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MARXISM, NATIONALISM AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION AFTER STALINISM

Hillel Ticktin

Part I: The Problem of Nationalism

Introduction

Nationalism has been crucial in preventing the victory of socialism. It broke up the socialist movement during the First World War. The Stalinist counter-revolution was itself nationalist. Formerly Stalinism and social democracy were the main barriers to working class victory. Now that social democracy and Stalinism is finished, only nationalism remains.

There have been many discussions of nationalism, both from a Marxist perspective as well as from right wing and often academic viewpoints.¹ The

¹ Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith are perhaps among the best known. Anthony Smith defines nationalism thus: "By 'nationalism' I shall mean an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity of a human population, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation.' A 'nation' in turn I shall define as a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members." Smith, A. (1991) *National Identity*, UK: Penguin/Harmondsworth. Chp 1, 4.

This definition suggests that the concept of the nation refers to a particular kind of social and cultural community, a territorial community of shared history and culture. This is the assumption of nationalists themselves, for whom the world is composed of unique historic culture-communities, to which their citizens owe a primary loyalty and which are the sole source of political power and inner freedom. This definition of a nation is little different from that J.V.Stalin.

Ernest Gellner defined a nation somewhat more dynamically: "What really matters is their incorporation and their mastery of high culture; I mean a literate codified culture which permits context-free communication. Their membership of such a community and their acceptability in it, that is a nation. It is a consequence of the mobility and anonymity of modern society and of the semantic non-physical nature of work that mastery of such culture and acceptability in it is the most valuable possession of all other privileges and participation. This automatically makes him into a nationalist because if there is non-congruence between the culture in

Marxism, Nationalism

latter is distinguished by assumptions that nationalism is an automatic, naturally occurring emotion and ideology in modern societies. The political economy of nationalism is either avoided or abstracted away. Stalinism was very similar and as it was itself nationalist, that is to be expected.² I am arguing that nationalism can only be understood in a class context and that the ideology itself is effectively imposed from above, even if it comes to be more widely accepted. Non-Marxist theorists turn social categories into categories of nature. In this case, they see nationalism or racism arising spontaneously out of differences between individuals or groups of individuals. Sometimes they add a temporal frame, as in the case of Gellner, which they explain, but they ignore the political economy and hence the role of the ruling class and of the capitalist system itself.

Nationalism is the doctrine that upholds loyalty to a particular nation above universal respect and support for humanity in general. While some nationalists may claim a degree of internationalism they too support their own nation when there is a conflict with another nation, whatever the circumstances. Nationalism stands radically opposed to international working class solidarity, where the individual places loyalty to the class above that of his own national origins. Nationalism is necessarily the opposite of universalism and internationalism and of course cosmopolitanism.

Where a country or a society is oppressed and/or exploited by the ruling class of another country or society, the demand for independence from the dominant power is not in itself nationalist, although it might become nationalist. In other words, the population might see itself as oppressed by the ruling class in the dominant nation and demand the removal of the forms of oppression and exploitation without seeing that dominant nation as a

which he is operating and the surrounding economic, political and educational bureaucracies, then he is in trouble.”

Both these quotes can be found at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/gellner/Warwick.html> and <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collecatations/gellner/Warwick2.html>

² “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in common culture.” 1913. Stalin, J.V. (1954) *Marxism and the National Question*, in *Works*, vol II; Moscow: FLPH; p308-381.

whole as the enemy. It is only in instances where there is no class differentiation that we can speak of nationalism. In what follows, I introduce the subject and then try to understand and theorise the evolution of nationalism, emphasizing the 20th century and the present time.

This essay tackles several contemporary issues on nationalism: first, the failure of national liberatory movements; second, the apparent decline of nationalism in many countries at the same time as its apparent bitter genocidal re-appearance in others; third, its replacement by a multitude of substitutes such as fundamentalist religion and anti-immigrant paranoia; and fourth, the rise of what I call disintegrative nationalism, as in Scotland, the Basque country and Eastern Europe.

This essay argues that all these phenomena can be most profoundly understood within a framework that describes capitalism as in decline and disintegration. Socialists have long regarded nationalism as their primary enemy and this perception is correct at the present time, but in a very particular form, one in which modern transformed nationalism is far weaker, even if lethal in its results.

