943 military government, General Juan Peron, used his position to remodel and expand the trade union movement, giving it an anti-imperialist, nationalist rhetoric. Elected with mass working class support in 1946, Peron carried out a series of pro-working class reforms as well as the nationalisation of the railways. The government pursued an import substitution strategy similar to that being carried out by the Chilean Popular Front Government (1938-48). Despite its authoritarianism, its glorification of the caudillo and its use of violence against its working class opponents, Peronism only received the confidence or the toleration of the bourgeoisie for limited periods. Its years of persecution, the long exile of its leader, all helped to root the Peronist form of bourgeois nationalism in the working class.

In Bolivia, the Chaco war (1932-35) mobilised the peasant masses and exposed the criollo elite's

incompetence at one and the same time. This provoked the flowering of a rebellious national, cultural and political movement. It took the failure of a nationalist military regime under Gualberto Villarroel (1943-46) to bring about the formation of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) as a force with civilian support. Here the role of centrist Trotskyism (POR) and its ally Juan Lechin, the miners' leader, allowed the MNR to gain a strong base amongst the decisive tin mining proletariat. This combination made the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 the most radical social upheaval in the continent since the Mexican Revolution. It resulted in a radical, if drawn out, land reform and the nationalisation of the mines as biproducts of the aborted proletarian revolution.

Cuba, like Mexico, had a tradition of struggle against colonialism. Its people resisted the Spanish in 1868-78 and again in 1895-1898 under José Martí, whose Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) organised the civilian and military resistance. The entry of the United States into the war against Spain spelled doom for Cuba's real independence. A reformist successor to Martí's party (PPC) held office between 1944 and 1952 at which point General Batista restored a pro-US dictatorship. Fidel Castro's July 26th Movement (26JM) inherited the political tradition of José Martí; it was bourgeois nationalist and bourgeois democratic. But the years of guerilla war between 1953 and 1959, and the links it established with the urban workers towards the end of this period, transformed the 26JM into a popular front. International events, the economic and military hostility of US imperialism, together with the willingness of the USSR to give massive aid and military protection to Cuba, enabled the small island to break the grip of the USA. Capitalism was overthrown and extensive social welfare measures were introduced, alongside a stifling political dictatorship. The Cuban revolution was a watershed event in the continent. Cuba sponsored a whole new phase of Latin American anti-imperialist nationalism in the years 1961-67 (OLAS) even against the advice of its Moscow backers. Castroism, despite its Stalinist ?Marxism-Leninism?, always placed enormous stress on its "anti-imperialism" and its pan-Latin American concerns. But the guerrilla forces it sponsored were either liquidated by repression or evolved into reformist petit bourgeois or even conservative bourgeois parties.

Outside of Cuba, where the overthrow of capitalism and support of the USSR until the late 1980s insulated the island from economic pressures experienced elsewhere, the nationalist economic model in Latin America ran up against inherent limits. Chief among them was a weak domestic market, first for non-durable consumer goods and later for capital goods. The deepening of ISI in the 1960s and 1970s aggravated social and economic problems. It led to an underemployed labour force, rural economic stagnation and chronic balance of payments deficits. The nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s had depended for its success upon maintaining some kind of unity?under the army?within the nationalist coalition. Eventually, the coalition fractured along class lines. The breakdown of the economic model and the antagonisms between the working class and the bosses, and within different sectors of the bourgeoisie, led to military coups between 1964 and 1973 in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in order to stabilise the state. This uncoupling of nationalism and democracy has been an enduring legacy of Latin American politics. Reliance upon caudillos, bonapartism, patronage of sections of society, machine politics?all this created the basis for neo-liberal politicians to plausibly claim the mantle of democracy.

All attempts by nationalists since the nineteenth century to achieve pan-Latin American unity ended in failure. At the beginning of the last century, the Peruvian-Bolivian confederation, the integration of Uruguay and Brazil and Argentine federation, Central American unity, Gran Colombia?all collapsed. Constant bickering and minor wars between the Latin American states have been more pronounced in the twentieth century than attempts at unification. In the 1960s, attempts at economic integration between various states ended in failure. More pronounced in the last years than pan-Americanism is the tendency to the break up of existing states at the hands of regional movements. Resentment against centralisation under the hegemony of the capital, and lack of resources, has sponsored a growing number of mass regional

movements. They are often led by local bourgeois who demand privileges for their region and get support from the local workers and peasants.

In Latin America today, despite the greater sense of national identity across classes within the existing nation states of the continent, there still exist dozens of native nationalities within and across these states. Many indigenous peoples were wiped out in the three centuries after the conquest at the hands of conquistadores or later European settlers. Many were kept alive and marginalised politically while being used as indentured labour on the haciendas and mines. They have their own languages, history and culture and many of them live in territorially compact areas. They have been subjected to mass murder and cultural genocide. They have been robbed of their land and subject to vile racism by the creole population. In the case of the native populations of Central America, the Andes and Amazon, it is necessary to support their right of self-determination.

### **The Middle East**

The history of the Arabs in the Middle East shows that possession of a common language and culture is a necessary but not self-sufficient condition for building a nation or sustaining a modern nationalist ideology. While over 100 million people speak Arabic these same people have been divided by religion, nationality and, indeed, racial origin. The unified Arab state under the Caliphate from the seventh century did not spawn an Arab nation state. Hence, its collapse and fragmentation from the tenth century, and the further Balkanisation of the region in the nineteenth century, did not signify a breaking-up of this "nation".

The original Arabs were from the Gulf peninsula, a people welded together for the first time into a state out of disparate tribes and clans by the merchant nomads under Mohammed in the seventh century. The subsequent conquest of the Levant and Spain spread the Arabic language along the trade routes. The conquered peoples in the Caliphate were not forcibly converted to Islam, though many did, and many of the peoples were Arabised. Scarcely three centuries of rule passed before the state fragmented as the mercantile basis of the state weakened. The fragmentation of the state and its rule by non-Arabs did not provoke a national or Arab uprising. As the Ottoman Empire declined, the new European capitalist powers encroached on the Middle East, tending to divide up the countries of the Arab world between them as colonies or spheres of influence. There was no unified Arab response to this experience.

The consequences of this rule, and the development of capitalism within each of the Arab states, created distinct national bourgeois and urban petit-bourgeois classes and a beginning of modern nationalisms within each of these countries. Egypt was the most dynamic example and the Wafd Party the clearest example of a modern constitutionalist nationalism. Following the 1914-18 war, the British and French divided up the region between them and the feudal Bedouin chiefs failed completely to unify the people of the region into a movement for an Arab state. They were all bought off and became tools of imperialism.

After the carve up of the region, each of the states was integrated into the world market separately, further weakening the ties between each of them. In response to these developments, Arab nationalism grew in the inter-war years as an anti-imperialist response of the modern petit-bourgeoisie to shared experiences of exploitation and oppression. Syrian nationalism was particularly strong in the 1920s. But pan-Arab nationalism was a minority ideology and movement until the creation of the Zionist state of Israel in 1948. The humiliation suffered by the surrounding Arab states in the 1948/49 war launched Arab nationalism. Nasser's Egypt was to be the torchbearer of the hopes of this movement in the 1950s and 1960s. His successful nationalisation of the Suez Canal, and the defeat of the French and British intervention in 1956, turned Nasser into a hero. On him were focused the aspirations of millions that an Arab Revolution would sweep through all the surrounding countries dominated by imperialism.

Nasserism's high point was the creation of the United Arab Republic (1958) with Syria. But clashes of

interest between the national bourgeoisies of each half of the Union led to its breakdown by 1961. Similar differences with Iraq prevented the extension of the Union. Nasser's radical measures against imperialism had already earned Egypt the hatred of the conservative pro-imperialist Arab monarchies of the Gulf Peninsula. Lingering defence pacts, in the face of the Zionist threat, kept Arab co-operation, if not unity, alive. But the Six Day War with Israel in 1967 resulted in a total crushing defeat for the Arab states and the cause of Arab nationalism suffered a grave blow.

For 25 years after the Six Day War, Palestinian nationalism was in the forefront of the struggle against imperialism in the Middle East and the PLO has been its main representative. Indeed, it played the role of a surrogate state throughout the large Palestinian diaspora with a "parliament" and a "government" but, until 1994, no definite territory. It was set up by Nasser in 1964 and always relied upon the financial backing of conservative Arab regimes. But after 1967 it assumed more importance and autonomy in its struggle against Israel. Its leading component? Fatah? was the dominant voice of the Palestinian bourgeoisie in exile. It only rhetorically espoused the idea of a secular Palestine on the whole of the Mandate territory and in reality was always willing to settle for less. The discrimination against the Palestinian bourgeoisie in the surrounding Arab states after the 1970s increased the pressure on the PLO to find some piece of territory which the bourgeoisie could call its own even if only as a flag of convenience for registering its property. Only the pressure of the millions of poor in the West Bank, Gaza and the refugee camps of Lebanon and Jordan prevented a capitulation before 1993.

The expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 destroyed much of the PLO's military capability. The exhaustion of the five year long uprising (intifada) that started in 1987 on the West Bank, created the conditions for a historic betrayal by Arafat and the PLO in the face of US and Israeli pressure. In 1993 Arafat accepted peace with Israel in return for a highly limited and supervised mandate in the Gaza Strip. Arab nationalism has never been so exposed, at such a major low point of its revolutionary anti-imperialist appeal. The pan-Arabism under Nasser, the episodic particular nationalisms of Ba'athism in Syria and Iraq (Hussein), and Palestinian nationalism have all proven themselves bankrupt because they have been incapable of consistent and revolutionary resistance, incapable and fearful of mobilising the masses across the whole region against imperialism and its local Arab agents. Given the current weakness of the secular left in the Arab world, the initiative lies with the Islamicist forces? many of them imbued with intolerance of the needs of the socially oppressed and reactionary in their attitude to the democracy of the masses. They are growing on the basis of disillusionment with Arab nationalism.

### **Asia Minor**

The Ottoman Empire was the framework for the birth of new nations in the Balkans and Asia Minor from the 1820s to the 1920s. The tortured history of both the Balkans and the Near East to this day is a product of two principal factors. First, the economic backwardness of these regions relative to Europe by the nineteenth century, a backwardness underpinned by the dominance of the Asiatic mode of production. Second, the region has suffered from being subject to the rival claims and interventions of the Great Powers since the fifteenth century. This led to the failure of any strong hegemonic national states (such as Prussia or Piedmont) to unify these regions and the resulting "Balkanisation" of them. Balkanisation is not simply the outcome of an imposed division by colonialist or imperialist powers but also reflects a failure of the indigenous ruling classes to unify their regions economically or politically in a manner acceptable to the other ethnic groups living there. The result is well known. Regular internecine warfare amongst the Balkanised states has been combined with the oppression of ethnic minorities or nationalities and uprisings in resistance to this oppression. In turn, rival states in the region, and imperialist powers, have fomented or manipulated these revolts. In short, Balkanisation means a chronic incapacity to resolve the national question. It is one more example of capitalism's failure to solve the tasks it sets itself in a democratic fashion and it is consequently a task inherited by the working class who can solve it only upon an

internationalist and proletarian democratic basis.

The Ottoman Empire was never a Turkish national state. Nor was its population predominantly Turkish. At the beginning of the twentieth century 25% of its population were non-Muslims and the state contained 21 "nationalities". Whilst its ruling dynasty, the Osmanli clan, were Turks, and its language of administration was Turkish, the ruling political stratum was far from being exclusively Turkish. This situation was rooted in the historic social character of the Empire. The Ottoman Sultanate rested upon a central core dominated by the Asiatic mode of production. Private property in land was suppressed and the surplus product of the peasant farmers siphoned off by tax collectors to the central Ottoman treasury. But the peripheral territories were dominated by nomadic-pastoralist tribes and a feudal, lord-peasant economy.

There was a permanent struggle between these feudal landlords (Uç beys ) in the frontier zones of the empire and the central regime. The central ruling elite was multi-ethnic in its origins. The Ottoman system, like other Asiatic despotisms, fell into rapid decline in the eighteenth century relative to the dynamic European powers where capitalism was developing. The Jannissaries and the Muslim clergy (ulema) became arch conservative forces. No modern bourgeoisie, either Turkish or Islamic, developed, since the bazaar merchants and artisans remained locked into a guild system and religious prohibitions in conditions of general economic stagnation. The bankers and much of the merchant class of the Empire were Greek, Jewish or Armenian.

The state ideology of the Ottoman Empire was Sunni Muslim and the Sultan was, nominally, Caliph of all the Islamic world. No serious or systematic attempt was made to convert the Christians of Asia Minor or the Balkans to Islam. However, non-Muslims were subject to heavier taxation and were forbidden to carry arms. This encouraged conversion in some regions and/or gradual displacement in others (e.g. Albania and Armenia). The lack of either conversion or prolonged resistance by most Christian subjects of the central elite is due to the fact that often Turkish rule weighed less heavily on them than had their feudal kingdoms. It also testifies to the non-national consciousness of these populations. The various non-Muslim communities were organised into millets, self-administering units with their own laws and traditions, under their own religious leaders who were responsible to the Sultan.

This was often reflected in the location of villages in the countryside or of "quarters" in the towns and cities. There was little similarity to the ethnic, linguistic and religious homogeneity of western Europe. There were no straightforward building blocks for national identity. The new building of a nation state could only be constructed by destroying not only the old edifice of Empire but the complex of religious and ethnic communities on which it rested. This ensured that the birth of nations would involve wars, expulsions and forced assimilation (as it did in western Europe). The key missing element?one that would prolong this process for centuries without a resolution?was the absence of a powerful, internally generated expansion of the productive forces (capitalism) which alone could fuse together ethnically disparate populations and create new social structures based not on faith or subjection to the monarchy but on citizenship and democracy.

With the pressure of European commerce, followed by British and French invasions of Egypt and Syria (1798), the Sultans Mahmud II and Selim III began the process of reform, first military and then administrative. This process of modernisation and centralisation forced the local elites to mobilise their populations for resistance. All this took place at the time of the French Revolution and its successive wars. The idea of nationhood was indissolubly linked to the ideas of modernity, progress, of "catching up" with Britain and France. The Serbs revolted in 1804 and were given limited autonomy, but the spearhead of modern Balkan nation formation was Greece which had the advantage of support from Britain and France. Tsarist Russia, with ambitions to seize Constantinople, posed as protector of the orthodox peoples of the

region. Balkan nationalisms were thus caught up in the conflicts between the Great Powers from the beginning. Greece became independent in 1829, while Serbia, Moldavia, and Wallachia became autonomous principalities.

### **Turkish nationalism**

The Ottoman Empire became ever more dependent on British and French loans. The French and the British, who wished to preserve the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russian expansion, encouraged a period of reform, (the Tanzimat, 1839-1871), which attempted to modernise the Empire. Economic and military renewal, and administrative, educational and legal reforms from above, accompanied by increasing subservience to the western powers, stimulated the emergence of a modern nationalist current?the Young Ottomans. It was led by figures such as Namuk Kemal, who adopted the language and organisation of European nationalism, especially in its Italian form. This first phase climaxed in the so-called Constitutional Revolution of 1876. Wars with Serbia, Russia and Bulgaria (1876-79) led to expansion and independence for Serbia, Montenegro and Romania and an enlargement of Greece. Bulgaria gained de facto independence. The Great Powers intervened at the Congress of Berlin (1879) to lay down a settlement which restricted Russia's influence. The defeats suffered by the Ottoman rulers led to the end of the constitutional regime in Constantinople and the restoration of absolutism under Sultan Abdul Hammid. This regime lasted for a further thirty years.

A second generation of nationalist reformers, the Young Turks, founded the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1895. It was led by army captains, majors and junior state bureaucrats such as Ahmet Riza, Mehmet Talat, Enver Pasha. The "revolution" of July 1908 was in fact a coup d'état which was popularly welcomed. Young Turkism was, however, wracked by contradictions, seeking to preserve the integrity of the multi-national empire whilst, at the same time, stressing Turkish identity. Its commitment to modernisation and constitutionalism drew towards it the support of other peoples of the empire. It was in a sense a nationalism in search of a nation.

The second Balkan war of 1913 and the entry of Turkey into the first World War in October 1914 brought the inner leadership of the CUP to almost dictatorial power. Talat Pasha and Enver Pasha in particular were able to develop a fiercely nationalist policy, expelling the Greek and Armenian bourgeoisie, creating private Turkish and state capitalist industries. As the British assaults on the Ottoman Empire began to detach its Arab provinces, the last elements of Ottomanism as a quasi-nationalism disintegrated. Pan-Islamism?an ideology to resist the attacks of the (Christian) imperialist powers?lasted a bit longer. But the growing force was an ethno-linguistic Turkish nationalism. Once the hopes of recovering Ottoman territories in Europe or retaining them in the Middle East were dashed, this left the creation of a nation state in Anatolia as the only viable project.

