Do the workers have a country?

*Internationalism and the national question*  

José Iriarte “Bikila”
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These are the titles of the collection: "De the workers have a country?". This is a good expression of something of which our author has become convinced during his almost thirty years of political activity: while Marxism has contributed so much to a political understanding of the national question, it is nevertheless time to return to certain discussions in the light of today's experience.

The title of the particular essay we publish here was "Thoughts on the national question", which is a good definition of its goal: to open up some areas of critical thinking without claiming to have all the answers.

The study made by Jose Iriarte "Bikila" is based on a solid knowledge of the classical Marxist authors and of the national struggles of the last few decades, from Central America to the Soviet world. Perhaps more importantly, it is the fruit of a personal involvement and an intimate knowledge of the fight of the Basque people — of the communist and socialist fight as well as that for national liberation. Bikila's experience of some of the questions he raises in these pages.

José Iriarte began his active political life in the terrain of revolutionary nationalism. In 1964, under the Franco dictatorship, he joined the ranks of the pro-independence organization ETA. Detained in 1966 for his activities, he went underground in 1968, as a member of the political leadership of this movement.

In 1970, differences on perspectives appeared within the movement. Bikila found himself in the leadership of the current known as ETA-VI (the wing of the organization that had the majority in the Sixth Assembly). Held for several months in French prisons in 1973, while he was active in the Basque exile community, he participated in that year in the formation of ETA-VI and the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria (LCR) section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state.

A member of the central leadership of the unified organization, Bikila returned to the Basque country after the death of General Franco in 1975 and collapse of the dictatorship. He became a member of the leading bodies of the LKI (the name of the LCR/ETA-VI in Euskadi). From 1985 to 1991 he was also an elected member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

In 1991, the LKI faced the EMK (Communist Movement of Euskadi). In the Spanish state, the LCR founded, some months later,

José Iriarte "Bikila", "Los derechos humanos y la Internacional" (Euskadi, 1991). The text was reproduced here entitled "Reflexiones sobre un cuestion nacional". This 220 pp. book contains two other essays: "Bikila's Portrait" in Euskadi (the Basque language) and "Pesquisas y cuestiones nacionales" in Castillian, like this first text.
I could have organized my work according to a historical plan, analysing the discussions which took place in each historical period. But I have preferred to adopt a method of division by topic. Within this, my approach is to move from the theory to the strategy; from the abstract to the concrete, that is to say to the problems which are posed today in the nationalities and nations to which we belong - actors in their own process of emancipation.

In recent times, it has been fashionable to assert that Marxism does not have a complete body of theory covering all the circumstances in which the national question arises (in fact only such a particular person as Stalin took the risk of giving a doctrinal nature to his work). This is not an unfounded judgement. It is not by chance that we have difficulties when we deal with problems such as "building the nation" from a class point of view.

However, it should also be emphasized that, despite all its limits, Marxism is the revolutionary current which up to now made the greatest contribution to the search for a positive solution to the oppression of the stateless nations, the nations suffering under the colonial or semi-colonial yoke, and the oppressed nations in the so-called socialist countries. In other words, everything which has to do with the national question in the period of late capitalism, as well as in post-capitalist societies, whether bureaucratized or not.

The problem is therefore to find a positive starting point which, while recognizing the limits, the mistakes, the good and the less good, allows us to continue with this development; and which sheds some light on what interests us particularly, as Marxists from oppressed nations or nationalities.

Marxism develops through a process of self-criticism and thus needs a continuous effort of revision — of what it means and what we should do — we do in the light of the results. I agree with Michael Lowy when he says:

"Marxism is forged through testing the validity of ideas in practice... Marxism is quite the opposite of Coca-Cola, that is a product which is conditioned and adapted to any country, which always has the same colour, the same taste and the same advertisements. On the contrary, Marxism is much more like the dish of rice which, while composed of certain basic elements, is prepared according to the taste and the style of each nation."  

But, it should be said in passing, we find certain flavourings produced by the internationalization of the economy in this national development of Marxism. We no longer even know which country many of its products come from, nor which company is making the profits.

So we also have to speak of strong national specificities as well as of the necessary interaction between national and international elements. This is one of the keys to use in analysing the national question in the current historical period.

Bikila
Chapter 1

Class and nation: an approach to the question of complementarity

Hardly any other sociological problem is quite so tricky as the national question. One of the main reasons for this is that it is so deeply in the sphere of emotions. 

Roman Rosdolsky

It is obvious that nation and class are categories which, while closely interconnected, express socially, culturally, historically defined realities. A social class is something which can easily be defined by whether or not it owns the means of production, by its income level, the quantity and nature of personal goods, etc. It is something relatively clear, particularly as far as the fundamental social classes are concerned, such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, even if there will always be intermediate classes, or indeed sectors of a particular class which am on the periphery or the borderlands. It is obviously not accidental that today there is a flourishing of so many discussions on the extension of the working class to sectors which were previously petty-bourgeois or occupied — that is to say their objective membership of one or the other social class — by new professional sectors who bridge the dividing line between two classes.

However, the nation is something which is much more difficult to define. Stalin tried to define the nation as “a historically constituted, stable, community of people” on the basis of four conditions — and if one of them was lacking then one could not talk about a complete nation. These were “a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up.” This definition turned out to be completely scholastic and garbled with many mistakes. In fact many different elements have to be taken into account.

The nation is a conglomerate of social classes in the present phase of capitalism and also, to a certain extent, in the societies in transition to socialism (further than that, who can say what will be the nation in the real meaning of the term and if it will exist in the stage of the classless society?). A nation possesses very different specific characteristics depending on whether it is an advanced nation, a dependent nation and so on. This makes a single definition of the nation almost impossible.

In addition, the same elements which, according to Stalin, define the nation — the four “common features” he mentioned — are by no means the only objective factors; their culture, their consciousness, and their political obstceans do not enter into the definition of their class. There are some positions, however, which should not be taken into consideration in the analysis. They put the emphasis on the role which is played by political projects and their organizational aspects in the structuring and thus in the existence of a class. This has provoked discussion on the relationship between the concept of a “class in itself” and a “class for itself” which obviously cannot be dealt with in the present study.

Nevertheless, as far as the national question is concerned, the process of formation of a nation and the development of individual or social classes in this process, we can say that there is a broad agreement in inverting the terms of this discussion, highlighting the decisive nature of the project of political determination over other factors. Thus, while material or quantifiable factors, like the economy, the language, the territory, etc, have their importance (but different in each national case) and can even be the starting point for consciousness of national existence; it is the political factor, in the project of formation of the nation that national existence attains its last and determining shape. It can be said that (here to some extent) the development of individual or social classes in this process, we can say that there is a broad agreement in inverting the terms of this discussion, highlighting the decisive nature of the project of political determination over other factors. Thus, while material or quantifiable factors, like the economy, the language, the territory, etc, have their importance (but different in each national

Jost Iriarte Bikla

However, for certain currents of Marxism or Marxism-Leninism, the biggest difficulty is the fact that it is with this goal that it is being clear on the components which constitute a nation (does it include all the attributes mentioned, or only certain, and how do they affect the formation of the nation?) The difficulty has been the disparity of existing criteria when there has to do with a class to the national question. How to combine these two elements — or indeed should they be combined — to give a positive answer to the process of national liberation, which generates the tasks of building a nation? And, above all, how should we place ourselves in relation to already formed nations? This involves the institutional body of the nation, or, if we prefer, both fused in one reality.

Can we or should we have different positions for example on the "Spanish nation" (here I will not go into the discussion on whether Spain is a nation, I simply note that the fact that for many people it is one) and on the Basque and Catalan nations? I think that the answer is yes. And this enormous dust cloud created by the famous phrase in the Communist Manifesto "The workers have no country." 4

Countries and motherlands. When is it worth being "countryless" and when a "patriot"? 5

Workers really do not have a country? After the Cuban, Nicaraguan, Vietnamese and other experiences, it is not more than obvious that two things have to be separated out which cannot be counterposed to each other. On the one hand, there is the eternal value of this phrase as a cry of revolt of the proletariat that are used as cannon fodder in the name of a cause which is not their own, and, on the other hand, the content of the slogan "my country or death", a rallying call to the fight for national independence and social emancipation, against imperialism. 6

In my opinion, nihilism or national indifference are harmful in revolutionary processes that exclude tasks of national liberation. The other extreme, patriotism, which does not have a clear revolutionary content can be manipulated by the bourgeoisie and used in its interests.

On the other hand, for citizens of nations with a long imperialist history, where patriotism has often been used by the bourgeoisie to support its aggression towards other peoples, it is healthy and necessary to reject a strong dose of a nihilism associated with internationalism, in renouncing that particular "country." Because of this, Marx's message is appropriate in the second case — and in reality it is with that goal that it was conceived — but not in the first case which the founders of communism did not take into account, or did not see as applicable.

To develop this point of view. The most consistent, the most revolutionary point of view, in the case of imperialist countries, is to be resolutely "countryless", whatever the internal regime (authoritarian, capitalist), or their traditional nationalism (aggressive or moderate), whether or not they get involved in wars of different levels of intensity and duration. The most consistent, revolutionary, point of view is to refuse to adopt the slogan of "national defense" because it is manipulated to its own ends by imperialism. These are countries which oppress other peoples, where the working class benefits from important gains in relation to the place of its capitalism in the world scene. Thus the appeal by Lenin and the Internationalists during the First World War to fight first against all one's own bourgeoisie has a fundamental symbolic and strategic value. The capitulation of the Second International and, later, of the Stalinists to the idea of the "home country" and the bourgeoisie soil bring out the importance of this question.

7. Lenin made a clear distinction between these two questions in his July 1916 polemic against those who stand in a too general fashion for:

"in the era of imperialism" defense of the fatherland amounts to the defense of the right of one's own bourgeoisie to oppress other peoples.

Lenin made it clear that:

This, however, is true only in respect of an imperialist war... We must be_Mechanics of the fatherland_ in an imperialist war, because only in an imperialist war... The authors of the Polish thesis seem to renounce defense of the fatherland in general, i.e. for a national war as well, believing perhaps that is the true "national imperialism" national wars are impossible.

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Obviously, this starting point does not resolve everything and does allow for some partial exceptions where very complicated situations are created, such as that of France during the German occupation. The Resistance lived in an anti-Nazi world with a good dose of French patriotism, in order to bring broad layers of the population under its leadership. Taking a distance from the patriotic sentiments provoked by the Occupation in the name of internationalism as an abstract concept, or because of France’s imperialist role, would have been a mistake. There is obviously the remaining question of how to identify with this patriotism, how to link it to internationalism and class politics. From this point of view it was perfectly correct for the Resistance to call on German soldiers to remind them of their situation as occupied workers, and to point out that the Nazis had started by exterminating a section of the German people.

Finally, in such cases we have to be clear what sort of nationalism we demand. Nationalism limited to the fight against the Occupation and the defence of a free France is not the same nationalism as that which defends “Great France”, which exalts chauvinism, which denies rights to the colonies on the pretext of maintaining the unified high command necessary for the fight against Nazism (it was this line argument that the French Communist Party used against Algerian patriots).