Patriotism and Nationalism

Some people, like Orwell, make a distinction between nationalism and patriotism, the latter of which they see as support for one's culture and way of life.³ Istvan Meszaros⁴ also makes a distinction between patriotism and

³ "By 'nationalism' I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad.' But secondly – and this is much more important – I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests. Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. Both words are normally used in so vague a way that any definition is liable to be challenged, but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different and even opposing ideas are involved. By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality." Orwell, G. (May 1945) Notes on Nationalism. p1. This can be found at <http://www.resort.com/~prime8/Orwell/nationalism.html>

Marxism, Nationalism

nationalism. They prefer to see patriotism as an individual love for geography and aspects of culture. It is individual in that it does not presume a need to enforce a collective will on a particular people of whom the patriot is enamoured or on other peoples. Yet, in its common usage, patriotism is usually seen as love for one's country that goes so far it puts one's country before other countries and other goals.

No one can dispute the fact that human beings are programmed from an early age to love their homeland unless, of course, it is inimical to their interests. As a result, the countryside, the culture and the language with which we are brought up is part of us. So is our history, even if most of us do not know it. Love of these things is inevitable and universal, but it is not the same thing as nationalism which is a collective socio-political act, attempting to absorb all classes and ethnic groups within the nation; whereas love of culture is, in the first instance, a relationship between an individual and the culture (even if that culture is itself social, in which the individual does not necessarily place his own culture above that of any other, and which therefore differs according to the individual). There is no presumption that one's countryside is necessarily better than another's, or that the culture of another is inferior or requires defeat and/or removal. A society in defence of a language or culture that is under threat is one thing, but it is another to defend the history and actions of a nation simply because they are your people, as a patriot might.⁵

In other words, it is hard to see any difference between patriotism and nationalism. But the nationalism of the imperialist has imposed a foreign culture, a foreign language and a false history on the conquered nation and that does mean that the oppressed group has to fight for its own culture, its own language and the restoration of its history. Usually it is this shared

⁴ "International solidarity is a positive potential of capital's structural antagonist only. It is in harmony with patriotism which is habitually confused in theoretical discussions even the left with bourgeois chauvinism." Mészáros, I. (2004) National and International aspects of Emancipation. Iran Bulletin-Middle East Forum. <http://www.iran-bulletin.org>

⁵ In his introduction to Nationalism, for instance, Hans Kohn argues in some detail that nationalism uses the natural proclivity of mankind to embrace its own environment. He then points out the historical and social basis of nationalism. Kohn, H. (1967) Nationalism. NY: Macmillan.

form that nationalists use to unite the otherwise divided nation and it is this which gives rise to a defence of patriotism.

However, it is wrong to think that Orwell's definition of patriotism is not nationalist: "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life." While one can imagine a society of lovers of Ben Lomond or Mount Everest who are wholly non-political, one cannot imagine devotees of a Fascist way of life, of tribalism, of the market, etc, being non-political. In fact, those who make the distinction between patriotism and nationalism probably have in mind an idyllic countryside village without classes or ethnic differences. The concept is either a kind of reactionary utopia or in the best case a defence of aspects of a pre-industrial way of life largely destroyed by an invading imperialism.

Many European nations have an inglorious history because their ruling class has oppressed, exploited and killed other peoples. The history of the working class and peasantry in these circumstances is different from the national history. The language and culture of such nations usually reflects both the imperial history and the class history.

Under capitalism there is necessarily a division between rich and poor, a ruling class and the ruled, the class of capital and the class of wage-workers, and any attempt at uniting them must involve the acceptance of exploitation and oppression, which the majority seldom approves. Instead it is glossed over with much talk of the shared culture and the importance of language. There is no question of the importance of these aspects of human existence but they are not sufficient to ignore the real antagonism in the society. Anyone who, therefore, combines the working class with the ruling class, calling on capitalist and worker 'to unite and fight' is not a Marxist or, for that matter, a socialist in its original sense. Nationalism, therefore, is necessarily the enemy of the working class, Marxism and the socialist movement. It is here that the distinction between patriotism and nationalism falls down because the patriot necessarily embraces his entire country and its culture.

Marxism, Nationalism

Most early Marxists,⁶ following Lenin and Trotsky, rejected the view that the working class had anything but a slave culture. The task of the working class was to overthrow capitalism and in so doing abolish itself as a class. Thus there was no working class culture to preserve. There was a shared history of struggle against oppression, the landscape, and the literature of the country; but the experience of the poor living in shacks in the countryside was very different from that of the rich living in the most beautiful parts of the country. In other words, there cannot be a special working class patriotic culture.