The person who took up a territorially limited and realistic nation building project was Mustafa Kemal. Kemal came to the fore in the resistance to the British, French, Italian and Greek attempts to dismember Anatolia in the years 1918-1923. The Treaty of Sevres promised the Armenians a state and the Kurds autonomy and self-determination. It also promised the Greeks a large slice of western Anatolia. In the process of forging a specifically Turkish nation, not only did hundreds of thousands of Turkish peasants perish, but 1.5 million Greeks were expelled from Anatolia and the genocide of the Armenians was completed with the aid of the Kurds. This done, the Kurdish people were themselves denied autonomy and their cultural annihilation began at the hands of the Turkish state.

Mustafa Kemal successfully expelled the Greek armies from Asia Minor and negotiated the Lausanne treaty, giving Turkey its present borders. After this, he proved himself a radical moderniser abolishing the Sultanate and the caliphate, secularising the law and the education system, unveiling women, and

instituting a nationalist ideology as the basis of the state. The Turks emerged with a nation state, but one under a harsh bonapartist regime headed by Kemal Attaturk. This Turkish nationalism spelled doom for the aspirations of the non-Turkish populations.

### **The Armenians**

One such were the Armenians. Armenian is an Indo-European language and has had a distinct written form since the fifth century. The Bagratids dynasty ruled a powerful independent state in the ninth century, but this was overthrown by the Byzantines in 1054. Yet, in only a decade, the Seljuq Turks swept over Armenia and penetrated central Anatolia. Generally, from then on, the Armenians were under Muslim and Turkish rule. Under the Ottomans, the Armenians, whilst forbidden to bear arms, had their own millet. Its ruling "class" was an elite of merchants and high officials, serving as bankers and traders to the Sultan. In this respect, the Armenians shared many of the features of the pre-modern Jews? a "people-class". But the majority of Armenians remained peasants in historic greater Armenia.

Armenian nationalism originated in the 1870s. In 1887, a radical nationalist organisation, the Henschaks, was formed. The Ottoman government responded to this by organising the Kurdish tribes in the Armenian provinces into cavalry forces modelled on the Russian Cossacks (the Hamaidyye), to be used against the Armenians. In 1894-96, the regime of Sultan Abdul Hamid encouraged large scale pogroms against the Armenians. Others fled to the Russian empire and many began the Armenian diaspora in Western Europe and the United States. Increasingly, Armenian nationalists looked to the imperialist powers to rescue them from their Turkish and Kurdish persecutors, a fatal policy which was to have the most tragic results. During the first World War, the Armenian nationalists looked towards Tsarist Russia to free them from Ottoman rule. Some joined the Russian army which invaded Turkey. This gave the Ottoman government a pretext in 1915-16 for a final solution to the Armenian question? the "re-location" of the entire Armenian population. In reality, the men were shot and the women and children were marched from the eastern Anatolian plateau into the Syrian desert where they perished. This genocide, the first of the twentieth century, claimed around one million lives and hundreds of thousands more fled into emigration.

In 1918, Armenia established its independence, fighting off a Turkish attack. The Dashnaks (a semi-social democratic movement formed in 1890 and the principal party of independence) put themselves at the service of British imperialism, which was at this point trying to destroy the Bolsheviks in Russia and to partition Turkey. However, with the resurgence of the Bolsheviks (and Kemalist Turkey) they were abandoned by the British. The Dashnaks surrendered to the Russian government and Armenia became a Soviet republic. Soviet Armenia saw rapid industrial and cultural development. Its population nearly tripled from 1.3 million in 1940 to 3.3 million in 1985. Today, the Armenian Republic remains the only state expression of the Armenian people. There are Armenian communities in the surrounding states, and since 1988 there has been open conflict in Azerbaijan where Armenian nationalists have fought to annex the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh. This led to anti-Armenian pogroms (Baku, January 1990), mutual expulsions of Azeris and Armenians from their republics and to a prolonged mountain war in which the Armenians benefited from support from the US diaspora as well as from Russia. Armenia remains surrounded by hostile neighbours, undergoing a painful capitalist restoration process. The only solution to the problems of the Caucasus is a federation and only the working class can create one that ensures no oppression, no privileges and the restoration of the refugee minorities to their homes, jobs and lands.

### **The Kurds**

The Kurdish people inhabit the mountains and high plateaux centering on the Zagros Mountains. They number between 20 and 25 million, the largest people without a nation state in the world. They speak several related Indo-European dialects which are not easily comprehensible to one another. The absence of a uniform language uniting all Kurds has hampered unification of Kurdish national struggles. Kurdish

independence and division have the same roots; tribalism, a series of independent principalities, and the ability to play off the rivalries of the empires based in Persia, Anatolia and Syria which bordered on the Kurdish territories. The economic and social conditions of this mountainous zone explain why the surrounding states have never absorbed or assimilated the Kurds but also why the Kurds have not united to form their own nation state.

In Turkey, there are ten million or more Kurdish speakers, representing about 15% of the total population. But the Atatürk tradition has always refused to recognise their linguistic or cultural identity, claiming that they were mountain Turks who had "lost their language". In Iran, the 6.7 million Kurds constitute 12% of the population. Some 1.4 million Kurds form 11% of the inhabitants of Syria. In Iran and Syria, it is forbidden to teach the Kurdish language in schools. In Iraq, the 4.9 million Kurds form 26% of the population. The Kurds have won more formal concessions in this country than in any other, including constitutional autonomy. But the Ba'ath regime has used more savage mass repression than even the Turkish state. From the period when the surrounding states started to consolidate themselves and to take on a modern national character, the Kurds have resisted their forced assimilation. In 1925, 1930 and 1937, Kurdish rebellions occurred but all of them were bloodily repressed.

The Kurds have confronted obstacles in the path of attaining a fully national consciousness. The extremely weak development of capitalism in Kurdistan, especially in the Iraqi and Iranian areas, led to a very weak Kurdish bourgeoisie which was incapable of leading the fight for a nation state. The leadership of the struggles inside Iraq remained in the hands of tribal landlords (e.g., the Barzanis). The failure to establish meaningful autonomy within Iraq in the 1970s and 1980s, together with the collective experience of genocide and oppression, may well deepen national consciousness from below. In Turkey, the urbanisation of large numbers of Kurds, the creation of a Kurdish diaspora (one million strong) in Europe has created conditions for a Kurdish cultural development which can feed back into the traditional rural areas.

The Kurdish ruling classes have repeatedly betrayed the struggle for self-determination and obstructed unity. Some tribal chiefs prefer to remain loyal to the non-Kurdish state of which they are a part rather than see a Kurdish state created under the leadership of rival tribes (hence the rivalry between the Barzanis and the Zibaris). In every Kurdish uprising there have always been some tribes that helped the oppressor state against the rebels.

Revolutionary socialists support the right of Kurdish self-determination up to and including the right to secede and form an independent state in one or in all parts of Kurdistan. The repeated revolts show that the Kurdish people do not wish to be assimilated into the partitioning states. It is possible that they would have been satisfied with real autonomy at various stages of the struggle but either they have been refused it or were offered only a bogus autonomy. The Kurdish masses—the peasants and the working class—can only escape national oppression, and express their will on which sort of state they desire, if the dictatorships of the surrounding states are smashed. They can do so only if regimes come to power which will freely let them decide for themselves their state future. None of the bourgeois democratic parties will recognise these elementary rights. The struggle of the Kurds against national oppression has to be linked therefore to the struggles of the Iraqi, Turkish, Syrian and Iranian workers and poor peasants. Also the non-Kurdish workers, within the oppressor states, have the elementary duty to support the struggle of the Kurds. Only along this path will the Kurds find their liberation.

Marxist internationalists cannot decide in advance what form of state the Kurds should settle for. If the Kurdish masses' national aspirations are fully satisfied by the gaining of real equality in social and political rights within each of the oppressor states, then this must be recognised as a just solution. Should their

struggle for self-determination lead them to the establishment of an autonomous region, then likewise, we will fight to defend this outcome. But the experience of the last two decades of autonomy within Iraq, the thwarted attempts at achieving it in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, together with the recognition that not even autonomy could have saved them from the recent murderous actions of Saddam Hussein (1991) or Turkey (1995), may well lead the Kurdish masses to rally round the demand for a united and fully independent Kurdistan. In this situation, we would seek to ensure that this took the form of a workers' and peasants' republic of Kurdistan as part of a Socialist United States of the Middle East.