The workers have no country” has also been an argument that affected the position of the working class to bourgeois society in general, an expression of its class independence. This was very clear in periods of great poverty, but was later obscured by the opportunism of the workers’ movement that based themselves on the advantages gained under conditions of oppression and opposition, particularly in periods of great poverty, but was later obscured by the opportunism of the workers’ movement that based themselves on the advantages gained under conditions of oppression and opposition.”

We therefore find, in this Marxist tradition, fundamental ideas which have been the source of a correct class point of view and a correct internationalism. Those ideas determine the position of national minorities against national liberation movements that collaborated with Nazism, either because of their anti-communism or because they hoped that Hitler would recognize their national rights. In any case these attitudes should not be confused with national demands that could be momentarily integrated into such political strategies. Let us add that, very often, the association of reactionary ideas and alliances with national problems takes place in the framework of national policies only, in response to certain specific social sectors. The insistence of the left forces in the oppressed nation and the attitude of the left forces in the dominant state leave the nation with the right of the Spanish Republic, during the civil war of 1936-39, allowed Francoism not only to consolidate its rearguard but also to bring along the colonized peoples in its adventure.

There is also the case of revolutionary movements which, at the head of the process of national liberation against colonialism or imperialism, continue to base their cause against ethnic minorities or simply do not take into account (Nicaragua at the beginning with the Miskitu). And the case of Quebec where, in the name of defence of the French language (a correct demand faced with English-speaking Canada), many injustices have been committed against Indian minorities (Mohawks, Hurons, etc.). There are also political processes in which the national identity is not clearly defined but where the component of strategic political conflicts which are obviously not resolved very well given that they have reappeared (in the world).

We should also point out that the class point of view, which is so understandable faced with the national question, is in its own way contained in the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, when it states:

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In cases where there is colonial oppression, or brutal national oppression, revolutions should, in my opinion, have a favourable attitude to the “patriotism of the oppressed nation” (whether this is in terms of anti-imperialism or national liberation). We cannot forget the over-riding importance that the national fact has taken in the imperialist epoch. We should say in Marx’s defence that it was difficult for him to foresee the importance that would be attached to nationalism in terms of movements in the revolution, both objectively and subjectively, in the fight to reappropriate the “usurped country,” whether the usurpers were their bourgeoisie or imperialism.

The national question has led to confrontations with imperialism (in the case of dependent countries) or to a challenge to the legitimacy of the bourgeois nation-state (in the case of marginalized or oppressed nationalities). In the economic field this has encouraged tendencies towards a greater decentralization of zones which are daily more and more in the stranglehold of the state and inter-state macro-organisms (giant conglomerations which are impossible to control and incapable of adapting to popular needs).

We saw the Nicaraguan assertion of their right to build their Sandinist country. Many national liberation movements have consolidated their workers-peasants-peoples alliance by asserting their “revolutionary nationalism”; by giving a national form and content to their own social revolt (as Trotsky already emphasized a long time ago).

Obviously, here again, exceptions or precisions should be introduced. There can sometimes be a convergence between nationalism and national demands and reactionary causes. This was the case for example for the Flemish, Breton or Wallonian movement that collaborated with Nazism, either because of their anti-communism or because they hoped that Hitler would recognize their national rights. In any case these attitudes should not be confused with national demands that could be momentarily integrated into such political strategies.
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I think this can be interpreted as: While it is true that the socialista revolution cannot be confined to a purely national framework, it has to start by being victorious at the national level. At what historical pace is another question. And we should remember that the national terrain implies specific conditions, traditions and realities which are noticeably different, as long as we have a clear vision of the effects of the international on the national and vice versa.

Reductionism of the "workerist" and "economist" type

It seems to me personally that, to quite a large extent, the thought and action of Marxists have been impregnated by a "cosmopolitan" culture of doubtful objectivity and legitimacy. This has engendered distrust and rejection of national identification, interpreted as a deviation or contamination of class consciousness, considered by definition and by essence as nothing less than "without national identity."12

Such positions demonstrate flagrant incomprehension of the national problem and, sometimes, an adaptation to the nation state as it is. They often derive from historical or economic conceptions for which bigger is better for bourgeois "national" states, their size in fact expressing great progress from the point of view of the development of productive forces and cohesion of the working class. Faced with these supposed advantages, the aspirations of the nations which live on these territories appear as an upsurge of petty-bourgeois fever, opposed to the onward march of history. From this point of view, the demand for independence should not be supported or, in the best of cases, should be moderated by the concession of a status of autonomy, or channelled into watered-down formulations of the right to self-determination.

We also find in these positions a workerist reductionism, linked to a certain conception of the automatic resolution of different forms of oppression in the course of the socialist revolution. These positions thus prove themselves to be incapable of understanding the way in which the national liberation movements today express the general crisis of capitalism, and thus the role that they play in the present period.

To sum up, in most cases there is a gross deformation of the Marxist point of view. This has fed on a not insignificant number of deficiencies in the original, as we will see when we analyse the formation of the nation, its place in history, etc.

Rightwing and/or conservative deviations

Rightwing deviations and class collaboration in national questions are, in my opinion, the other side of the coin, a symmetrically mistaken approach to the problem. At the end of the last century and at the beginning of this one, during the process of degeneration of social democracy, Bernstein and the leaders of the Second International ended up by identifying — in their own interests — the workers' gains in electoral and trade union matters, with what Marx called "constituting themselves as a national class."

Beyond a certain level of development of the working class this becomes a complex question. Given its ability to wrest some conquests and rights from the bourgeois state, the working class no longer has only its economic and social interests, but also its national ones.

The refonnist answer to this question has been very different and nuanced according to the country, but the general trend has been gradual identification with the bourgeois nation state, and, in the final analysis, with capitalism as a system, claiming at most to limit the most threatening and aggressive aspects. This last claim of refonnism has itself been abandoned when the bourgeois state, the working class no longer has only its national and class questions are two sides of the same coin, but from this fact we can draw out different conclusions.

12. I refer to the persistent conception in some sections of the left which confuses the "nation" and bourgeois interests and thus counterposes the concept of "class," or counterposes national consciousness and the class consciousness, which is justified in the case of the big nation states, where the interest of the nation is synonymous with the interests of big capital, which uses this identification to carry on its imperialist and militaristic policy, because dangerously wrong when it is applied to national or anti-colonial processes in a whole series of underdeveloped countries or in the case of a national revolutionary movement, like the in the Bauea country, within a developed society.

Different national problems

As a general rule, I think that a revolutionary class position on the national question should be defined according to the concrete nature of the latter. This obviously means a variety of points of view (there are many different cases of national oppression). In this vision, very different from any form of opportunism on the national question, the nation, in order not to be an abstraction, will be explained in different ways when questions and content have to be clarified.

Revolutionaries often have to oppose patriotism, but sometimes they have to take it over for themselves when it responds to a project of national and social liberation. Thus they sometimes have to oppose the "official nation" and at other times become the spokespersons of the oppressed or minority nation. In this field there is no always-applicable recipe which makes it possible to avoid a concrete analysis of the concrete reality.

In addition, we can be confronted with complex situations where the progressive camp and the reactionary camp in relation to the national struggle are not clearly defined. There are also situations where that is not the case, but it is rather a question of emphasis: What importance should be given at a particular moment to the national dimension or the class dimension? On what should the strategy, alliances and so on be based? This type of question has led to more than one disagreement between revolutionaries in our different nations. The national and class questions are two sides of the same coin, but from this fact we can draw out different conclusions.

The class and national aspects, while being related to each other, often have different origins and respective weights. They can give rise to dynamics which do not necessarily converge, even in a project of national liberation. In other words, depending on the country, the national and class questions do not always have the same place in relation to the roots of oppression, poverty and domination.

To simplify things we could say for example that what is happening today in Peru is explained to a large extent by the weight of imperialist domination and, particularly, by the role of the foreign debt. In Euskadi, however, the economic crisis does not have a fundamentally national origin, that is to say it is not linked to dependence on an external imperialist agent (as far as self-government allows measures that palliate the effects of unemployment and the crisis); it arises from the type of industrial development and the place that Basque capitalism has within the capitalism of the Spanish state and internationally. Such differences cannot be ignored when we define a class framework for the analysis of the national oppression suffered by the two nations, which is formally independent but subject to the firm rule of imperialism, the other without any national sovereignty but involved in the productive structure of a developed capitalist country. Such varied situations should logically give rise to different approaches in defining a socialist strategy of national liberation.
Chapter 2

The nation in the history of capitalism and socialism

State boundaries are in themselves trivial issues for Marxists. But 20th century experience teaches us that national identities are anything but trivial matters.12

Oliver MacDonald

It is not possible here to deal with all the discussions that this question has provoked. I will limit myself to mentioning certain questions which help to understand the complexity. We start, as is the tradition for Marxists, from the fact that the nation is a "historical category", which has not always existed and which, independently from what people want, is not condemned to exist indefinitely. Nations result from a long process of community formation (which has sometimes lasted for thousands of years). Existing in reality today, they are shaped by the way concrete social, political, economic and political factors are combined in the capitalist system (and what is carried on into transitional or post-capitalist societies). The formation of the nation state is the result of a singular phenomenon, in a period when capitalist and bourgeois society constituted the dominant system. It is thus marked by this system.

This historical conception has come into conflict with essentialist and idealistic viewpoints which see the nation as something exclusive and closed, and which attribute the causes of existing problems to deviations, products of a change in the original foundations of the nation. Their most grotesque forms have led to the development of racism (hating the nation on the face) and exclusivism (in postulating on the national essence which excludes different types of citizens for reasons of religion, ideology, origin or behavioural stereotypes).

It has also come into conflict with ahistorical conceptions which see the nation as an "invariable", something whose origins can go back to prehistory and whose essential foundations have remained unchanged until today. These conceptions confuse the nation itself — or the already formed nation — and human communities which, with a greater or lesser degree of continuity, have come and gone through history. The point is precisely that the nation has played a role of a driving force in the formation of nations (it was in this way that the myth of "eternal Peace" was created). There also exist cases where the nation is born from a recent amalgam of populations (the best-known being the United States). But even elsewhere, where the continuity between the original community and the nation is obvious, we cannot confine the two if we take into account the qualitative leap that takes place when this community is transformed into a nation, usually organized in the form of a nation state.

Light and shadow in this analysis

The materialist point of view makes it possible to analyse the temporal dimension of the national phenomenon. But it is far from being an infallible guide: guarding us against unfounded analyses, errors and errors of different magnitude. In the name of historical materialism and under the pretext of fighting against national-idealistic points of view, unconvincing facts have been denied, which referred to the specificities of each national formation: really specific phenomena in cultural and economic questions, the social structure etc. These are all features which are products of a past, and which have been shaped and modified during the course of history. Real misconceptions have thus been committed in relation to national processes which did not fit in with pre-conceived schemas.