It is, therefore, very difficult to talk of a difference between a patriot and a nationalist because both imply a unity of capitalist and worker.

History of the National Question

Marxists, historically, raised the question of the suppression of the rights, and culture of a superexploited working class and peasantry under the title of The National Question. The issue was debated before the First World War and there were three different tendencies among Marxists. The first was that of the so-called Austro-Marxists who argued that the solution lay in national autonomy. The second was that of Lenin who argued for the rights of nations to self-determination to the point of secession. The third was that of Luxemburg, and others, who argued that the national question could not be solved under capitalism but would be dealt with under socialism.

Because of the victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917, the Leninist solution was officially adopted by the left. Luxemburg's position is usually derided or counterposed to her position on Turkey, where she took a more nuanced viewpoint, while the Austro-Marxist position is often regarded in the same light as the betrayal of social democracy, of which they were a part.

⁶ Bogdanov, as the founder of Proletcult in the early 1920s in the USSR, took the view that the working class had its own separate culture under capitalism which had to be preserved and developed. This view became widespread in the labour movement as Stalin adopted it as a means of denigrating intellectuals and consequently all dissident thought. The worship of the image of the mighty labourer was a feature of both social democracy and Stalinism in the mid-late 20th century.

Lenin's position was an adaptation to political necessity, which Lenin himself did not follow. In my view, Luxemburg has been proved partly right in that the national question has not been solved under capitalism. But she ignored the real demand of the colonial or subject countries for independence from an imperial master, as well as the need for the left to take the lead in that struggle (while also demanding and working towards the overthrow of capitalism). The Austro-Marxist position has turned out to be the reality because an interdependent capitalist world, with a world division of labour, allows only limited autonomy to any but the biggest countries.

However, one cannot simply introduce these positions without providing their context, because each was specific to its context. Lenin had in mind the demand for liberation from a colonial power, the Austro-Marxists were dealing with a multi-national imperial country, while Luxemburg was faced with growing Polish nationalism which she rejected. Any Marxist has to argue that the subordinate country or national group has the right to independence, in so far as that is possible in an interdependent world. The problem is that under capitalism there is an international division of labour with a hierarchy in which the most developed capitalist country or countries extract a form of tribute from the rest both through the medium of finance capital and through its various industrial companies. A less developed country has to accept the domination of the language and culture of that superordinate country as well as its place in the world economy. It has only very limited room for manoeuvre. The simple demand for the right of nations to self-determination cannot be fulfilled under capitalism except in a purely formal sense. That formal sense, of course, has its own validity but it has been far more restricted than the promises of the nationalist parties before taking power.

It is clear that nationalism's formulation simultaneously by President Wilson of the United States and Lenin was no coincidence. The United States needed to produce a formula which would counteract the demands of the colonial peoples but also of the various oppressed nationalities in Europe, including those in the former Russian Empire. Lenin, in turn, could not formulate the full socialist demand in a world which had not yet overthrown capitalism. He, therefore, embraced the same verbiage as a

Marxism, Nationalism

transitional demand. For both it was a pragmatic answer to the situation of the time. In fact, it was nominally accepted by all sides until the end of the Soviet Union, when the United States felt free to abandon the concept.

The Insoluble Problem of the National Question under Capitalism

The Third International debated the question before it was Stalinised after 1923. When one looks at the debates it is clear that the Communist Parties were torn between demanding class warfare in the colonial countries and support for national independence. The debates around the question, most notably those around M. N. Roy and India, expressed the difficulty of the question, rather than a principled divergence in ideas.

The problem was clear: if the left fought the emerging elite or bourgeoisie in these countries at the same time as attempting to overthrow the colonial power, it might be too weak to achieve anything; on the other hand, if they had a truce with the local bourgeoisie while both fought, independently, against the colonial power, they could ultimately defeat that power. However, the very idea of such a truce was fraught with so much difficulty that it was hard to achieve. After all, why would such an emerging bourgeoisie want to have a truce with a future enemy, who might be so strengthened by the struggle against the imperial overlord that the national bourgeoisie could either be overthrown or greatly weakened? Later events, such as those in China, showed just what that national bourgeoisie did think when they turned on their ostensible allies, the Communist Party of China in Shanghai, and wiped them out in 1927.