## **The Balkans**

The Slav peoples had already begun to awaken to national life in the period from the 1780s onwards. In Bohemia and Moravia, Czech speakers formed 70% of the population but German speakers held all the key state positions. This came under challenge as economic developments led to the birth of a Czech bourgeoisie. The intelligentsia and the merchant classes created a fully developed national movement, following the model of the Poles, Hungarians, Germans and Italians. In the 1848 revolution, the Czechs sided with the democratic revolution in Vienna. But their programme aspired to a federal Austria rather than integration in a united Germany, and so the Czech nationalists rejected any involvement in the Frankfurt Assembly. After repression by the ruling Hapsburg dynasty in Austria, the Czech nationalists became a tool of first Austrian and then Russian reaction. Tsarism, the main bastion of feudal counter-revolution, utilised pan-Slavism to increase its power and influence in Central Europe. The Czechs gained nothing from this. Even with the creation of the dual monarchy in 1867, which drew in the Magyar gentry as co-rulers of the Hapsburg state, the Czechs were excluded from a share in power. A triple monarchy remained the goal of nationalists till the 1914-18 war. Tomas Masaryk, Eduard Benes and Mstislav Stefanik proclaimed in 1915 the goal of an independent Czechoslovak state. The nationalists sided firmly with the Entente powers (Britain, France). The Czech regiments in the Austrian army disintegrated and mutinied. The victorious powers at Versailles in 1918 recognised a Czechoslovak state.

The Slavic population entered Central and Balkan Europe in the seventh century under the leadership of nomadic "empires" like that of the Avars. They rapidly became a farming population, still at a communal and tribal level of organisation, with hardly any form of state structure. They formed Slavic settlement areas, Sclavinias, some of which eventually evolved into states, often under the initial leadership of non-Slavic peoples, e.g. the Turkic Bulgars. These rulers were absorbed into the mass of the Slavic population. With the westward expansion of the Germanic feudal realms and the Kingdom of Hungary, the Slav population became divided into northern and southern Slavs; in the first group were the Poles, Czechs and Slovaks; in the second, Bulgars, Croats, Slovenes and Serbs. Bulgar, Serb and Croat states emerged in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries respectively. Their independent existence was not a long one, however. In the eleventh century, the Byzantine empire restored its control over the Balkan Slavs, destroying their states. But they were soon to re-emerge. In the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, Serbian and Bulgarian kingdoms flourished again, as did for a brief period a Bosnian kingdom. These monarchies were short-lived before internal dissent and conflict within the feudal ruling classes aided the success of the Ottoman conquest of the whole Balkans.

These feudal monarchies were not national states, despite the mythologised past invented by Serbian, Croatian, and Bulgarian nationalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the fact that there had been powerful feudal states and rulers throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule provided the raw material for a national ideology.

Important cultural divisions within the Slav peoples of the Balkans flowed from the role of the different churches which converted them and provided the administrative framework of their early states. The Slovenes and the Croats were won to the Roman Church. The Serbs, Bulgars, Montenegrins and

Macedonians were converted from Byzantium to Orthodox Christianity. The use of the Cyrillic script expressed and consolidated this relationship. Added to this, the Serbs and Bulgars were ruled by the Turks for two to three centuries longer than the Croats and the Slovenes. Despite the relative linguistic closeness of the Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Bulgarians, such historic factors have impeded unification. Even within the Orthodox Slavic community, a major fault line has obstructed a pan-South Slav identity. The Serbs and the Bulgars are the two largest southern Slav peoples. Both in terms of their historic national myths, and the experience of nineteenth and twentieth century national development, they have long been rivals, contesting several wars. This historical experience hindered the creation of a unified ruling class and thus of a united South Slav state. "Yugoslavism", after 1918, never really transcended the chasm between the two largest South Slav peoples. It was unable to dispel the suspicion amongst Croats and Slovenes that this ideology was a disguised ideology of Serbian hegemony and oppression. Meanwhile, Serb nationalists criticised Yugoslav federalism for attempting to block the creation of a Greater Serbia.

The "national rebirth" of the Southern Slav peoples started in the late eighteenth century, but the decisive impulse was given with the expulsion of the Turks from the Balkans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first Balkan war of 1912 saw the united forces of Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece seize nearly all the remaining Ottoman territories in Europe, excluding Istanbul and the Straights (Gallipoli and the Bosphorus). Serbs, Montenegrins, Bulgars, Greeks, Albanians and Macedonians were able to form states. Conflicts and wars between these states, backed by one or other major power, were common in the run up to the first World War. With the defeat of Germany and the disintegration of the Hapsburg monarchy at the end of the war, peasant risings and workers' strikes swept the whole of the Balkans. The Croat and Slovene bourgeoisie turned to the Serbs to rescue them. The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (KSCS) was set up (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929). This emerged not from any democratic revolution but from a counter-revolution against the workers' and peasants' uprisings. It was a centralised state which oppressed all minorities not belonging to the three major nations and as such was an extremely unstable state from the outset.

The national question was "solved" by Tito along the lines of impeccable Stalinist principles first enunciated at Jajce in 1943 and put into practice after 1945, when the "People's Government" took power after a long civil war and expropriated the bourgeoisie. The federal system gave the individual provinces far-reaching formal freedoms and enshrined the principle of consensus for the decisions of the state leadership. Yugoslavia relied on this federal set-up to ensure the equality of the nations within the state. Yet because of the dictatorship of the centralised YCP, Yugoslavia remained in fact a fully centralised state. With this hyper-centralised party and state machine, the industrialisation of the first five year plans could be set in motion. However, by the 1960s, an at first hidden, and then open, struggle developed, tinged with nationalism, over the distribution of the centrally administered national income. The levels of new investment, the (supposed) favouring of individual republics or regions, all stimulated proto-nationalist conflicts. The philosophy of Titoism after the break with Stalin, and the myth of a worker self-managed economy, only obscured these conflicts for a period.

Titoist political deceit and suppression was not the main cause of the amelioration of national conflicts in the 1950s and 1960s. There was a rapid and continuous economic and social progress due to the dynamic initial construction phase of the planned economy and a relaxation of state control of agriculture in favour of small scale peasant proprietorship. This was boosted by the effects of increased trade and aid with the west after Tito took an anti-USSR line in the Korean War (1950-54). However, Yugoslavia began to experience a slowdown, like the other East European states, in the later 1960s. It brought a conflict between the "centralisers" and the "federalists" which ended in victory for the latter. At the same time, the federal state was raising large revenues and redistributing them between the republics, thereby sparking

off conflicts over the share of the growing "national cake". The highly developed regions, Slovenia and Croatia, felt themselves to be robbed by the net outflow of funds, whilst the less developed districts insisted that the disparity between themselves and the better-off regions was being reduced far too slowly; the historical conflicts, officially proclaimed to have been overcome, began to rise from the grave.

The underdeveloped regions and republics initially supported the centralists, because they received considerable sums from other regions via federal aid, while the richer provinces argued for further de-statisation and decentralisation in order to be able to hold on to the greater wealth they produced through their higher productivity. Inequalities in standards of living fed national conflicts and ensured that they regained their old sharpness. The victory of the federalisers meant increased powers for the republics and a change in the constitution. The republics were recognised as sovereign states and Yugoslavia became, de facto, a federation of states where unanimous decision-making was necessary on all important questions.

The most decisive effect of these changes was finally to weaken the centralised YCP, now called the League of Yugoslav Communists. The republican parties became nearly autonomous, each with its own national bureaucracy. When a sharp decline in the economic situation was felt in the mid-1980s, the imbalance between the individual republics and provinces began to be played upon demagogically by the separate republican bureaucracies. This enormously sharpened the ethnic conflicts and violently polarised Yugoslav society once again. Eventually, after 1990, Yugoslavia broke up under the strain, engulfed by Croat and Slovene dreams of closer ties with the European Union on the one side, and the Greater Serbian ambition of Belgrade on the other. Tens of thousands killed, hundreds of thousands "ethnically cleansed" from their homes, have been the preliminary results of four years of nationalist wars.

## **The Far East**

Asia, in contrast to the American and African continents, was the site of ancient states still economically and militarily powerful when the European merchants arrived in force in the sixteenth century. For two centuries more there was no question of the Europeans conquering states such as the Ottoman, the Persian, the Mogul, the Chinese or the Japanese empires. Only in the eighteenth century did these "Asiatic despotisms" begin to show signs of decrepitude, in contrast to the rapidly advancing capitalist powers. European colonisation in Asia was at first confined to small, militarily weak but rich states. By the 1840s, however, Britain, the most developed capitalist power with established colonies on every continent, was expanding eastwards beyond its Indian base.

The opium trade was used to open up China. From the first "opium war" onwards, China was subjected to many rapacious assaults. By the 1860s, the other powers were following suit. They wrung from the hands of the declining Manchu (Qing) dynasty enormous concessions, first along the sea board (Shanghai, Tientsin, Canton) and then up the arterial highway of China, the Yangtse River. In their concessions, they stationed their troops, based their missionaries and followed their own laws. A rapid growth of the Chinese merchant class (compradors) took place, who dealt with the Europeans. In the concessions, the Chinese were treated with brutal racist arrogance and for decades after 1847 Chinese labourers were kidnapped in large numbers and forcibly shipped as "indentured labour" to the plantations and railway construction projects of North and South America, Africa and other parts of Asia. They replaced the African slave trade as a means of providing virtually free labour.