Some people have analysed the relationship of the bourgeois nation-state in such a mechanical a fashion (some quite confused concepts in the analytic tool kit). For example, one might say that nationalism is a "historical inevitability", that the nation is a "natural phenomenon", that it is a "social construct", that it is a "product of the mind", that the nation is a "projection of the state", to quote but a few examples. With a corresponding "historical determinism", the political and economic questions of the nation-state are reduced to "economic determinism". It is thus difficult to eliminate.

According to Michael Lury, the specificity of a series of structured (or "institutional") organizations is a universal need of all civilized human societies. These organizations can as well take national forms, as international (the state, the UN) and religious ones (the church). The ideal type is a characteristic example of a social and political organization combining local structures which are "pre-national" (the left, the peasants, etc) and universalizing structures which are "beyond the nation" (the Holy Roman Empire, the Church). The modern nation-state emerged around the 14-15th centuries, with the rise of capitalism in the western market - precisely through the institutional/representation of these two non-national structures.

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14. As a simplification we can take the example of the tadpole and the frog. The frog would not exist without its previous form in the evolution process, but once the transformation has taken place, there is a qualitative leap, not only in appearance but also in the forms of behavior and in organic functioning in general. Modern nations are in many ways hardly recognizable in comparison with previous societies.


15. Carlist was the traditional movement which supported the claim of Don Carlos (the brother of Charles V) to the crown of Spain. The three Carlist wars marked the nineteenth century and the fall of the Ancien Regime. The first Carlist War lasted from 1831 to 1835, the second from 1835 to 1839 and the third from 1872 to 1876. The "Fier" was a system of communal rights and duties in the Basque country to which the population was very attached.


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Marx and Kautsky, and in Lenin's first writings on the subject undoubtedly contributed to this. In the present-day world, we can very easily see that these are two very different things, even if they have been unified by the market mechanism, particularly important because, in a non-capitalist society, a specific community could survive and develop as it likes without the framework of the nation state. This is why the demand for an independent state can exist, in future, be posed in a new form that cannot be seen in advance, while today it is a necessity faced with the bourgeois imperialist state (or so-called "actually existing socialism").

Economic conceptions have also developed which overestimate the economic factor (the importance which nobody can deny) in the formation of nations, to the detriment of other essential elements, such as power, which is of great importance, which have their own autonomy and without which we cannot understand the strength of national feelings: the language, the psychological factors flowing from a partly-shared history, a series of common elements which have a strong impact on consciousness. In addition, these elements can play a key role in external situations of geopolitical nature, of social and national identity, etc. The ruling class uses them and manipulates them in order to capitalize on feelings of solidarity to their advantage.

Moreover, and whatever their importance, national existence cannot be reduced to simply economic or cultural elements. The extent to which the political factor — and the actual class struggle — also counts in the development of national consciousness and the raising of the demand for national sovereignty should be emphasized. All this has its own autonomy, even if, obviously, the political has a relationship with the material base on which it is set, or the cultural elements which feed it.

Scotland is a significant illustration of this point. This country has, in its totality and in its different components, all the typical ingredients which accompany the formation of a nation, including the memory of a recent past, a continuity of a common phenomenon, a strong anti-English feeling, that is to say against the nation most privileged by the union. However, until recently different factors prevented the development of a national or nationalist type demand, postulating the existence of a different nation on the territory of the state. There has therefore been a long historical parenthesis between a strongly marked pre-national existence (Scotland, as a distinct nation, with a quite different past and culture) and the unchallenged existence of a different nation on the territory of the state. There has therefore been a long historical parenthesis between a strongly marked pre-national existence (Scotland, as a distinct nation, with a quite different past and culture) and the unchallenged existence of a different nation on the territory of the state. There has therefore been a long historical parenthesis between a strongly marked pre-national existence (Scotland, as a distinct nation, with a quite different past and culture) and the unchallenged existence of a different nation on the territory of the state.
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discussion of the "historically progressive role" of capitalism, particularly in relation to the national question, the universality, the "inevorable logic" of centralization/concentration of capital and its state or supra-state political instruments. This is also a type of analysis in which imperialist positions can too often emerge.

Moreover, the need to unity the capitalist market, which lies behind the policy of each capitalist state, did not give birth to a single structure of institutions and composition of these bourgeois states. The centralist or Jacobin model of the French revolution has itself several versions; other models — federal or confederal to example — are also useful to capitalism and are found in different national situations.

The general tendency has been to attribute sovereignty to the institutions of the nation going so far as to identify one with the other ("The nation is the National Assembly," in Robespierre's words). The centre of power is thus shifted towards different bodies, towards almost-uncontrollable and narrowly-based executive bodies. This can be seen in today's bourgeoisie society by the role played by the representative institutions of the nation in ensuring the mechanisms for managing capitalism.

We should also note the importance of certain ideological evolutions. From Jacobin thought, which sought with greater or lesser success to link the role of guide assigned to the French nation with the universal ideals of democracy, we moved on to very different types of fascism and nationalism. The notion of the nation itself has been conceived in very different ways: in terms of citizenship (acquiring a national dimension in institutions) or as belonging to a race, to a linguistic community, to a common fate, etc. In short, the idea that there is only one form of national development which goes along with the evolution of capitalism cannot be sustained in any way.

The nation is a relatively stable fact as a historical entity. But as has already been noted, it is no less, by definition, a world of diversity (each nation is in fact, in relation to its neighbour, a sum of resemblance and of differences produced by comings together and separations). What is more, the content of the nation can be transformed according to which class finds itself in the leadership of the process of building the nation and shapes its relations with others.

Here we are confronted with a whole world of conflicts which can only be understood in broader notions of what is the nation and its place in human history, and of the class struggle. If we insist on this last point, it is because the class struggle is far from being the sole driving force of historical transformations, or at least is far from being something which is chemically pure. It is sometimes only in the last instance that it is the determining factor, given the autonomy and the weight which nations, sexes, etc have in the evolution of human history.

Discussions on the nation and the national future under socialism

History has now given its answer to the idea that the socialist revolution will make it possible to advance very rapidly beyond existence as a nation. The balance sheet of the experience of transition (in the Marxist sense of societies which are no longer capitalist but not yet socialist) has turned out to be as complex as that of building capitalist societies themselves. At first, the Russian revolution gave rise to many positive experiences in the exercise of the right to self-determination (this is particularly true in a field which has been little discussed up to now, that of the national minorities whose process of constitution started with the revolution). What is also put into question is the conviction that the revolution would naturally take on the task, uncompleted under capitalism, of overcoming the existence of separate nations (seen as a residual hindrance to the universalization of humanity and thus to full realization of socialism). Later, with the bureaucratic generation of the revolution and the complex situation which resulted (repression, mass deportation of entire ethnic groupings, but also the return and promotion of certain languages, it is obvious that the national question remains just as important in the transitional phase as under capitalism.

On all these questions, Otto Bauer developed an original interpretation which is worthy of consideration, whatever the errors that exist in his overall theory of nations and nationalism. Let us see what it is.

Bauer's theses are different from the pseudo-progressive type of historicism which accorded certain nations civilizing virtues (present in the famous theory of the "nonhistoric peoples" of Engels). This last conception has nourished a certain social-democratic tradition which considered colonialism as a lesser evil and which has (mentally) thrown others nations considered as non-civilized into the dustbin of history. Let us compare to this tradition an analysis which can be summarized as follows:

a) There is no nation which exists separately from the social classes which compose it. We cannot measure the value of a nation on the basis of the qualities and failing of the classes which lead it at any given moment (whether that is by denying them any national value because they are agrarian or backward, or by considering them imperialist as a whole without taking into account the development of the class struggle within them);

b) Nations advance and retreat in direct relationship to the evolution of their economic, social and political capacities, some within the framework of capitalism itself, others by undertaking the socialist revolution or by falling into greater dependence on imperialism.

Bauer was able to see that the rise of capitalism was far from attenuating the aspirations of the so-called "nations without vitality", within the region of capitalist expansion. In fact, these aspirations have been reinforced by the desires of each bourgeoisie to form its own market, and to form a state which assures free development. As its level of education rises, the working class begins to form its own contributions to the national cultural identity.

This analytical perspective corresponds quite well to what has happened in two circumstances: when the developing bourgeoisie of certain countries considered as "nonhistoric" has fought to establish its own nation state; or when national liberation movements, led by revolutionaries, have been formed and then associated national liberation and socialist construction of the nation.

Despite the use of the slippery concept of "national character" (seen as the result or the crystallization of a material process), Bauer tries, in a merit-theory fashion, to make precise the definition of a nation:

The materialist conception of history can understand the nation at the never-finished product of a process that is always underway, whose last driving force is conditioned by the conditions of man's struggle with nature, the transformation of human productive forces and the changes in the human conditions. According to this conception, the nation is what is historic in up.

The particular vision of the nation that Bauer develops is interesting because, over and above the simple effort to understand, it offers us the possibility of integrating the national struggle and the class struggle into a total perspective of emancipation. Socialism is thus seen as the framework best adapted to the development of the nation. In this sense, for the first time a really national class, the working class, would fully develop its potentialities without entering into conflict with other nations, seeking harmony with other cultures and encouraging national efforts towards a common humanity.

All these conceptions of the nation, the place in history and its internal dynamics of development, led Bauer to two conclusions. The first was that in the future socialism would offer a framework of "harmony between nations" and not of brutal or gradual assimilation of the one by the other. The second was that it is possible to struggle together for the liberation from internal barriers which make it impossible to benefit from all national advantages, and for universal enrichment, product of a total of contributions and not a simple process of assimilation. He was convinced that only the


18. Michael Lévy analyses the polemic among Marxists on this question in the following way:

One can find basically two tendencies: 1) Those who favoured (or considered inevitable) the future assimilation of a universal common socialist culture: Kautsky, Lenin, Stalin, Pannekoek, Steiner. Kautsky's theory of the single international language is the coherent expression of this position. 2) Those who believed in the free development of all national cultures in an integrated universal community: Otto Bauer, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. A third position "national neutrality" is implicitly sketched by Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Jewish Bund... Marxists should neither prevent nor stimulate this process of assimilation but remain neutral. ("Synchronie oder Nationen?", op. cit., p. 225.)
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Working class could be a really national class in this fully democratic and universalist sense.

**Elements of a conclusion**

To conclude, the nation is formed in a different fashion depending on which class exercises hegemony. The recognition of this fundamental fact does not however mean those who share this viewpoint with us from running into certain problems in the definition of a programme (whether it is related to the preliminary phase of liberation or the later phase of construction). There is no magic that has enabled us to see clearly. There are sometimes questions as to the national content that the working class should demand or reject. The same goes for the measure of this or that oppression. Is it really national oppression or another type of oppression? There are sometimes cultural, political or economic measures necessary not only for nations in the full sense of the term but also for regions and other types of communities.