Then, too, there was the question of the USSR itself in its relations with its, at least nominally independent, neighbours such as Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and China. The attitude adopted was more pragmatic than principled in that, in every case, a deal was patched up. The effect of the Russian Revolution was undoubtedly one in which the left in those countries was galvanised but in each case the Soviet Union came to terms with the bourgeois regimes on its borders. The problem was that the left was too weak to succeed in those countries in the early twenties, while the local elite took the opportunity to strengthen its position against the imperialist overlords and the semi-feudal remnants.

Lenin's solution to the problem, which arose both inside and outside the former Russian Empire, was to argue that the *state qua state* would stand for the right of nations to self-determination to the point of secession, but the Communist Party would stand for socialist unity. However, this was little more than a fig leaf, as the Communist Party was the government of the USSR and hence played the dominant role in the state. Many have tried to square Lenin's circle, but it cannot be done. There was a real conflict between the interests of the USSR as a secure entity and the needs of socialism. Lenin, as a genuine socialist, generally put emphasis on socialism and ignored the right of nations to self-determination when required, as in the case of the Ukraine which was effectively conquered, and when he marched through Poland to get to the German border.

The usual justification for his position is couched in terms of the cession of the Finnish right to self-determination in 1919. In fact, however, this was no more than recognition of reality because the Bolsheviks were far too weak to go the aid of their Finnish comrades. In any case, the right had sufficient assistance from foreign countries to fully justify intervention. Lenin, as always, kept his eye on the main goal, the victory of a socialist world system, and maintained a flexible and sometimes pragmatic political position in its interests. Hence he regarded the USSR as a base for world revolution which in its turn had to be protected and if the governments of the surrounding countries were prepared to come to terms with it, so much the better, even though it was deleterious to the class struggle in their own countries. Clearly he saw these issues as short termist, awaiting a not long delayed European revolution.

However, there is another dimension to this discussion. The nationalist opposition had to attract more than the existing and potential middle class in order to have sufficient support to oppose the imperial rulers. That meant that they had to have a programme which appealed to both the peasantry and the working class. In practice, that usually meant that there was a nationalist left in most of these parties and that many of the leaders of such parties adopted an ambiguous position to the left and the working class both internally and externally. This was the case with Gandhi, Nehru, and Sun Yat-sen. It was, therefore, often an easy step for communist parties to come to some kind of accommodation with the local nationalist parties. It was,

Marxism, Nationalism

however, one thing to come to an agreement to maintain an anti-imperialist front and another thing for the communist parties to trust such nationalist parties. While the issue did not arise under Lenin, it did under Stalin with disastrous results. The point, however, is the ambiguity in the position taken by the Comintern and its local parties in the early years of the 1920s.

The issue to a large degree depended on the attitude to the peasantry of these countries. The Communists, in general, orientated themselves to the poorer peasantry, who had small plots of land or were landless labourers. But this usually meant that they had minority support among the peasantry, as in the Russian empire itself. This was inevitable as the middle and upper peasantry, by and large, wanted bigger plots for themselves and a more advantageous situation in the market. In other words, their demands stood in direct opposition to those put forward by the representatives of the working class who wanted the abolition of the market and its replacement by planning. This meant that the nationalists could get more support on the countryside than the communist parties which tended to be smaller parties, although sometimes big in particular towns or regions. In this respect, Lenin's formulation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry did not help. He had put the slogan forward before 1914 as a way of attracting the peasantry towards the Bolsheviks but it was a theoretical nonsense and a pragmatic failure.

The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, put forward by Marx, and adopted by all Marxists, amounted to the statement that in a transition period the working class would take measures to abolish all classes and so gradually abolish the market itself. But such measures would necessarily conflict with the bulk of the peasantry who remained inside the market without any understanding of the alternative. This was shown graphically when the Constituent Assembly was elected after the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks only obtained the votes of some 14 per cent of the peasantry. The socialist revolution might ultimately be in the interests of the peasantry and indeed of all mankind but no-one could expect the peasant to give up his private plot, his cattle and implements to what appeared as a utopian entity even if it was described as a more just and efficient collective.

In Marxist terms, the backwardness and isolation of the peasantry meant that their demands were closer to those who demanded the removal of the landlords and particularly the foreign landlords, while maintaining the market. As a result, the peasantry usually went along with the nationalist movements, even though the latter often supported the landlords.