These deprivations produced anti-Qing risings?the Taiping (1853-64) and the Nienfei (1865). Neither were fully national risings in the modern sense of the word. The Boxer Movement still had powerful dynastic elements but it was a mass popular uprising, aimed first at the missionaries and then at the foreign concessions and the legations in Beijing. Its crushing by the combined imperialist powers, including Japan,

led to the notorious Boxer Protocol. This imposed massive reparations and even more extensive extra-territoriality. It was obvious that the European imperialist powers and Japan were carving China up, first into spheres of influence, with the aim eventually of turning these into outright colonial possessions. The USA, in slight contrast, was advocating an open door policy, that is, a cartel of imperialist powers super-exploiting the country through Chinese political intermediaries.

Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 and the ensuing revolution in Russia had an immediate effect in China. Democratic revolutionary student groups formed. Mutinies in the modernised army spread. The semi-alien Qing dynasty collapsed in revolution 1911-12. Sun Yat-sen was briefly president but yielded power to a pro-dynastic war lord who proceeded to try to make himself emperor on the basis of foreign loans. After his death in 1916, war lords took power in most Chinese provinces and did deals with the various imperialist powers. It seemed that China would be divided amongst them. But, just at this time, the world war sparked rapid industrialisation in the major ports, cities and in some inland sites. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat became stronger. The Chinese workers' movement was born.

The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia had an electric effect on China and not least on Sun Yat-sen. Close links were made with the Bolsheviks. Soviet military advisers arrived in South China, the centre of revolutionary nationalism. Chiang Kai-shek, the nationalist army chief, received military training in Moscow. The Guomindang was re-founded as a modern political party in 1924 and was modelled in many organisational aspects on the Bolshevik Party. Sun Yat-sen developed a ramshackle ideology (the "three peoples" principles). The Chinese CP entered the Guomindang and set about building it as a "national revolutionary party". Bourgeois nationalism in China, however, turned out to be far from revolutionary. As in India, the bourgeois nationalists could not contemplate the mobilisation of China's workers and peasants against Chinese landlords or Chinese landowners.

Workers' mass strikes and peasant risings in the mid-1920s bore witness to the fact that a full scale revolutionary situation was developing, but it refused to stop short at the democratic or anti-imperialist stage. Terrified of the masses, but encouraged by the political passivity of the communists, the Guomindang leaders decided to decapitate the workers' movement and isolate it from the peasants. first, in 1926, Chiang carried out a preventative coup against the CCP and its Russian advisers. Still the CCP, on advice from Moscow, held back the masses. In 1927, in Shanghai, Chiang carried out a bloody coup slaughtering 5,000 communists. Adventurist risings ordered by Stalin to cover up the magnitude of the betrayal led to the bloody "communes" of Shanghai and Canton. The CCP was reduced to a rump and driven into the countryside. The theory of permanent revolution was tragically confirmed on its negative side. If the proletariat did not take the lead in the "national democratic" and agrarian revolution then the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie would betray it.

Force was the midwife of history in the case of Japan. The labour pains of modern national development in Japan were abruptly induced by the "black ships" of Perry in July 1853. The humiliation of the Shogun's feudal regime, combined with the evident success of "the West", led to a search for the causes and a desire to emulate the evident superiority of the ways of the "barbarians". Amongst these was the modern concept of the nation. The so-called Meiji revolution in Japan (1868-71), led in fact by middle ranking samurai who mastered western military technique and used it to overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate, were only able to carry out one of their two slogans ("restore the emperor; expel the foreigners"). Modelling themselves consciously on Bismarkian Prussia they deprived the feudal-clan magnates (daimyo) of possession of independent armed power and forced them to remit their fiefs to the emperor, creating a modern conscript army. Over the next twenty years, in a dual struggle against the feudal counter-revolution and democracy, Japan took what Lenin called the "Prussian road" to modernisation. This involved the triumph of capitalism as the dominant mode of production but combined with the continued political power

of reconstructed and bureaucratized elements of the old landed ruling classes.

In introducing universal education, the concept of modern nationality made its appearance. Japan, for many centuries, had a common written language but the peasants (80-90% of the population) could not read it. Spoken Japanese was a series of nearly mutually incomprehensible dialects. Only with the idea of nationality did it become vital to introduce universal literacy and to standardize Japanese. An ideology based on the longevity of the imperial dynasty, but turning it into an expression of the nation, became the official state ideology (Shinto). By the 1880s, Japan was contracting agreements with the European powers on an equal footing and between 1894 and 1902 all the unequal treaties, along with extra-territoriality, were renounced. Japan escaped semi-colonial servitude because its fundamental leap to capital formation and state modernity took place before the full weight of the imperialist epoch was established, whilst the European powers were still divided and pre-occupied with their assault on China. Japan became a "modern" capitalist, indeed, an imperialist, power. It began its own expansionist and predatory policy with regard to its Asian neighbours. At the same time it became a model of national development in Asia, above all for Chinese radicals seeking to escape the terrible suffering and humiliation that the Celestial Empire had been subjected to since 1842.

### **The Russian workers' state and national oppression under Stalinism**

The Bolsheviks not only raised the slogan of self-determination, they carried it out after the October Revolution, even where this meant the recognition of bourgeois and counter-revolutionary regimes, as in Finland and Latvia. They also recognised the bourgeois nationalist regime in the Ukraine and the Menshevik regime in Georgia. The Bolsheviks applied a general rule faced with a secessionary movement in an oppressed nation previously dominated by the Tsar's Russia: recognition by the new workers' state was not conditional on the triumph of the proletarian revolution in the oppressed nation, let alone conditional on a willingness to join the federation of soviet republics. Nevertheless, in conditions of Civil War, when the surrounding states were being used as bases by the White armies and the imperialists to attack the workers' state, the Bolsheviks had to put the victory against these forces above the formal self-determination of some of these regimes. Ukraine, for example, became the theatre of war against White Guardists, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the anarchist "social bandit" Makhno. The result was that Ukraine eventually fell to the Red Army and a soviet regime took power.

The same principles were at work, negatively and positively, in the case of Poland. In 1917, the Bolsheviks immediately recognised the independence of Poland. Later, they were to make a mistake that cost them dearly. As the founder of the Red Army, Trotsky did not underestimate the revolutionary role of the army of a workers' state. Yet it was he in particular who urged restraint during the Red Army's advance on Warsaw in the summer of 1920. Lenin, eager to advance through Poland to reach a Germany seething with revolution, underestimated the national feelings of the Poles. Trotsky was proved right. The Poles, workers as well as peasants, feared the Red Army, seeing it as yet another army of their Russian oppressors. They did not rise in rebellion against their own class enemies. There are other examples where the Bolsheviks or the Red Army did intervene militarily in states or republics and overthrew their bourgeois or feudal reactionary governments. When the imperialists were threatening to occupy a key national territory to facilitate their attack on the workers' state or when the internal counter-revolution was using independence as a pretext to seize and prepare a drill ground for civil war, intervention proved necessary. Yet even in such cases Lenin and Trotsky were extremely cautious and hesitant about such actions, as they were in Georgia in 1921.

Georgia, a predominantly peasant country, lacked a modern industrial proletariat. It was dominated by the Mensheviks who had said little or nothing about Georgian independence under the Tsar or under Kerensky's Provisional Government (February-October 1917). But the October Revolution converted them

overnight into fierce Georgian nationalists. At the end of the civil war in May 1920, the Menshevik government began to negotiate with the imperialists for the entry of troops into Georgia to "protect" it. The Georgian Bolshevik, Ordjonikidze, who was Stalin's emissary in the Caucasus, took the initiative to invade Georgia in February 1921. Soviet forces overthrew the Menshevik government and installed a minority Bolshevik government. Lenin and Trotsky had to defend this action and roundly denounced the complaints of the Mensheviks and the Second International. But it is known that Lenin had, shortly prior to the invasion, explicitly opposed any forcible measures in advance of an insurrection of the Georgian workers. Trotsky later commented that "the Red Army invaded Georgia upon Stalin's orders and had confronted us with a fait accompli."