What approach should be adopted, when we run into this type of problem? We have already indicated what seems to us the fundamental method to be used: to start from the recognition of the national entity in its political manifestation, that is to say its desire to form a nation, and to place at a different level the way in which other elements (economic, etc) are integrated and combined in this. This is not a question of under-estimating these “other factors” in the formation of this desire to form a nation. In fact, this desire is not born in a vacuum, many material elements have a role to play in the way in which national consciousness is formed, gains in cohesion and is condensed and given vigour. In addition, depending on which social class leads the national process, and the project that it puts forward, these material elements which underlie a nation can be given value in a specific fashion. History, geography, language, the productive forces, the forms of ownership, all have their importance in the formation of the national identity and its most political manifestations.

Certain theorists find it necessary to make a distinction between the “conditions of existence of a nation” and the already formed nation (whether or not it has its own state). They therefore make a different between the “existence of conditions” which make the formation of a nation possible, and a “nationality” on the other hand. In the first case, the process of formation of a nation can still not come to its final conclusion. In the second case, the formation is demonstrated by the presence of a political project (called national or nationalist) which goes in a national direction. In other words, these theorist base themselves on the existence of a strong nationalist or national movement to decide whether we are faced with a national entity, or simply the potential of one.

We should not fall into the doctrinaire attitude of those who deny situations of national oppression, in the name of a pre-determined schema which they use to shape reality (this is what made it possible for Stalinists to deny the right to self-determination for many nations). Nor should we give way to simple imitation and transfer mechanically the goals of the struggle of one oppressed nation to other territories. There can for example be a strong oppression of a specific type, which cannot be considered as national, without this implying denial of the right of the populations concerned to wide-ranging measures of autonomy and self-government. The existence of a national entity, over and above these possibilities, includes above all the right to separation, that is to say to constitute a separate nation.

To conclude this chapter an obvious fact should be emphasized: we cannot forecast the future of nations, nor what will be the universal society foreseen by the founders of Marxism. From our present vantage point we can simply reject two presumptions. The first is that of the pseudo-cosmopolitans who announce a nationally uniform humanity, or an amalgam of heterogeneous cultures and existence (normally the product of a process of assimilation by the strongest). The second is that of those who postulate a national essentialism, who see nations as something unchanging, that have always existed and will always exist in an unaltered form, whatever type of society is held for us by the future.

What counts today is the desire to finish with all types of oppression or forced independence; to develop nations in line with the desires of their inhabitants, and ensure that this development is democratic, internationalist and based on solidarity. The future will tell us how to build world socialism, whether it will be built in an immediate and future material interests of the working class world wide, and requiring, over and above solidarity in struggles, a strategy of internationalist breadth and content. Obviously this is not the only definition of internationalism, just as there are different ways of being internationalist from one, even in the framework of Marxism. There are other conceptions and other practices, linked particularly to contemporary revolutions or to certain regions of the world. There is this regional diversity as well as the “campist” perversion which sees the world as divided into two “blocs” — that is to say which transforms internationalism into a simple transmission belt at the service of the political and diplomatic goals of the so-called socialist camp, particularly the USSR.

What is internationalism? There are several definitions in this field (including those which refer to reactionary nationalism of essentialist, racist or imperialist versions which we do not intend to deal with here). But there is not the same clarity, from a Marxist point of view, as there is when we define internationalism.

I would add that it is sometimes difficult to find a common reference when we discuss nationalism and the range of Marxist positions. This difficulty is caused on the one hand by the “logical gaps” which can arise when there are different starting points (the nation or the social class). But this difficulty is also the result of suspicions which are not always justified, which are the product of much too abstract or stereotyped definitions of the nationalist phenomenon.

Here we use a definition which does not give rise to too many problems, that used by Recalde in his book on the formation of nations:

**Chapter 3**

Nationalism and internationalism, the domain of ideology

What is internationalism? We can say, at the risk of being rather facile, that the Marxist tradition was born under the "sign" of internationalism, and it lives under this sign as easily as a fish swims in water. We are a certain number to have lived and worked for internationalism, which we understand as a force uniting the immediate and future material interests of the working class world wide, and requiring, over and above solidarity in struggles, a strategy of internationalist breadth and content. Obviously this is not the only definition of internationalism, just as there are different ways of being internationalist from one, even in the framework of Marxism. There are other conceptions and other practices, linked particularly to contemporary revolutions or to certain regions of the world. There is this regional diversity as well as the "campist" perversion which sees the world as divided into two "blocs" — that is to say which transforms internationalism into a simple transmission belt at the service of the political and diplomatic goals of the so-called socialist camp, particularly the USSR.

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Here we use a definition which does not give rise to too many problems, that used by Recalde in his book on the formation of nations:

It is true that we find mixed in this definition, as if it was an indissoluble whole, the national emancipation movements and the ideology of one or other movements, whether it is hegemonic or a minority. Nevertheless, in the same way as the workers' movement is not synonymous with socialism or communism but with class action, different ideologies, and of course different forms of nationalism, exist in national emancipation movements.

Nevertheless, this definition of nationalism should not be rejected (even on the level of ideology itself, of symbols of identity of abstraction) from the point of view of a strategy which claims to make the working class the "leader of the nation" (as the South Americans like to say), of a strategy which wants to build the nation which is denied to it by imperialism and its incompetent and treacherous bourgeoisies. Thus we should talk of "revolutionary nationalism" or "internationalist, class nationalism" as do the Sandinistas in Nicaragua or the class-conscious counrty of Basque and Catalan nationalism.

There are cases where an ideological synthesis has been successfully developed, crowning a movement towards unity between nationalists and revolutionary socialists, or making it possible for them to coexist in order to respond to the double oppression. We have seen how the anti-imperialism of Sandino and Marxism socialism as interpreted by Carlos Fonseca produced a Sandinista ideology combining both. We can also find other formulas of synthesis such as "two oppressions, two sides of the same coin" or "strategy for national and social liberation" (used by the ETA in the Basque country or the IRA in Ireland).

This question should not, for all that, be approached in a doctrinaire fashion, and given fixed answers, a yes
We can thus achieve deep and close unity in action. It is only then that a higher synthesis could occur (going beyond the opposition to the national and social struggle). This is why the struggle against the oppressor has a more complex nature in the national liberation struggle, involving political, social, and cultural dimensions.

The counterpart is that revolutionary nationalists should change their hegemonic and sometimes exclusionary vision in relation to other components of the national-liberation movement, like the national bourgeoisie and the rural population. This requires a reevaluation of the historical role of the traditional elites and a recognition of their contributions to the struggles for national independence.

As long as this does not happen, we will have to "search together but separately." Here I am continually referring to the idea that what we call the "guiding ideas" and not the organizational projects of a front or coalition type. In this latter field, coexistence is possible in the same movement between revolutionary Marxists and radical nationalists around common political goals on the terrain of the national and social struggle, while respecting different positions and opinions. We can thus achieve deep and close unity in action while maintaining the full ideologica and strategic independence of each force. This means that we are confronted from the outset with a clear difference between what we call the national policy of the revolutionary left (that every communist should take as the basis of their internationalism) and nationalism as an ideological-symbolic movement. Unity in political action is a practical necessity in the struggle against the common enemy, but ideological unity remains more difficult and not necessarily possible. Achieving it would depend above all on a desire for regroupment and ideological-theoretical developments in this direction.

We are convinced that symbols of identity are not unchangeable. The substance of concepts changes because even the meaning of words changes with time and place. In fact, it is not uncommon to see Latin American Marxists call themselves nationalists because for them this is the "problem" that means of national and social liberation. Here, in the Basque country, something similar has already happened with the word "abertzale," essentially associated with the struggle for national sovereignty. In our case there are opportunities for dialogue, and we think that the future remains open.

History has shown that class nationalism and revolutionary socialism are not closed, mutually exclusive systems of thought which do not allow any contributions "from outside." Many ideological groups, in the process of forming a socialist identity, are undergoing a change of pace and direction. It is by taking new points of view in fields such as the formation of nations which are so complex and unfinished in Marxist theory — we have reached the point of taking on national identities without considering that we are in contradiction with our internationalism.20

It is very important to recognize the existence of these mutations in this process of coming together between revolutionary Marxism and national liberation movements in advanced capitalist countries. It is in fact very often the precondition for a real implantation in national reality, in its social and political dimension.

**Different starting points**

What are the fundamental problems which are at the root of the current separation between communists and revolutionary nationalists? We will try to look at several possibilities.

For revolutionary Marxists, the starting point remains the class point of view, including on the national question. The national policy is considered as a class response to a phenomenon of community as of much importance as the internal and external relations of the nation. This means that to a great extent the confrontations inside and outside the nation are seen from a class standpoint. Revolutionary nationalists in our region continue to take national oppression as the starting point for defining developments and strategies. This way of looking at things is often expressed in a more purist fashion in formulations like "the class struggle takes the form of the national struggle" or "the national struggle is the fundamental contradiction in the current phase." Their policy and alliances, in this national framework, are analysed above all through an essentially nationalist prism, to the detriment of a social approach when forming the national liberation movement; the priorities to be set in forming alliances; the development of different demands, and their relationship with the different cultural components will be subordinate to the requirements of the national struggle, which is considered as the main contradiction.

There are also different ideas on a whole set of questions such as: the vision of the nation to be built; the role which the different cultural components will play in building it; the role of the working class in the construction and formulation of the national liberation movement; the priorities to be set in forming alliances; the development of different demands, and their relationship when forming the national liberation movement itself and linking it to socialist aspirations.

To appreciate the importance of these elements we have to take into account the geopolitical factor, the social field where ideology is reproduced and the sources from which it comes.

Nationalism in capitalist Europe, including that of oppressed nations, has a different content and objective significance from that in dependent countries. It is not by chance that nationalism and the nation state were born in Europe. Nor is it by chance that in this part of the world we have seen all the possible faces of nationalism, from the most horrifying, like fascism, to currents of a revolutionary nature. There is in general an original cultural influence we can see in many fields (like history, the nation, which was very much present among the first nationalists). Its effects are palpable in revolutionary nationalism as well. This makes it possible to understand that, from Sabino Arana to the first theorizations of ETA and then to the most recent, we see a process marked by ideological breaks and original survivals, that are difficult to measure.

This appears in the way in which the movements concerned understand their own historical roots and elaborate their strategies; the way in which they conceive the nation and the society in which it is formed. We have an example, in Euskadi, of a perception treating the continuity of the national liberation struggle, from Carlist until today. That is one hundred and fifty years of national struggle!

However, the demands of indigenous peoples, their role in the affirmation of anti-imperialist movements or the place of figures like Sandino as emblematic components of the movement for national liberation, are one thing. Another thing is to identify with all the events and situations that Euskadi has experienced over the last 150 years, without having any substantial differences with what was done and the way of doing them, when we are dealing with the phenomena as complex as that of the Carlist of the last century or the experience of the PNV in 1936 or when we are confronted with personalities like Zumalakarregui, Sabino Arana, etc.21

In sum, we cannot have a simplistic vision of the different phases of a movement when it has not reached the stage of "national liberation." That is, we cannot accept the so-called "continuist" vision of "150 years of pathetic war" or the "garbis — Basque soldiers — of yesterday and today." It is, from this point of view, symptomatic that a movement which claims today to unify social and nationalist aspirations, identifies only with the movements of the military struggle closer together.