Lenin's slogan was not in fact used in the pre-Stalin post-revolutionary period as it was unusable and theoretically dubious, even if understandable. Lenin had put it forward as a means of attracting the peasantry but it could not work. As a result, the left in the colonial countries concentrated on building up working class support. On that basis it tried to get support in the peasantry, vying with the nationalist movements, with varying success. What might have happened after 1923 is unknown as Stalin took power at that point and subordinated the world communist movement to Soviet foreign policy.

Underlying much of the discussion was the role of imperialism in providing a material cushion for the proletariat in the developed countries. In theory, once that had gone, the proletariat in the developed countries would be more inclined to be militant in their demand for socialism. Hence, non-socialist independence movements had an apparently progressive role both internally and in the world. Not everyone agreed with this analysis, since it was obvious that the unrest in Europe towards the end of the First World War and immediately after had often been led by the very stratum that Lenin considered the aristocracy of labour, the skilled workers. At the same time, the Russian Revolution itself had taken place in an underdeveloped country colonised in economic if not political terms. There the Revolution had been conducted under the slogan of permanent revolution or the uninterrupted revolution, depending on whether you prefer Trotsky's or Lenin's verbiage.

If one extended the principles of the Russian Revolution to the Third World, then the logic was that every revolution should take the demand of independence and turn it into a demand for independence in a socialist world. How then could any deal be made with the local bourgeoisie? The very most that could be done was to agree an occasional truce when both

Marxism, Nationalism

sides were under stress; but it was clear that as soon as one side was dominant the other would be crushed.

The point of this discussion is to point out the ambiguities and difficulties inherent in the relations between the left/communist parties and the nationalist parties in the Third World in the period of Lenin and Trotsky, when the communist parties were themselves anti-nationalist and rejected the slogan of socialism in one country.

Stalinism

When Stalin took power he inherited a situation which was easy to manipulate. He had no interest in fostering revolution as any other revolution would have been critical of the rising elite in the USSR itself. He, therefore, favoured deals with nationalist parties, which often led to the left being marginalised or wiped out, as in the case of China referred to above.

The new Comintern programme of 1928, written by Bukharin, explicitly endorsed a two stage perspective with nationalism as its first stage. Later that was followed in 1935 with the endorsement of the Popular Front strategy that, in essence, embraced all classes and parties in opposition to Fascism and later to whatever enemy was declared such. In the post-war period the Stalinists maintained an anti-monopoly alliance against big capital who, in some guise or other, was the new enemy. The concept of national liberation, therefore, was pushed to the fore and acquired this new all-inclusive meaning of all classes fighting to eject the imperial power as the first of many stages towards socialism.

Stalinist foreign policy was based on maintaining equilibrium with the United States during the Cold War. As the USSR was far weaker than the USA in the immediate post-war period, it took a more militant international line, hoping to weaken the major capitalist powers. When the USSR itself had acquired nuclear weapons, consolidated its borders behind subordinated countries, and built up a modern and massive military machine it supported nationalist movements in the underdeveloped countries in order to break up the European empires.

In some cases, as in China, Viet-nam and Yugoslavia the local communist parties rejected their tutelage, but only because they had largely become nationalist parties. As the USSR was declining and disintegrating its policy veered from adventurism in going into Afghanistan, supporting the Cuban troops' entry into Angola, and doing direct deals with the United States as détente showed during the period of Nixon and later under Gorbachev.

The Soviet Union and its associated communist parties built up a whole doctrine of the stages of national liberation in order to justify their actions, which were always pragmatic decisions based on their immediate interests. This is discussed further below.

However, it is clear that their doctrine had little in common with that of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party. Whatever the ambiguities of Lenin, he stood four square behind a policy of taking power in order to further the introduction of socialism in the world. While he was ambiguous on stages it is clear that his dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, however dubious a concept it may be, involved the overthrow of capitalism as part of a world revolution. Trotsky, of course, was clearer in that he argued that the national question was part of the bourgeois revolution, which itself could not be consummated by the bourgeoisie but only by the proletariat. Thus only a socialist revolution would solve the national question. Unlike Luxemburg he recognised the immediate importance of the national question.

In other words, much of the left has supported a concept, that of national liberation, which is not of the left and which the founders of Marxism would have certainly rejected.

Nationalism's Negative Achievements: Imperialism and National Liberation

The empirical reality

The nationalism of the Great Powers led to two appalling world wars, in which over 100 million people died. Both sides in the First World War claimed that their way of life was superior to that of the other side. It was patent nonsense. Both sides were undemocratic in their own ways: the

Marxism, Nationalism

majority of the population in the UK, for instance, did not have the vote; and the Kaiser had an inordinate constitutional role in Germany.