Following the ideas of Marx and Engels, Lenin had advocated a unitary and centralised state for Russia prior to the October Revolution. Yet, after the Bolshevik regime was in power, it was obliged to proclaim Russia a "federation of national soviet republics", to which the workers and peasants, wherever they held power, could declare their adhesion. However, the conditions of a long and bloody civil war, which ebbed and flowed over the vast territories of the former Tsarist empire from 1918-20, were not those suited to realising the ideals of voluntary federation or voluntary separation. Independent states formed by local elites oscillated between the Whites and the Reds, fearing the former for their Great Russian chauvinism and imperialism and the latter for their social radicalism. The Red Army often gained support from formerly oppressed peoples and generally installed Soviet Republics when they occupied a territory. In vast areas of Central Asia and Siberia, the non-Russian population lived in pre-national and, indeed, pre-state social conditions. In other areas, small nuclei of intellectuals had begun to develop nationalist ideas since the 1905 and February 1917 revolutions. But in these areas there were few non-Russian workers and in some regions few settled peasants.

The Bolsheviks allied themselves wherever possible with the reforming, nationalist, modernizing intelligentsia. Many of these were petty-bourgeois or even bourgeois, some were reforming Islamists, others influenced by pan-Turkic or pan-Mongolian ideologies. The "soviets" which the Red Army set up were more formal than real. Likewise with the "national" republics and autonomous regions. They were set up, federated and even dissolved, with a rapidity that betokened their shallow social and national roots. Indeed, it can be said that most of the peoples and ethno-linguistic groups of Eastern Russia and Central Asia had not yet reached the stage of mass national consciousness. The Kazakhs were still largely a nomadic people. There were a few exceptions. The Tartars of the lower Volga had a mercantile bourgeoisie and this leadership rapidly proved hostile to the Bolsheviks. This led to various interventions, re-ordering from above of autonomous regions and republics with other minority peoples (e.g. the Bashkirs) to "control" the Tartars.

The settled populations of Khiva, Bokhara and Turkestan presented another problem?the influence of pan-Turkic "nationalism" and the hold of Islam. The landowners and the mullahs formed a possessing class bitterly hostile to communism. Yet Russian settlement meant that in a number of cities soviets existed and, indeed, had seized power. This led, in mid-1918, to the foundation of a Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. These local Bolshevik regimes were rooted almost exclusively in the Russian urban settler population.

It was the Red Army which overthrew the Khans and the Amirs of the Central Asian states. This "forced sovietisation" was, whatever its justification in terms of the Civil War, no model for Marxists to adopt. In the western borderlands of the young Soviet state, reasonably well established nationalities and nations existed (e.g. Poles, Finns, Latvians, Estonians, and to a lesser extent Ukrainians, Georgians and Armenians). By contrast, in Central Asia, there were virtually no mass nationalist movements and no national consciousness. Yet, at the same time, civil war continued beyond 1921. The actions of the Red

Army, under commanders like Frunze and of the Nationalities Commissariat under Stalin, cannot serve as a model for solving the national question, even amongst backward peoples. As a pragmatic defence of the soft underbelly of the Soviet workers' state they were justified; no more and no less.

The Treaty of Union, in 1922, created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). It was adopted as the result of a bitter battle between Lenin and Stalin over the national question. Stalin initially simply wanted all the non-Russian republics to adhere to the Russian Federation as autonomous republics. This meant the loss of a large degree of "independence". Up to now these states were bound to the federation by formally equal treaties. This "autonomisation project" was bitterly opposed especially by the Ukrainian and Georgian leaders. It was also firmly rejected by Lenin. He proposed, instead, a new federation of equal republics, with a government and congress of Soviets separate to and superior to that of the Russian Federation. Whilst Stalin formally conceded to Lenin's plan, the content was essentially the same as Stalin's suggestion. Lenin virtually on his deathbed launched a struggle. His words, should warn Marxists how far from being a revolutionary model was the work of the Commissariat of Nationalities under Stalin (1917-24): "Before the workers of Russia, I am terribly guilty of not having devoted sufficient energy to the famous question of 'autonomisation', officially called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics". Lenin believed that the project of the USSR treaty reduced "the freedom to leave the Union, which is our justification, to a mere scrap of paper". Lenin sought to protect the delicate alliance with the nationalities by fighting Great Russian bullying and bureaucracy. His struggle was ultimately unsuccessful.

The USSR's 1924 Constitution was one of the first fruits of the Thermidorian (political counter-revolution) reaction. Indeed, the Thermidorians around Stalin (Dzerzhinsky, Ordzhonikidze) cut their teeth in the fight against "national liberalism". The future Left-Oppositionist, Christian Rakovsky, was engaged in this struggle. Trotsky failed to take up Lenin's cause as he had been requested to do. Stalin's policy on the national question was to deny the republics, in practice, all political independence, utilizing the centralised bureaucracy of the party to completely dominate them and the autonomous regions. Any opponents were purged and accused of nationalist deviations. But, at the same time, Stalin adopted a policy of cultural nation-building, korenizatsiia (nativization). In many of its formal goals it took up Lenin's concern to correct the results of the Civil War phase when Great Russian Bolsheviks took over wherever the Red Army was victorious. This looked to the indigenous population like the triumph once more of the Russian coloniser. "Nativisation" involved promoting the local languages to official languages of the state and administration. It promoted literacy campaigns, the development of new written languages from one or more dialects, as well as the stimulation of art and popular culture. At the same time, the upper echelons of the republican parties were filled with the titular nationals rather than with Great Russians throughout the whole of the 1920s. In themselves most of these measures were very progressive, though they were accompanied by a positive nation building ethos that was far from Lenin's position.

Under conditions of increasing political bureaucratism from the central powers, including the breaking-up of republics such as Turkestan and the forcible union of others, Stalin's "nativisation" programme amounted to an ironic fulfilment of the Austro-Marxist programme of national-cultural autonomy. As a policy, it encouraged the development of (certain) national entities. Indeed, it created in some cases. At the same time, it negated the right to political self-government, let alone the right to secede. This failed to remove the sense of grievance that national rights were being restricted, and ensured that the sense of oppression would continue. The manoeuvrings, re-definings, splitting and unifying of nations "from above" was to enflame national grievances, especially when, from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s a wave of Great Russian chauvinism swept over the republics. Last, but not least, there was the suppression of real proletarian internationalism as a positive ideal that could only have been possible on the basis of soviet democracy. Stalin's policy could never hope to resolve the national question. This policy, which lasted until 1933/4 was in essence the national policy of the Soviet Thermidor. Thereafter, a new harsher policy, that

of Soviet Bonapartism was imposed; it was a policy of outright national oppression which returned the USSR to the status of a "prison house of nations".

The battle cry of the latter policy ?"the battle against nationalism"?was heard first and most loudly in the Ukraine. It was initiated as early as 1930 with show trials against Ukrainian "nationalists". Ukrainian nationalism became the "main threat", the "spearhead of capitalist restoration". In 1933/4, a massive purge removed most of the Ukrainian party leadership, replacing them with Moscow bureaucrats. This policy spread rapidly to the other republics and nationalities. In Tadzhikistan, the entire leadership was removed. The new national intelligentsia created by the previous policy was persecuted and scattered. In its place, a glorification of Great Russian culture and history, thinly disguised as Soviet patriotism, triumphed. The Great Russian people were proclaimed the "elder brother and guide" of the other peoples. Other aspects of Stalinist policy overlapped with the national question. Some of the most widespread resistance to forced collectivisation came from the Ukrainian peasantry. To break this resistance, the bureaucracy resorted to an artificially magnified famine. It was artificial because, throughout, the Soviet Union continued to export grain. Khataevitch, second secretary in the Politburo, boasted: "it took a famine to show them who is the boss. It took millions of lives, but the system of collectivisation has prevailed. We won the war."

In fact, it took the lives of six million adults and three million children.

To such horrors must be added the forced settlement of the nomadic populations of Central Asia. The Kazakhs, the most numerous nomadic people with over one million households in the 1920s, lost 20% of their population. Kazakhstan was settled with Russians and Ukrainians, often those deported for resisting forced collectivisation. The Great Purges of 1936-38 further intensified national oppression. "Trotskyite-nationalists" figure in large number amongst the victims. The purges eliminated the greater part of the "Stalinist" elite built up after 1923. This included the party leadership and the cultural intelligentsia built up throughout the period of korenizatsiia. It was felt as a cultural genocide perpetrated against the peoples "awakened" to national life by Stalin's earlier policies. These crimes were to weigh heavily in the balance against the workers' state after 1988 when pro-capitalist and pro-market nationalists came to the fore.