Of course, we should not fall into the opposite excess, and simply present the liberals of the nineteenth century as the progressives and the Carlists as the reactionaries while ignoring the significance of the "Garbi" for the Basque people. Or to limit ourselves to a simple demarcation of the revolutionary features of the historic 20. 'The situation today is different from that which prevailed at the birth of the workers’ movement and communist movement. Many “signs of identity” and national programmes have seemed to have taken up or were oriented towards a revolutionary outlook, whose roots and nature are not firmly communist or working-class. We can thus easily assume that many of these formulations are present in the references of revolutionary nationalism in the same way that formulations coming from nationalism can be present or resurrected by revolutionary communism. The problem consists in categorizing the differences which appear in our own politics and between different forces, and what we have in common.'

21. On Carlists see Note 16. Zumalakarregui was the Basque military leader of the Carlist wars in the mid-19th century. The PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco) is the original party of Basque nationalism. Sabino Arana was the founder of this party. His nationalism was based on a deeply Christian religious element even if it has the merit of being the first stimulus towards Basque nationalist elements.
torical nationalism, without taking into account its historic contribution to the formulation of Basque national demands. This fallacious simplism, the reverse of the first, often hides a very manipulative version of history that is rather more favourable to Spanish nationalism.

History has also shown us that nationalism ideas that were correct at the start have evolved towards imperialist ideas of different sorts. In addition, cowardly nationalism of the oppressed nation is often used to impose a policy of national predominance, to the detriment of certain of the peoples they could exploit. We should not underestimate the danger hidden in these arguments.

It should be highlighted to what point antagonistic forces, like the bourgeois nationalist forces of the oppressor nation and the oppressed nation, can use common ideas. Thus, a great deal of confusion is created, depending on who uses them and at what point, serve to feed both the healthy aspiration to national freedom and the narrowest and most reductive nationalism.

To sum up what I am saying: the revolutionary nationalism we know is in general formed during the second stage of the national struggle, a product of the convergence between the national and socialist struggle. It develops a progressive vision, marked by a desire to internationalize. It also often suffers from the pressure exerted by different nationalisms in the region where it develops. In any European nationalism there are sleeping tigers which should be exalted — and this can only be done with a firm revolutionary orientation. And when such an orientation is fully assumed this brings about a change of "ideological wavelength" and probably changes in the vision of the world and in the national destiny. He thus defined the phases which nationalism must necessarily go through:

The phase of demanding a difference of social structure which culminates in provincialism. The phase of extension of the language and conservation of wealth, which is identified with regionalism. The national phase, the possession of all the elements of national existence, including the state itself, in order to ensure leadership. Then the later, imperialist phase, of external influence.

It is clear that no left or revolutionary nationalism can accept such a thesis. But it is often the case that, in the name of supposed priority of the national aspect, they define phases and impose priorities whose effect is to attack the specific dynamic of social movements, movements which however exist within the process of national liberation.

Unfortunately, there exist many examples of appeals to "the nationalist family", including even bourgeois nationalism, which are made in the interests of the more traditional nationalist parties and movements. We find here a problem which arises. The nature of the links which should be made at the level of the state points to other discussions. There have often been mistakes in this field, the "opposite" of the "nationalist retreat" of central governments tending to ignore the national characteristics of Basque, Catalan, Galician organizations. This was to forget that the national movements of the oppressed nation should be sovereign and on the basis of this sovereignty establish the model and the intensity of the relationships in question.

There are different forms of nationalism, different forms of communism and socialism

Once the questions which create the most frictions and divergences between nationalism and internationalism have been clarified, we must state clearly what unites and what separates the revolutionary communists of an oppressed nation and their revolutionary nationalist colleagues.

Again, it should be emphasized from the start that nationalists cannot be trusted as a bloc, nor can nationalism be given an abstract definition.

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long time since this term ceased to have one single meaning. This is also true of the terms "communist" and "socialist," but it is particularly true because factors which go far beyond ideology intervene on the social and political terrain. Trotsky was right when he refused to fall into the trap, by making it clear that:

Nationalism has not always been a reactionary ideology, not by far, and it is not always one today either.

Quite to the contrary, it has often been:

a revolutionary element as opposed to the abstract and false cosmopolitanism [...].

Not taking this question fully into account not only prevents us from seeing clearly the difference between different forms of nationalism. When we have made this mistake, this has also prevented us from correctly appreciating the significance of revolutionary nationalism in relation to the Spanish state and bourgeoisie society. We have, in particular, underestimated its objective role of opposition to the system and its capacity to bring into motion social forces susceptible of becoming involved in the revolution (even if, conversely, we should not ignore how it can hide a really internationalist vision).

All this has implications for making alliances, the forms of convergence in the struggle against capitalism and the capitalist state. It is obvious today that we have more points of convergence with the revolutionary nationalists than with certain currents called of the workers (socialists and Eurocommunists) not to give them any other description.

If we talk about different forms of nationalism, what should be said of the different forms of socialism or communism which sometimes have nothing in common, even ideologically (if we do not allow ourselves to be misled by ritual relations which always remain purely formal)? Thus there are common points between left nationalists and revolutionary communists which try in their different ways to develop strategies and ideologies for social and national liberation.

At certain times, we have defended formalist interpretations of the idea of the workers' united front in conditions of national oppression. We answered the question "which are the class organizations in the Spanish state" by saying: the revolutionary communists and the reformists (the PCP and the PSOE) and so it is with them that we should form the "workers' united front" (only the moment and the form remained to be clarified).

It was only later that we understood that, in the current phase, this was not the natural framework for the struggle against the state and the bourgeoisie. We have seen revolutionary communist formations of different nationalities, including Catalan, support a formation like Herri Bataunesa in elections, considering that on this terrain and in many circumstances this was the formation that essentially galvanized the resistance against the system (even although this could change in the future, this is a good example of the point we are making). This is the case because the national and class dimensions are not separate, and particularly when government policy is vehicled by a very concrete form of nationalism, provoking the most resistance in a case like Euskadi where there is a coming together around another very different type of nationalism, opposed to the nationalism of the state.

26. Leon Trotsky "On the Declaration by the Indocheinese Opposition" (18 September 1930), Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31), Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, pp. 30-31:

As the present time the nationalism of the most backward Indocheinese peasants, directed against French imperialism, is a revolutionary element as opposed to the abstract and false cosmopolitanism of the Truong Son and other democratic bourgeois types, or the "internationalism" of the social democrats, who rob or help to rob the Indocheinese peasant.

Michael Löwy makes a similar distinction as far as liberation theology is concerned. In one work, some consider that there is a historic battle between idealism and materialism. The school of Poliakov in particular hasionalized this message in its own particular way. Politically, and I would say even ideologically, this is not always true. It is sufficient to compare for example the activating forces of liberation theology and Stalinism in Latin America.

Among the first there is religious mysticism and thus mystification of human conditions. But because of their service to the poor and underprivileged, and with their consciousness of the causes of poverty and oppression, they have the idea of revolution in millions of people. Among the second there are definitively materialists who accurately criticize idealism and religious metaphysics but whose point of view leads to the most crude "stagism," to the development of strategies on a so-called objective basis, which are in fact simply stale collaboration, which will lead to unexplained failures and frustration.

27. Herri Bataunesa is a radical left nationalist organization, ideologically close to ETA.

28. The quotations from Roodolfsy in this chapter are from op cit., p.183-5.
The struggle for the hegemony of the working class in the national question. It should rid itself of the currently hegemonic revolutionary nationalism, without dismissing the possibility of a deeper alliance.

Trotsky understood this problem when he described in these terms the possible evolution of the consciousness of the Irish working class, after the Easter Rising:

The young working class of Ireland, formed as it was in an atmosphere of national rebellion, and coming into conflict with the agrarially narrow and imperially arrogant state-ministers of Britain, but naturally wounded between nationalism and syndicalism, and it is always ready in large to connect these two conceptions together in its revolutionary consciousness.30

This type of question is posed in the specific cases of oppressed nations within which there is an already politically defined, independent, proletariat, which therefore defines its own specific strategy in the role of the national question. It is also the case of the situation where there are communist and left nationalists involved in strategic alliances to overthrow the common enemy.

The outcome of the 1916 Rising was not positive for Irish Marxism, because the defeat of the Easter Rising meant the annihilation of the workers' vanguard, thus interrupting the definition of a national strategy, whereas the left national Marxism grew from this moment, in reaction to the events. We should however make it clear that, thanks to this experience, Irish nationalism experienced a deepgoing adaptation to the tasks of national liberation, especially refined in terms of the possible evolution of the consciousness of the group itself, depends on how strongly it is formed.31

In reality, Connolly did not have any electoral alternative available. When the moment came he had to choose the insurrection, knowing that it would have terrible consequences for them. This is an experience to take into account.32

It seems interesting to now look at the thinking of Otto Bauer on the combination of the national and international dimensions in the workers' movement. For him:

International socialism must on the contrary see these national differences in methods of struggle and ideology within it as the result of its external and internal growth. It should learn to start from this national plurality, which develops within the international, to teach its nationally different combat troops, despite the national particularities of their methods of action and of the intellectual development of their theory, to coordinate their efforts to reach common goals. This is a perfectly common struggle. The state of the International must be, not to lay down the national specificities but the strategy, within national, diversity and international unity.33

To sum up, it appears that the strategy for building really internationalist revolutionary workers' parties cannot be anything other than the national revolutionary strategy. We have to forge a dual identity, or a combined identity, integrating the national and international dimensions, in such a way as to develop an orientation adapted to the tasks of national liberation and of social revolution against the bourgeois state.

This is the same conviction which guided Trotsky in his struggle against "the theory of socialism in one country", defended by Stalin to justify the bureaucratic deformation of Soviet society, and the transformation of communist organizations throughout the world into faithful servants of the leading party of the USSR.

It is also this conviction that we find in Lenin, when he said that Russian society was the weakest link in the imperialist world chain.

For classical Marxism, the general analytical framework has however not always prevented distrust or disbelief in relation to national struggles or processes of national-building which were in conflict with the big states which were supposed to represent the attributes of progress, of culture and have the capacity to create powerful industrial-working-class concentrations. The current hits of this latter point of view today consider necessary and positive the continuation of the Spanish and British states; their continuation as they are, at the cost of some reforms and adjustments which do not change anything essential. They assert that they offer a suitable framework for building socialism. And that they should be defended from the fragmenting effects of peripheral nationalism, considered as a historical anomaly, an invention or turning backwards of the wheels of history.

In my opinion, the existence of such "peripheral" movements is a good thing. They challenge empires, or what remains of them, whose only virtue is to maintain centralized bodies already rendered out of date by history, at the cost of much misery. Only a rupture in these bodies, or a drastic change in their political, ideological and economic basis, can make possible unions adapted to the constructive and liberating effect which socialism requires.