The Nazis were indeed German nationalists. Some may argue that moderate nationalism is acceptable but the Nazis went too far. In some sense that is patently true but one can ask whether they did not take nationalism to its logical conclusion. After all, there is no obvious answer as to the extent of the nation. Does it include everyone in a particular geographical area or does it exclude people of a certain religion, colour or other background?

All modern nations have conquered various ethnic groups or proto-nations within their borders at some point in their history. If it does include all groups then what happens when the nation goes to war with another nation when part of the first nation derives from the second nation? The Japanese were interned in the USA, the Germans in the UK, and various ethnic groups were victimised in the USSR under Stalin. So the actions of the Nazis were not unprecedented especially when one considers that their victimisation of the Jews was effectively supported by other western nations when they refused to open their doors to those same Jews in order to save them. Taking this case further we can see at the present time that Jewish nationalism, in the form of Zionism, which itself was a reaction against the exclusive nationalism of the Great Powers, has done an enormous injustice to the Palestinian people.

In other words, nationalism in the past century has been responsible for unprecedented barbarity.

In the last 150 years we have witnessed the rise and fall of imperialism in which the whole lesser developed world was divided between the Great Powers. The case of the Congo is well known, where a large proportion of the country was wiped out by the colonial power in the pursuit of profit. In fact, the population of all colonial countries suffered but it was only with the Russian Revolution and the growth of a working class that resistance became effective. There is no question that European nationalism was given a great impetus in this period, but the crucial case is that of the nationalism of the conquered.

However, this revolt was channelled into nationalist forms precisely by Stalinism with its doctrine of national liberation. Above we have discussed its history. Here we can look at the result. National liberation is proclaimed a great success when the standard of living of much of Africa is below that which obtained before the colonial powers left. In Zimbabwe it was already 40 percent below what it had been under white rule before Mugabe went off the rails. In South Africa, the numbers employed are below the level before Mandela came in and the standard of living of the majority is static or declining, while profits have gone up substantially. In India the numbers of the urban poor are proverbial.

In short, national liberation has failed. Countries which overthrew their colonial overlord have new symbols and can introduce their own languages into the schools and TV but life for the ordinary peasant or worker is often harder, albeit they can now use their native languages.

What Does This Mean?

There can be no question of the oppression and exploitation of the colonial powers. In this respect we are talking of the extraction of tribute and the apparatus of force which accompanied it. How is it that their removal has not made life better for all? There are two reasons involved:

1. We can take the real example of the way the South African government has made provision for the supply of water in the last few years. While there has been an introduction of taps, pipes and pumps in order to supply the population with water, this has been accompanied by a levy; a payment which the ordinary person can't afford. Thus the situation has been made worse because previously free water from the river or well is now off limits. The market is no solution, and nationalists support the market today. And as this example shows, the market has often made the situation worse for many, and sometimes most, people, even as it benefited a minority.
2. Nationalist movements, under the banner of national liberation, by and large adopted a socio-economic policy similar to that of the Soviet Union, in which an elite or ruling class, depending on the country, took power and organised the economy while maintaining a limited market. The elite

Marxism, Nationalism

enriched itself while the economy failed. They usually wiped out their left and established strict controls over the population.

For the past century there has been a radical disjuncture between the internationalist and universalist demands for the overthrow of capitalism and the limited programme of nationalists. A clear divide was established by the First World War when the major socialist parties of Europe divided along nationalist lines, leading to war. This led over a period of a decade or so to the rise of three new political movements: Social Democracy, Stalinised communist parties and pristine Marxists, of whom the Trotskyists became the most prominent. The first two were nationalist, albeit with concessions or usually lip-service to internationalism.

Somewhat amazingly, much of the left in developed countries has supported these national liberation movements, often long after it was clear that they were liberating only their own elite/middle class. In fact, to a degree a considerable part of the so-called left maintained its organisation and cause in and through so-called solidarity movements with nationalist governments or organisations in the Third World. The effect on the left has been disastrous in that it has had to distort the truth and its organisation in order to maintain this doctrine. Often these groups spent most of their time organising protest demonstrations in favour of movements which have been as exploitative and oppressive, albeit in different forms, as the regimes that they overthrew.