The Soviet-Finnish war, and the annexation of Eastern Poland, Belorussia and Moldavia in collusion with the Nazis in 1939/40, together with the forcible annexation of the Baltic states, added another series of national crimes to Stalin's tally. Hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of "unreliable elements" were deported to Siberia, resulting in a huge loss of life. After the Nazi attack on Russia, Stalin declared a number of entire Soviet peoples "counterrevolutionary" and traitors to the USSR. In this list were included the Crimean Tartars, the Volga Germans, the Meshketians, the Ingush, the Chechens and others. Whole peoples were deported into the steppe without their existing means of production and with next to no one awaiting them. Hundreds of thousands perished. To all these mass oppressions must be added the episodic bouts of disguised anti-semitism in the 1936-8 period and in the years just before Stalin's death. Jewish party leaders and intellectuals were persecuted for ?cosmopolitanism? and then Zionism. The national oppression carried out under Stalin's rule amounted to a genocidal attack on troublesome "minority" nationalities and nations of the USSR. It was not motivated by some racial purification objective, such as Hitler's, nor can it be said that Stalin set out to eliminate completely any particular people. Rather, the ruling bureaucracy's (Great Russian) national chauvinism was an integral part of their hatred and fear of the international proletarian revolution and the threat of political revolution.

In an exchange with the sectarian Hugo Oehler, in 1939, Trotsky developed a method of dealing with the national question in a degenerated workers' state. Trotsky explained how the Bolsheviks' support for self-determination necessitated a compromise with the "full socialist programme", one which has consequences for the economic life of the workers' state whose principle is that of a centralised planned economy. Trotsky points out that " . . . a federation may develop towards greater centralism or, on the

contrary, towards greater independence of its constituent parts". The determining fact for Bolsheviks, rather than for bureaucrats, is " . . . whether or not a particular nationality has, on the basis of her own experience, found it advantageous to adhere to a given state". Trotsky concludes that under Stalin, "the isolated proletarian revolution in a backward country proved incapable of solving the national question, especially the Ukrainian question". The measure of this is the wishes, the consciousness, the subjective desires of the Ukrainian workers and peasants who are, "dissatisfied with their national fate and wish to change it drastically. It is this fact that the revolutionary politician must, in contrast to the bureaucrat and the sectarian, take as his point of departure." For this reason, Trotsky decided to advocate the slogan of an "independent Soviet Ukraine". The Stalinists and Stalinophile sectarians like the Oehlerites argued that such a recognition completely contradicted the position of the defence of the Soviet Union from capitalist restoration.

Trotsky replied that the Ukrainian masses were not hostile to the workers' state as such but to the oppression of the bureaucracy. But he added that, even if the latter were the case, "how can a socialist demand that a hostile Ukraine be retained within the framework of the USSR?" Trotsky made it clear that there was no question of imposing, as a precondition, the defence of the USSR, the preservation of the Moscow-centralised plan, or even the retention of the workers' state.

Such conditions are alien to, and self-destructive of, the whole purpose of recognising that it is an oppressed people themselves that must decide these questions. Trotsky's slogan was certainly for an independent Soviet Ukraine. But this was not meant as a condition for recognising the right to self-determination but rather as a positive slogan which Trotsky advocated to take the leadership of the Ukrainian national struggle out of the hands of Ukrainian bourgeois and petit bourgeois nationalists and into those of proletarian internationalists. Trotsky's position flows not from an abstract or absolute commitment to Ukrainian independence but from the tactical necessity of winning to the side of the political revolution the Ukrainian proletariat and their peasant allies.

With such an explosive charge of brutal national oppression built into its foundations, it is no surprise that the national question was one of the key factors in blowing up the USSR. Indeed, in a negative confirmation of Trotsky's correctness on the Ukraine, it was the Stalino-nationalist government of this critical republic which refused to sign the new union treaty of Gorbachev and thus precipitated not merely his downfall but the dissolution of the USSR itself. The years that followed the relaxation of Stalin's dictatorship, especially under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, saw a stabilisation of the party elites in the national republics and even a certain return to "nativisation". These new bureaucrats held their posts for long periods due to Brezhnev's policy of "cadre stability". These bureaucrats promoted cultural enthusiasm amongst the nationalist intelligentsia. In addition, a wholesale corruption, a sort of bureaucratic mafia, began to develop, especially in the Caucasian and Central Asian republics. The "black economy", a distorted and criminal eruption of the law of value, put Georgia, Armenia and Tajikistan among the front runners in the race towards the market.

Attempts in the 1970s and early 1980s to clean this up proved in vain. The extended families and clan system protected the corrupt bureaucrats against Moscow's purges. Meanwhile, the policy of detente (1972-78) and perestroika (1985-89) promoted the growth of nationalist dissidents and even organised nationalist movements in the western republics (e.g. Rukh in Ukraine, Sajudis in Lithuania). The easing of repression in 1988 allowed these groups to become mass movements and sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy either went over to them wholesale or had to borrow their programme of first "sovereignty" and then total independence. Gorbachev first obstructed self-determination or tried to hedge it round with conditions. Then he viciously attempted to repress Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Lithuania. This had exactly the effect a Leninist would expect; it strengthened the nationalists immeasurably and doomed the USSR to destruction. Only early and unconditional recognition of the right to secede, advocated by a proletarian

revolutionary vanguard, could have challenged the nationalists for the leadership of the workers of the non-Russian peoples, thus exposing the reactionary social plans they had for these republics. Once the mass movements for complete separation came into existence, then it became vital to adopt Trotsky's slogan of independent soviet (i.e. workers' council) republics as well as the slogan of a free and voluntary federation after this had been achieved.

## **The programme of national liberation in the imperialist epoch**

### **Semi-colonies**

Our tactics have to be both consistent with the general strategy of social revolution and at the same time founded on a concrete analysis of each specific case. This means that we cannot promise to positively support each and every national struggle but only those which form part of the proletariat's struggle against imperialism or whose resolution will remove a serious impediment to the class unity of the proletariat. For this reason we support the right of oppressed nations to self-determination which, for us, can mean nothing more nor less than the right to secession and the formation of a separate state.

In the case of the colonial empires, or of multi-national semi-colonial states, it was nearly universally the case that national secession was a positive goal; the bourgeois democratic starting point of the permanent revolution. Whether or not the revolutionary party actually advocates secession in advance of this is another matter;

"The social-democratic party must decide the latter question exclusively on its merits in each particular case, in conformity with the interests of social development as a whole, and with the interests of the proletarian class struggle for socialism."

In any given country, a national movement against oppression may exist, led initially by the petit bourgeoisie or even the bourgeoisie. If it already has, or is gaining, profound influence over the proletariat and the other plebeian classes, it is necessary for the proletariat to contest with these classes for the leadership of this struggle so as to aid the proletariat to take power. When the slogans of the nationalists are taken up by broad sectors of the plebeian masses, then we are in favour of their right to democratically ascertain the will of the population on separation. Where no systematic and deep political oppression exists in the recent past, or in the present we are opposed to separation and would campaign against it, whilst insisting that should the majority of the nationality concerned express a will to separate, then the proletariat must render them all possible assistance to force the oppressor bourgeoisie to concede this.

Marxists support the right to self-determination, and the struggles being waged around the world, without giving any political support to the nationalism of the parties carrying out these struggles, to their guerrillaist strategy or to their tactics of bombings and assassinations aimed indiscriminately at the majority or oppressor population. These methods will not achieve liberation and will not prepare the way for working class internationalism and unity. Unconditional support for the struggle for legitimate national rights must be combined with criticism of petit bourgeois nationalist politics. We do not support armed struggle against the will of the majority of the nation in question when this has been freely and democratically expressed. Indeed, we oppose it as, not a justified war of national liberation, but a campaign of individual terrorism. We defend the organisations that carry out such actions against state repression as we would defend anarchists who use such methods.

Where the secession or separation of a region or province would ipso facto create a national minority in the new state, in order to prevent the simple reversal of the roles of oppressed and oppressor, the new state must guarantee one of two democratic rights: the right to secession or the right to territorial autonomy depending on the concrete circumstances. Should a compact national minority exist on territory which is

contiguous with the state from which secession is taking place, then the new state must itself allow the right of self-determination, including that of separation, to the national minority. If, on the other hand, the new minority inhabits territory which is not contiguous with that of its co-nationals in the former state, then the seceding state must allow it a broad degree of autonomy and the fullest economic and cultural links. In this case, Marxists must especially oppose any forced transfers of population or "ethnic cleansing". They must oppose any linguistic or ethnic qualifications for citizenship beyond stable residence and willingness to accept citizenship on the basis of complete equality. There must be no discrimination in terms of the franchise or in educational or cultural rights. National minorities must be able to use their own languages in politics, the law, education and culture.

Ethnic minorities and tribal or "indigenous" peoples who have been deprived of their lands, subjected to genocide, deprived of citizenship or civil rights by states of settler origin, exist the world over.