We should however note that, for the founders of Marxism, this type of viewpoint was changed by experience. The observation in the analysis of the Irish phenomenon (while Poland was considered a nation with revolutionary virtues because of its opposition to Russian Tsarism, the "gentrification of Europe") still applies now.

Lenin used this formulation many times when he incorporated the struggle for the right to self-determination of the peoples into international strategy. In his 1914 policy with Rosa Luxemburg he looked back explicitly at the evolution of Marx's position on Ireland.

All Lenin's argumentation tend to show that nothing holds back the unity of the class so much as injustices in the national terrain and:

References:
32. The Easter Rising against English rule started on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916. It was finally defeated by the British forces on April 29. Many died in the fighting, and still more in the repression which followed. Irish leaders, including James Connolly, were shot between 3rd and 12th May.
33. Otto Bauer op cit.
34. Any revolutionary strategy, in the existing conditions in Euskadi, means a different strategy from the standard strategy of the Spanish socialists (PSOE).
35. Pierre Ville, Historia de España.
Do the workers have a country?

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The question is in fact one of the fields in which Lenin advanced a position that has not been developed by other leaders. The question is: "Do the workers have a country?"

37. For example, he quotes this letter of Marx of 20 December 1860 which explains clearly his change of analysis on the Irish question:

"For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working-class solidarity... I have now concluded that it is impossible to achieve this by the Irish workers alone..."


39. To quote Michael Lowry once again:

"If you ask me, I think it is in fact one of the fields in which Lenin advanced a position that has not been developed by other leaders. The question is: "Do the workers have a country?"

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unity of workers' organizations regardless of their national identity, and whether in the defense of the territorial units created by capitalism. We think that the only principle should be the defense of self-determination, and not the concrete formula for the exercise of this right in the same way for all peoples and should be made on the basis of different factors. And these factors are taken into account by revolutionaries in the concrete formula they put forward for the application of the right to self-determination.

What is the basis for the defense of the right to self-determination, that is to say to full sovereignty, to being exercised in one way or another: independence or free union? For Lenin, politics predominates in this domain over other considerations concerning national existence, such as economy, culture, language, etc.

The right to self-determination is the right to have sovereign institutions and not to accept that certain people enjoy all these rights, and that others are deprived of them. This point of view has certain limitations, which can feed restrictive conceptions of the nation. But it also presents big advantages for the revolutionary struggle. It centres the struggle precisely where class contradictions are sharpened, and therefore it means the overcoming of all forms of oppression. This is what made it possible after the Russian Revolution to develop revolutionary strategies in most of the countries subject to national oppression. Also this which made it possible to go beyond deviations of different types which are found in nationalistic or chauvinistic currents. On this question it is useful to come back to certain elements of Isac's polemic against Otto Bauer and Rosa Luxemburg.

Bauer, as a theorist on the national question, considered that the national question, compared to other Marxists who at their time were interested in the question, has the advantage of having a more complete vision of the national phenomenon and the place that it occupies in the development of the world economy (this was mentioned in Chapter 2). But his analysis contained the risk of over-estimating the cultural aspect; his proposal for national cultural autonomy (national extra-territorial citizenship) is quite original but in its defense of the national minorities produced by emigration (for example the right of Andalusian immigrants to maintain their cultural characteristics in Catalonia) it is not. But it also obscures the problem when the question posed is that of belonging to a particular state; that is when it concerns the demand for self-determination.

It is perhaps for this reason that Bauer made a vain attempt to maintain the unity of the Austro-Hungarian empire while Lenin's goal from the beginning was to destroy the Russian empire. His organizational theory was perfectly acceptable to the Jewish workers' organizations who wanted to organize separately, but regardless of the territorial factor. Lenin on the contrary always associated the right to national separation with the

Note on the history of Poland

Under the Tsarist empire, Poland became quite heavily industrialized and a number of insurrectional movements led by the nobility took place (1830-31, 1846, 1863). The mass base of the nobility began to shrink after the abolition of serfdom in 1864, as well as the rise of the national bourgeoisie as the dominant class. Poland became independent again after the First World War, in 1918.

This short historical note explains the interconnection of the revolutionary movements in Poland and in Russia. In "Congress Poland", socialism was divided between a nationalist Polish Socialist Party (PSP) one of whose leaders was the future bonaparte Jozef Pilsudski — and a current opposed to national independence, considered as a utopian and bourgeois slogan (the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, SDPL, was led by Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches).
The realm of abstract principle is always, my dear friend, the last refuge of those who have less their way on this earth.

Leon Trotsky

Trotsky in his "History of the Russian Revolution" and Ernest Mandel in his texts on the Leninist theory of the party, are the most ardent defenders of the conceptions developed by Lenin, those of a centralized party on the territory of a given state. They stand clearly for the defence of self-determination as the political solution to national oppression at a strategic level. They recognize the right to separation, to freedom of choice, whether this is a federal union or a single state. But, for them, all this does not apply to the organization model of communists, the party. This latter should be centralized because this is the only way to adequately confront the enemy, which is increasingly centralized. 44

To illustrate his argument, Trotsky used the example of a sculptor, pointing out that a difference should be made between the instrument that he uses and the material on which he works. He thus brings out the idea that the "instrument" (the party) should not be confused with the "model" (the society for which it is fighting). "For this task, this tool": the party should correspond to the task for which it is created, that is to say to be an appropriate instrument for the plan and strategic project required for the destruction of the enemy power. This has given rise to an organizational culture where even a federal structure guarantees the continuation of a common framework, has been seen as a threat to the unity of the party; and thus to the effectiveness of the revolutionary instrument. From this starting point, the slogan has become "one state, one party", even if the idea of later breaking up this state, and thus the idea of a future independent party for the newly-separated nation, is put forward.

This model showed both its strengths and its weaknesses in the case of the Bolsheviks: to raise it to the level of a principle is more than questionable and could lead to serious mistakes. Some of them were rapidly overtaken by history, like the colonial situations of the "overseas provinces" annexed by imperialist states (or the very particular case of Ireland). There, the communist parties were organized separately from those in the metropolis. Other aspects of the problem were better understood on the basis of the Bolsheviks' own experiences, where the multi-national party did not escape the assimilationist hegemony of the strongest national faction (which in addition corresponded to that which had embodied the national spirit of the overthrown Tsarist empire).

No serious and objective analysis can simply relate the mistakes made to the initial conceptions of the party, given precisely that there were major efforts to correct them — in the same way as it would be wrong to consider there is a continuity between Leninism and later bureaucraticization. We can, in the case mentioned here, content to identify Russellifying degeneration with the idea of a single centralized party. But it is obvious that there are very delicate problems in this field. Problems which can lead us, given concrete reality, to seek different concrete solutions (federalism or even independence, while maintaining strong links).

This is not all. The distinction between "tools" and the "material" they work is not a simple thing when the material (that is to say all the subjective and objective conditions) requires very sophisticated tools to be effective. The national question requires very fine analyses which deals with the symbols of identity them­

self: the language, question, the press, public appearance, etc., factors which are sufficiently important to have a direct effect on the model of the party we are building.

But to what extent depends on concrete reality.
Chapter 7

Capitalist development and national problems in Europe today

Rosa Luxemburg and Ernest Mandel have several times highlighted the unequal and geographically unbalanced character of European capitalism. This is an uneven development that we find at the continental level as well as within each state where the capitalist market is formed. This inequality, in relation to the different speed of development and to the different characteristics of each particular country, provides a material basis for the appearance of national demands of different degrees and intensity, whether in revolt against underdevelopment and economic subjugation which curtail the nation's existence in order to achieve full capitalist development which is blocked by the dominant state.

Different types of nationalist or national emancipation movements have developed in this situation. Some have fought under the banner of equality, as they demanded for themselves what others already had within the existing state. Some declared themselves with great vigour to be separatist, affirming the existence of different nationalities and competition. Others were hesitant or took intermediate positions, in the case of Catalan nationalism under bourgeois leadership has historically vacillated between two aspirations: playing a leading role in the Spanish conflict as Catalans or consolidating the self-government and sovereignty of Catalonia (later acquiring independentist overtones in a petty-bourgeois format — the Republican Left). In contrast, nationalism in Southern Europe, although important, has had a strong pro-independence component, with a marked aspect of national self-protection (which contrasted with the integrationist and Hispanophile attitude of the Basque bourgeoisie).

In the period of late capitalism, since the Second World War, the problem has reappeared, and even where it did not exist in the last century (Scotland, Corinica), it takes many forms: an internal challenge to a national legitimacy which appeared unshakeable; deepening imbalances within the nation states (at a time when their anti-democratic aspects were being strengthened); the juxtaposition of the pressures of the European Common Market with its trend to uniformity in culture; the rise of multinational companies. All these factors today create national problems with varied and complex components.

For the Scottish writer Tom Nairn:

In Western Europe there are two sorts of nationalism distinct: that of under-developed regions (usually agricultural) which have begun to react; and the highly developed industrial economies which consist they are resisted by the already established "nations". This combination of simultaneous processes which are apparently contradictory, produced both a sharpening of the repressive features of the nation states and the internationalization of police, military and economic alliances (like, for example, the Trevi Group). We should therefore say that nationalization does not bypass the existing nation states. It is juxtaposed with them, maintaining the essential of the "state barriers". Contemporary European evolution does not in the least disrupt us from the task of destruction of the bourgeois state. On the contrary, it forces us to confront all these states which are now in alliance by presenting our alternative: a Europe of the working class as the new foundation of a different society. It is precisely in this framework that we reject the "Fortress Europe".


67. The Trevi Group is composed of the Initiative and Justice ministers of the EEC. It is preparing the Community accords of the "security" of "Fortress Europe".

In this framework, stereotyped answers are of very little use if it is a question of dealing with a concrete national question. The famous "rule" established by Stalin, according to which some questions are national and others regional, does not help us at all. Nor does any reasoning by analogy or imitation, considering a priori the "national question" as these which are not in a petty-bourgeois format. In each case, only the concrete analysis of the concrete reality makes it possible for us to avoid the excesses which take us away from a correct standpoint, and the conservation which prevents us from playing the role of a vanguard. The Spanish state is precisely a terrain where there is a range of examples, going from "historic" nations (Catalonia, Euskadi, Galicia) to nations and nationalities of more recent date (Andalucia) to peoples of a strong personality.

68. The current bourgeois states, consistent of their limits, are trying to adapt to the growing internationalism of the market and centralization of capital. They are exacerbating the conflict of national pasts and organizations of all types. The bourgeoisie knows that it cannot do without the nation state because it lacks alternatives, whether in terms of internationalism or national patriotism. The role of the national state is to maintain its unity even when its national state is a new way of justifying the oppression which it is always in conflict within society and which challenges its legitimacy or its present shape. There is in fact a tension—permanent in some zones, intermittent in others—but always present—which nourishes the conviction of large sections of the historic nationalities that they are not Spanish, 69.

69. It is good to maintain the centralization of the state while responding to the pressures of the nationalities by giving a more full form and more less meaningful status of "autonomy".

70. Revolutionary communists called Spain the "prison of the peoples" (by analogy with what Lenin said about Tsarist Russia), because they noted that first the monarchy and later the Republican maintained a striking centralization and practiced a policy of forced assimilation of the nationalities.

Since there have been some superficial changes. The fashionable new theme is "the state of autonomous regions". But, up until now, we have to conclude that none of these changes have removed Spain's character as a "prison of the peoples" and that it is always in conflict within society and which challenges its legitimacy or its present shape. There is in fact a tension—permanent in some zones, intermittent in others—but always present—which nourishes the conviction of large sections of the historic nationalities that they are not Spanish.

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71. Th e dictatorial regime of General Francisco Franco did go into struggle. On the other hand, as far as the national question is concerned, reactions were more complex. Some bourgeois nationalist layers demonstrated more or less total satisfaction (like in Catalonia). But significant sections of the Basque (and, to a lessor extent, Catalan) population took the path of resistance.

In any case, the importance of the national question is obvious today, and is shown in two ways: a) those of the popular layers who resist and fight against the state; b) the use of Spanish nationalism to wage a counter-offensive against these layers on a number of fronts. Thus, "Spanish interests" were used to justify industrial reconversion, entry into NATO, reforming the state apparatus, etc. Spanish nationalism was transformed into the
do not wish it, and thus justify the continuation of their oppression under the national state. The period of transition which followed the death of Franco in fact was a real solace for certain bourgeoisie (b). They did not hold all the cards at the point that the dictatorship entered its death throes and thus they needed time to establish new mechanisms for their rule. On the other hand, this transition provoked a real feeling of frustration among the workers and popular layers of the nationalities, which expressed itself from the fall of Franco. This frustration did not produce a clear, and still less a uniform, political result.

In the case of the working class, confusion and unity predominated (with the exception of certain sections which did go into struggle). On the other hand, as far as the national question is concerned, reactions were more complex. Some bourgeois nationalist layers demonstrated more or less total satisfaction (like in Catalonia). But significant sections of the Basque (and, to a lesser extent, Catalan) population took the path of resistance.

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Chapter 9

Some questions of strategy

As it is not possible to deal with all the programmatic, political and strategic questions, I will simply deal with those which — from my point of view — are decisive, starting with a discussion of the strategic relationship between the international, state and national levels.

The strategic questions: the impact of the international context; working at the state and national levels

The degree of inter-relation and autonomy of these different levels is the subject of permanent discussion (it has been in the past and will be in the future) giving rise to differences which have deeply marked the political profile and the identity of the movements concerned.

All the currents which identify with socialism and national freedom declare themselves “internationalist” and suppose the solidarity of revolutions underway (if they sufficiently far away and do not pose problems in international affairs; even reformists can show themselves ardent “Sandinistas”). They all say they are opposed to blocs and to the arms race (although things get more complicated on this question), opponents of international capitalism (although on this the differences with the reformists are very deep, to the extent that they developed a strategy of class collaboration and defend the “national” interests of the capitalist economy). Some of us highlight the correlation between internationalist practice and its more organic aspect (building the international as an organization), others see a purely national development or some conjunctural formulation of collaboration without thinking that they are abandoning the practical tasks of internationalism.

The international aspect therefore cannot be forgotten. The reason for this is obvious. The internationalization and interpenetration of economies, of politics and even of the dynamic of wars mean that international reality has to be taken into account in one way or another.

It is possible to agree with the radical nationalists on the importance of the national framework in defining a political orientation and challenging the state. But it is not possible to agree on the significance which they give to the theory of the “autonomous framework of the class struggle”. This theory diminishes the need to destroy the bourgeois state because the strategic goal that it sets is to make the existence of this state unbearable for the nationality in question. We should note that this strategy fits well with the variation which proposes negotiations as the solution to a conflict supposedly impossible for the state to sustain.

Nor would I agree with the positions which, while defending the right to self-determination and the need to destroy the existing state, reduce the scope of the national struggle to a simple formal defence of democratic rights and which do not believe that the national question should have repercussions and concrete implications on questions of strategy and of organization.

It seems to me that it is more appropriate to combine the different terrains of action, to maintain the idea of destroying the state (coordinating and unifying as far as possible the political and social forces interested in this goal) while giving the appropriate place and importance to the national level (in particular dynamic, the specificity of its political dimension, etc) through specific strategies and specific national organizational projects.

52. Remember what we have already stated: the term “state” in territorial terms for the Spanish state means the whole country, and not as it is used in the USA, Mexico or Brazil which are composed of a federation of states or the states of Texas, the state of Montana, the state of Rio do Janeiro, etc.

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To sum up, rather than a homogeneous and centralist vision of the revolutionary project, we have to develop an open and differentiated or, if we prefer, combined point of view. This should help us to coordinate and unite a complex strategy which takes us into account and to bring out what is autonomous and specific in each national reality. This is the only way for us to develop a strategy which simultaneously takes into account the oppressed nation as an oppressed nation is expressed in a nationalist perspective and the confrontation with the "national" state of the centralist bourgeoisie.

We defend this standpoint on the basis of a multilateral vision of our recent history (how struggles developed, the political process, etc) and a more developed idea of what is the Spanish state. Let us deal with these two aspects.

As far as the lessons of history are concerned, the Civil War and the last few years of Francoism confirm for us to what point the isolation of a nation strengthens the central state and weakens the resistance in this region (whether it is working class or national resistance or both). A position which makes a

resulting from national experience).

Without falling into exaggerations or dogmatic hypotheses, we can and should orient ourselves towards a quite complex strategy which takes us into account and to bring out what is autonomous and specific in each national reality. This is the only way for us to develop a strategy which simultaneously takes into account the oppressed nation as an oppressed nation is expressed in a nationalist perspective and the confrontation with the "national" state of the centralist bourgeoisie.

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us to understand these two aspects: the strategic dimension of the slogan of self-determination faced with the state, and its capacity to give substance to the alliance between communists and revolutionary nationalists, whether or not they agree on the specific goal of independence.

Obviously, this implies that there is not a restrictive character to self-determination, that it is not an "anti-independentist antidote", nor that it is a right that is recognized but cannot be exercised. This is counterposed to practices like that of the PCE (Spanish Communist Party). The congress of the Comisiones Obreras (Workers' Commissions, trade unions influenced by the PCE) states that self-determination is not equivalent to the right to independence. It is also counterposed to the position of Euskadiko Ezkerra which views self-determination with popular consultation on limited choices such as the Statute of Guernica. If one believed this party, this statute put self-determination into motion because it was accepted by the majority of the Basque people. This, unfortunately, obscures the fact that it was not the result of a free choice. It was put forward as "take it or leave it", given the limits imposed by the constitution - a constitution which the Basque people had previously rejected and which from the outset excluded any form of independence.

The current meaning of the right to independence

There are different practical and totally legitimate opinions on the centrality of the right to self-determination, in the sense of winning adequate instruments to guarantee full national development. To choose between them we have to be able to weigh the pros and cons, particularly in the point of view of the international relations between the working classes of different nationalities and the building of socialism in its dual dimension, both national and international. This is the context in which we should discuss federalism, communalism, and independence.

Federal relations - voluntarily renouncing sovereign rights to a greater degree - or confederal - with the nation retaining a greater degree of sovereignty - have many undisputed advantages on different fronts: economic or cultural relations, free circulation, mutual defence, etc. to the extent that each nation is related to the others by mutual agreements and solidarity. But there are other points of view, particularly in the sphere of self-determination, centripetal tendencies or a tendency to assimilation by the most dynamic nation, etc.

Independence, on the other hand, does more to preserve national identity - something which is less than banal after years of assimilationist pressure - and to guarantee sovereignty. In return it feeds isolationist tendencies, certain forms of chauvinism and sometimes hemmatic trends in the case of economically strong nations or it limits possibilities in the case of economically weak nations. If all this is taken into account, we understand better why self-determination is the centre of the strategy, the "symbol of identity", particularly from a communist point of view which weighs up and balances out the degree of freedom and solidarity necessary. The rest, which has to do with the question of what is the most appropriate solution, implies concrete choices which should be made on the basis of the actual situation. This does not at all mean being "taciticians" or opportunists, but seeking to develop a socialist strategy in line with the real conditions of a specific country.

From this point of view, I find ridiculous the accusations of "Spanishism" made at one time against those who based a vision of the defence of the sovereignty of the Spanish State on the previous exercise of the right to self-determination. The reason for this is clear. The right of a people to enter into a union is as substantial and inalienable as the right to separation. The two things cannot be dissociated. Moreover, there could be differences in the forms of coexistence. For the same reasons, it is just as unjustified to make the accusation of "petty-bourgeois nationalism" against those who have today changed their position and decided on independence as the goal of their demand for self-determination.61

Today, as in the past, the main option remains that of national liberation and solidarity among nations, from a socialist point of view. What changes in the concrete recipe for reaching this goal? In the role of the change of "recipe" is not at all unimportant and that it must be argued through. This is a significant aspect of our own history. We can try to evaluate the positive and negative aspects which led us at a given moment to defend the initial position, that of a free union. We can do the

61. The revolutionary communist parties are currently in favour of independence of Catalonia and Basque.

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The people defending self-determination without putting forward any more concrete demand. And then we can look at defending independence, for example in the case of Euskadi, and think about different aspects of the problem.

The choice of independence implies a radical challenge, therefore these options also imply a commitment to the viability (posed) to be clearly when they come after years of domination: reduction of sovereignty, centripetal tendencies or a tendency to assimilation by the most dynamic nation, etc.

Independence, on the other hand, does more to preserve national identity - something which is less than banal after years of assimilationist pressure — and to guarantee sovereignty. In return it feeds isolationist tendencies, certain forms of chauvinism and sometimes hemmatic trends in the case of economically strong nations or it limits possibilities in the case of economically weak nations. If all this is taken into account, we understand better why self-determination is the centre of the strategy, the "symbol of identity", particularly from a communist point of view which weighs up and balances out the degree of freedom and solidarity necessary. The rest, which has to do with the question of what is the most appropriate solution, implies concrete choices which should be made on the basis of the actual situation. This does not at all mean being "taciticians" or opportunists, but seeking to develop a socialist strategy in line with the real conditions of a specific country.

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Today, as in the past, the main option remains that of national liberation and solidarity among nations, from a socialist point of view. What changes in the concrete recipe for reaching this goal? In the role of the change of "recipe" is not at all unimportant and that it must be argued through. This is a significant aspect of our own history. We can try to evaluate the positive and negative aspects which led us at a given moment to defend the initial position, that of a free union. We can do the

Finally we also have to clarify what is independence. The precise formulation and the concretization of independence do not always have to take place in a separatist perspective or with a separate national state (while emphasizing that this option should be really taken into account). This will in fact depend to a large extent on the process of institutionalization of Europe: is it going to take into account the existence of nations which cannot be reduced to the states which currently exist or is it going to take shape basing itself on these latter?