Revolutionaries must support their struggle for full equal rights, for the protection of their lands and property against further inroads, and for such economic restitution as will allow them to make a social reality of formal civic equality. Whilst it would be utopian to attempt to undo 500 years of European and other colonisation in Latin America, or to disintegrate the new nations that have been created in this period, revolutionaries should support; (a) the right to self determination up to and including separation or autonomy of territories presently occupied by the indigenous or tribal peoples. We support this even where this would involve territory crossing more than one existing state (eg Aymaras in Peru/Bolivia or the Maya peoples of Central America); (b) compensation of those peoples that have been expropriated, impoverished and plundered at the expense of the imperialists and their "national" bourgeois agents. However, we do not advocate separate ethnic/indigenist states. The present economic backwardness of these regions, and the small size of their industrial proletariat, would make them a reactionary utopia on a capitalist basis. Liberation for the indigenous peoples will come from the creation of workers' states as part of a socialist federation of Latin America. We support self-determination all the better to be able to fight indigenist nationalism which ties the exploited and oppressed indian to the emerging class of indigenist bourgeois.

In the late imperialist epoch, as with other democratic demands, it is not possible to fully realise these aspirations to independence whilst capitalism is maintained. Therefore, the positive social content and political form we fight for is that of a workers', peasants' and communal peoples' state, based on councils of elected and recallable delegates. For tribal peoples, living in pre-capitalist conditions, no stable independent state would be possible without the support of the working class, indeed without the support of the working class in power. Here, we seek to construct an alliance between the working class and these peoples or their plebeian strata to realise these common goals. At the same time, we fight for the permanence of the revolution beyond the existing balkanised frontiers, to create a federation of such "soviet republics".

### **The workers' states**

Despite the fact that the right of nations to self-determination up to and including the right to secede is a bourgeois right, the proletariat must continue to extend and defend this right even in those states where it has seized power. It does this in order to win the proletariat of the oppressed nationalities into supporting the creation and the extension of the workers' state. A general recognition of this right is applicable throughout the entire transition period. The victorious proletariat can, as Engels said, "force no blessings on another nation". The proletariat should recognise unconditionally the right to self-determination of an oppressed nation, even if this nation then proceeds to restore capitalism. This was the position of Lenin with regard to Finland and the Baltic States after 1917. Where independence movements in a workers' state are led by bourgeois forces, revolutionaries must try to win the proletariat of an oppressed nation to

the defence of planned property relations. The best way to achieve this is to remove the roots of the bourgeois nationalists' influence?the forcible retention of the nation within the state borders of the workers' state. This will aid the proletariat of the seceding nation to retain or to recover state power.

The military-strategic necessities of a workers' state faced with attack by imperialism or civil war, or the general interests of the international revolution, may make it necessary to violate the right to self-determination in specific instances. This was the case during the Civil War which followed the October Revolution of 1917 when the military and logistical needs of the war made certain violations of self-determination a lesser evil than the downfall of the workers' state. But such instances do not constitute a permanent negation of the right to self-determination. When the workers of a particular nationality are convinced that they need a separate state and desire for secession is deeply rooted in the masses, we are obliged to support an independent workers' council republic. With this slogan we should try to convince the population to oppose the capitalist nationalists, preparing the conditions for a new, genuine and democratic federation of workers' states.

### **Nation states and national oppression in imperialist countries**

Between the 1960s and 1990s, revolutionary Marxists were obliged to take a stand on the European bourgeoisies' plans for western European economic union and then later political union. We are not in favour of a European imperialist cartel, or a mega-state acting as a rival oppressor to the USA or Japan. But neither can we give any support to the reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie and their petit-bourgeois and labour bureaucratic allies who defend the existing imperialist states as havens of democracy, private enterprise or the vessels for some future socialism. We express our equal opposition to both by refusing to "choose" between one or other camp in elections or referenda held on this subject. Instead, we seek maximum working class unity across Europe and beyond. We maximise opposition to European imperialist rearming and their collective actions of a military nature and we summon up maximum opposition to racist laws and all immigration controls. The programme of revolutionary communists, since the 1920s, has been for a workers' council socialist united states of Europe.

In addition, revolutionaries have recognised the continued existence of certain progressive national struggles within imperialist Europe. The Irish republican struggle against British imperialism's enforced division of Ireland, and the holding of the southern portion of Ireland in semi-colonial servitude, is a progressive revolutionary nationalist struggle. Their goal, a united bourgeois Ireland, and their strategy, guerilla warfare, are not ours but we defend the republican fight unconditionally against the British forces. Our strategy and goal is that of permanent revolution for a united Irish workers' republic. Our tactics are those of the political class struggle culminating in the armed mass struggle for power.

In Francoite Spain, revolutionaries supported the struggle of the Basques and the Catalans for self-determination. This justified democratic struggle was an integral part of the struggle against Francoite fascism and bonapartism. It remained a progressive struggle during the highly bonapartist transition to democracy. However, it is now clear, within the limits of bourgeois democracy, that the inhabitants of Euskadi and Cataluna have chosen a degree of autonomy within the Spanish state. A continued guerrilla struggle against the Spanish state has degenerated into individual terrorism, does not have a democratic or revolutionary character, and cannot be supported by Marxists.

Spanish revolutionaries should continue to support the right to self-determination by any of Spain's nationalities should a mass movement re-pose the question and we oppose the repression of the state against nationalists. However, we have no positive reason to seek the break up of the Spanish state into its component regions.

The "struggles" of small minorities amongst the Scots, Welsh, Bretons, Corsicans, Flemings in Europe

have nothing intrinsically revolutionary or progressive about them, and will not have unless the states concerned decisively block democratic expression of the views of the peoples concerned on the question of separation. After the granting of autonomy to Euskadi, ETA's desperate resort to individual terrorism when faced with the indifference of the majority of their own people, is totally reactionary. Usually it has the objective of provoking repression from the "oppressor state" so as to reveal its real nature. The creation of a national question by these means is hostile to the historic goals of the working class.

### **Federal or unitary state?**

Marxists have no preference for a federal over a unitary state. Quite the reverse. In a society where there is no serious question of systematic national or ethnic oppression, we would oppose any bourgeois federalism or regionalism if it sought to preserve or secure privileges for economically advanced areas or to seize and monopolise natural resources for one part of the population. The soviet type state alone can combine local, district, regional self-government with a centralised economic and political life. The capitalist state either ruthlessly subordinates the regions to the capital or the centres of advanced capitalist economy or it creates federal and confederal structures which entrench privilege (Switzerland, Lebanon). However, where various peoples inhabit a common state and suffer varying degrees of discrimination or oppression (nations, nationalities or even tribal or ethnic groups that are evolving into a distinct national life) Marxists may advocate the formation of a federation. In the imperialist epoch, the creation of a multitude of small scarcely viable states, disconnected from one another economically and politically, will only benefit the imperialist states and multinationals who will subordinate and exploit them as semi-colonies despite their formal independence. Therefore, in the semi-colonial world, we favour regional and continental federations of workers' states as the only effective framework for resisting and overcoming Balkanisation.

Federation is also the only progressive solution for intermixed nationalities or ethno-linguistic groups who have a history of conflict, of being used by oppressor states or imperialism. In the Balkans, the CIS and in parts of Africa and Asia "nation-states" were not formed on the basis of distinct, compact, conscious nations. Imperial and dynastic rivalry created states whose borders cut across linguistic groups, religious and tribal communities. Forms of oppression developed during the attempted homogenisation into what can be called "state-nations"; that is, nations created to fill a pre-existing state and its ruling class. Economic development and democratic rights facilitate the development of such a new nation. But these are possible only in rare and fitful periods in the imperialist epoch. The onset of a deep period of renewed crises can reverse them and can encourage a process of disintegration among many nation states. The norm of the present period is economic stagnation and decay and political repression of national rights. In these conditions, regional, tribal and religious elites can raise the banner of a "reborn" nation as if it were the only refuge against this oppression and economic exploitation.

The logic of repeated sub-division and separation, with its near inevitable expulsions of minorities, is a reactionary one. The repeated use of the principle of self-determination by itself is no solution, since repeated separations only reproduce the problem on a smaller but no less savage scale. To expect a democratic solution under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, let alone pre-capitalist exploiters, is utterly utopian. The reactionary character of this bourgeois utopia has been seen in ex-Yugoslavia and in the former USSR as the restoration of capitalism pours petrol onto the flames lit by the disintegrating Stalinist bureaucracies. The only solution to the complex territorial intermixing of peoples where there are no clear, compact majorities is the development of a federation of workers' states.