Formulates about sovereignty used in the past, if pushed to the extreme, came back in fact to independence, although this was not explicitly demanded. In an interview in the journal Egiña, Ernest Mandel stated that "the right to self-determination is sovereignty without any interference." For example, a formula like e should be considered assembly without state interference, was this not an act of sovereignty? We have reached the conclusion that, although the class point of view is in the last analysis the same for all (socialism), the starting point is conditioned by national existence.

For the workers of the non-oppressed nations, the starting point must be the defence of self-determination, the defence of sovereignty to be recognized for those who have been refused it. I agree with Andreu Nin when he states that in their relations with the oppressed nations the workers should sometimes make the defence of freedom predominate over the defence of unity because, if not, we will not succeed in overcoming the minimum "petty-bourgeois nationalism" prejudice against those who have today changed their position and decided on independence as the goal of their demand for self-determination.61

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José Priante Bikila

Do the workers have a country?

There are a whole series of problems which also arise from the ten years of democracy and five years of left government which succeeded the dictatorship (thus following a long bitter historical experience, which was intervened by the Franco coup and the solidariy given to the Basque people). These last fifteen years, for from seeing an end to national oppression, have seen its institutionalization in "democratic" forms. Once again the root of the problem has been denied, the majority of the Spanish workers have been incited to oppose national demands, particularly those of the Basques (because, for these workers, they were comprehensible once the statute of autonomy was granted).

And a constituent period can be decisive, by inauguring new relations and seeing how different peoples respond to them, whether they choose independence or another type of relationship.62

60. The PCE is the Spanish Communist Party. Euskalherria Ezkerha is a national organization of a social-democratic type.

61. The revolutionary communist parties are currently in favour of independence of Catalonia and Basque.

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Guide to people and organizations

Arama, Sabino: Founder of the PNV. Ideologue of Basque nationalism at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. There was a religious and racist component in his thought, even though he had the merit of giving the first impulse to Basque national demands.

Austro-Marxism: Austrian Marxist current whose representatives include Max Adler, Rudolf Hilferding, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer. Marked by acute nature of the national question in the Austro-Hungarian empire, developed some original, controversial theses on this question. Particularly vigorous movement before the First World War.

Austro-Hungarian empire: Formed in 1867 on the basis of a “compromise” between Austrian and Hungarian states. Ruled by the Hapsburg German-Austrian monarchy. Multi-national linguistic and religious conglomerate. Included parts of northern Italy, the Balkans, Poland, etc. Fell apart in 1918 as a result of the defeat in the First World War and the rise of the nationalist movements.


Bernstein, Edward (1850-1932): Leader of German social-democracy. Executor of Engels’ will. Provided a big controversy on “revisionism” (that is his “revision” in a reformist direction of Marxist thought) with his 1899 book Evolutionary Socialism (Schocken, New York, 1965).

Bund: Jewish General Workers’ League of Poland, Lithuania and Russia. Founded in 1897. Jewish, Marxist and anti-Zionist organization. A component of the RSDLP, it demanded a federalist organizational structure and wanted to be the representative of the Jewish proletariat, independent of any territorial considerations.

Carlists: Traditionalist monarchist movement in Spain which represented the claimant to the throne descended from Charles V. The three Carlist wars marked the 19th century and the fall of the Ancien Regime. One of the main nationalist and anti-Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).


Easter Rising: Rising in Ireland against English colonial rule, 24-29 April 1916.

Engels, Friedrich (1820-1895): Main collaborator of Karl Marx. Made his own contribution to Marxist theory.

ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna): “Euskadi and Freedom”, Basque armed organization, underground independentist organization.

Euskadi: Basque country, in the south in the Spanish state, in the north in the French state.

EE (Euskadiko Ezkerra): Basque Left. National political organization of social-democratic type.


Euskera: Basque language.

Euskaldun: One who speaks Euskera.

Franco y Bahamonde, Francisco (1890-1975): Main leader of the Spanish colonial army, ally of German Nazism and Italian fascism, took power after the defeat of Republican forces during the Civil War (1936-1939). Established a dictatorial regime which lasted until his death.

French Revolution: unless otherwise stated this is the “great” bourgeois revolution of 1789.

Force: System of communal rights in the Basque country which still existed at the beginning of the 19th century, ensuring elements of autonomy and local democracy to which the population remains attached.

Fourth International: Revolutionary communist anti-revisionist and anti-Stalinist organization. Founded in 1938 with the participation of Leon Trotsky.

Gudari: Basque soldier.

HB (Herri Batasuna): “Popular unity”. Basque organization, radical nationalist left, ideologically close to ETA.

IA (Izquierda Alternativa): Left Alternative. Revolutionary organization in the Spanish state created from the 1991 fusion between the LCR and MC.

Jacobin: The strongest of the radical currents in French Revolution which brought down the Ancien Regime in 1789. The term “Jacobin” is often used to designate an orientation which aims to build a centralized nation state or “centralist” political tendencies.


Kata Party: (Kata Parti): Connected with the German Social-Democratic Party. A component of the RSDLP.

LCR (Liga comunista revolucionaria): Revolutionary Communist League. Former section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state. Founded in 1971, under the Franco dictatorship. In 1973 it fused with a wing of the...
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Basque organization ETA (from which the LKI origina-

ned). Fused in 1991 with the MC and gave rise to a new

organization: Izquierda Alternativa (Left Alternative).

LKI (Liga Komunistu Frantziako): Revolutionary Communist

League. Former section of the Fourth International in

Baskind. Founded in 1970, from a current in ETA called ETA

B. Developed from the majority of the Sixth Assem-

bly of ETA. Sister organization in the Basque country of

the LCR of the Spanish state. Fused in 1990 with the

EMK.

Lenin, Vladimir (1870-1924): One of the main represen-
tatives of the second generation of Russian Marxists. Rep-
resentative of "Bolshevism," which became "Leninism,

within the RSDLP. The best-known of the leaders of the

1917 Russian Revolution and the CP.

Luxemburg, Rosa (1870-1919): Polish revolutionary and

Marxist theorist. Played an important role in the struggle

within German social-democracy. Known for her studies

of imperialism. Critical of Lenin on the national question

and on the party. Internationaleist during the First World

War. Assassinated after the "Sparks" uprising.

Marr, Karl (1878-1883): Main founder of... Marxism. We all

owe him a lot.

Moder: Vladimir: Born in 1879. Leader of the Jewish

Marxist Bund. Socialist reformist. Socialist in

Euskadi. Formed in 1917. Became Stalinist and then, in the

1930s, "Eurocommunist.

PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español: Spanish Workers'

Socialist Party Founded in 1879. Currently in govern-

ment. Social-democratic reformist.

Ramsay, Karl (1879-1935): A representative of Aus-

tro-Marxism. Austrian social-democratic leader. Lawyer,

wrote on the national question. Became a "social-patriot

in 1914. Was then twice Chancellor of the country.

Ribas, Prat de la: Theorist of Catalan bourgeois nationalism
during the first half of the 20th century.

Robespierre: One of the main representatives of the French

Revolution.

Rosenblum, Roman (1938-1967): Joined the revolutionary

movement in 1915. Leader of the CP in western Ukraine.

Linked to the Polish section of the Fourth International.

Has produced important historical studies; as well as on

the national question and on Marx's Capital.

RSDLP: Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. Founded

in 1898. Included the main Marxist currents in Russia.

Political and organizational divided for a long time.

The two main wings of the RSDLP were known as

"Bolshevik" (majority, included Lenin) and Menshevik

(minority). The Communist Party was formed in its ranks

in 1917.

Russian empire: Extended from eastern Europe to the

border of Turkey and China and to the far eastern limits of

Siberia. Russia ruled over very different ethnic groups and

nationalities, including Muslims in the south and in the

west, the peoples of eastern Europe whose industrial

development was sometimes quite advanced (Poland for

example).

Social-democracy: Today this term means the current to

which the reformist Socialist Parties belong. But before the

First World War (1914-1918), it meant the whole

Marxist current including the most revolutionary (i.e.

Lenin was then a Russian social-democrat).

Statin, Joseph (1879-1953): Georgian revolutionary cadre

belonging to the Leninist wing of the RSDLP. After Lenin's

death took the leadership of the party and the state which

he kept until his death. Purged all his opponents and per-

sonalized the bureaucratic counter-revolution.

Strouzer, Joseph (1870-1935): Far left social-democratic

activist in Austria. Critical of Otto Bauer on the national

question. Internationaleist in 1914. Joined the Austrian CP

in 1919. Worked in Moscow from 1923 to 1928. Ex-

pelled from the CP after his return to Austria, accused of

"Trotskyism."

Trevi Group: "Trevi" is formed from the words "terrorism,

radicalism, extremism, violence, international." Formed by

the Interior and justice ministers of the EEC countries.

Exists since 1975. For collaboration between the differ-

ent police and information services to har-

ness the Western system and criteria for access to po-

litical asylum.

Trotsky, Leon (1879-1940): Independent personality within

the RSDLP. Joined Lenin's current in 1917. Became one

of the main leaders of the Russian Revolution. Opposed

Stalin after Lenin's death. Led the Left Opposition.

Deported, exiled. Founded the Fourth International in 1938.

Assassinated by Stalinist agents.

Zamalkarregai: Basque military leader in the Civil War of

the mid-19th century.
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Do the workers have a country?
International and the national question
José Iriarte “Bikila”

Presentation
Introduction
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Chapter 2. The nation in the history of capitalism and socialism
Chapter 3. Nationalism and internationalism, the domain of ideology
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Chapter 5. Questions of strategy, the right to self-determination and proletarian internationalism
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Appendices
Names of people and organizations
A guide to further reading

Marxism has contributed a lot to the understanding of the national question: its class dynamics, its relationship to internationalism, its political importance and the importance of the slogan of self-determination. Lenin’s role in this was particularly significant. But, the authors thinks, we should also take into account other theorists like the AUStro-Marxist Otto Bauer, or the Irish socialist and patriot, James Connolly. Above all, it is important to relook at a number of questions in the light of contemporary experience: In what circumstances can there be a fusion of Marxist and nationalist traditions? What is the particularity of an oppressed nation in imperialist Europe? Should the borders of a revolutionary party necessarily be the same as those of the existing states? What are the main features of a socialist vision of the national question and what does this bring out of the concrete analysis of concrete situations? What is the present significance of independence?

José Iriarte “Bikila” was born in 1945. His thinking on the national question has drawn on his personal involvement and intimate knowledge of the struggle of the Basque people. The interconnection between the fight for socialism and national liberation has shaped his whole history of political activism. In 1964 he joined the ranks of the independentist organization ETA. In 1973 he participated in the fusion between the current ETA VI and the Revolutionary Communist League, section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state. In 1991 he participated in the fusion between the LKI (sister organization of the LCR in Euskadi) and the EMK (Communist Movement), founding an independent revolutionary organization in the Basque country.