The Importance of the National Question

In spite of any critique of the concept of 'national liberation' it is clear that the 'national question' is a material reality as much as the extraction of surplus value in the labour process from the direct producer. That, of course, is why it has been debated at such length. There is, however, a difference between recognition of the national question and nationalism.

I'm arguing that the extraction of tribute and the suppression of the national rights of peoples have been present for centuries, if not thousands of years, in the world. Only when the national question could be solved, was it able to enter centre-stage. Over the centuries many peoples have been ethnically cleansed, physically wiped out, and otherwise turned into sources of tribute

for conquering nations. We have only to think of the conquest of North and South America, where millions were killed by European conquest, to see the reality of the national question further back than the 19th century. When the development of industrial capitalism showed the potential for the abolition of exploitation, the elimination of national oppression became a real goal. In other words, its overthrow became real only at the point that socialism itself came on to the agenda.

To understand that point, we have to look at the nature of national question. Over time, ethnic groups have suffered physical annihilation, reduction to slavery, the imposition of foreign landlords and of foreign owners of capital. A foreign ruling class, whether it is landlords or capitalists, has every interest in suppressing potential unrest in order to make its own position permanent. To do so, it has often tried to suppress the indigenous forms of government, local languages and dialects, as well as literature (oral or written or both) and history. The brutality that has often gone with such national oppression has become the stuff of folklore. The point, however, is that the extraction of tribute from a people, whether they constitute a nation or not, has necessarily been accompanied by forms of inhumanity that have tended to bond the whole people or ethnic group.

The solution to this situation has to start with its material origins in colonialism and neo-colonialism or other forms of exaction of tribute. Once the overlords are removed whether they are colonialists, landlords, or foreign investors the situation can be radically changed. It does not, of course, follow automatically and it needs a full appreciation of the damage done to undo the wrongs wrought on the population. The indigenous language has to be restored, without cutting the population off from the rest of the world. This is a delicate question which has to be dealt with in all its subtlety.

There is, in fact, only one world language at the present time, English, although a number of other European languages also give access to world literature and discussions. Where a language has been wiped out, it cannot be restored through the imposition of compulsory rules and it makes no sense to impose a language spoken by a few thousand people on the population without providing for an additional world language, even if it is

Marxism, Nationalism

the language of the conqueror. Indigenous literature and more general debate can be fostered to provide for the all round education missing in times of imperial dominance.

Once, however, the issue is set out like this, it becomes clear that only governments can perform this service for two reasons. In the first place, it requires long term nuanced planning, agreed in advance by the whole population through democratic procedures. In the second place, the majority of the population cannot participate in such national rejuvenation if they do not have the opportunity to do so. That means that an egalitarian educational system is fundamental to these changes. Usually under alien rule some people benefit but those benefits cannot be retained. This frequently, though not always, strikes at the class nature of the regime. Furthermore, the particular forms of national discrimination bear heavily on those least able to resist them, and this invariably means that the wealthier suffer less. This does not mean that the latter may not lead the resistance or even feel the discrimination more sharply. The need to overcome the effects of decades or centuries of discrimination requires a reallocation of resources in favour of the majority.

The above conditions for solving the national question make it clear that the market cannot deal with the issue. A country might become independent and have nominally independent governments but it does not thereby become independent of the international division of labour. It is then compelled to perform tasks dictated by the dominant imperial powers. At the same time, only a truly democratic administration can completely restructure the forms of education to allow benefits to all, as opposed to a limited few. Luxemburg was right that only socialism can solve the question. That, however, does not mean that limited concessions might not be gained under capitalism, concessions which normally benefit a rising bourgeoisie, middle class or intelligentsia. Even for them the gains are limited but they are real.

The fact that the national question can be partially solved at best, under capitalism, is no reason why the demands should not be put forward. Nonetheless the fact that the majority will obtain little or nothing from an apparent massive victory has to be driven home. The left cannot forget that

for the majority the standard of living has gone down after the removal of the colonial overlord. Indeed in many countries it is even worse in that post-colonial wars have led to mass slaughter and a hitherto inconceivable barbarism.

Part II: The Stages of Nationalism

In its material form, nationalism has gone through 4 stages since its evolution in modern times, or in more direct terms, with the rise of capitalism. By briefly describing them we can move closer to a description of the phenomenon itself and understand its present state.

The First Phase

The concept of a nation and hence generalised loyalty to that entity is only possible under two conditions:

1. All members of that nation be accepted equally as citizens;
2. National bonds play a greater role than local or international bonds.

Where the majority of the potential nation is regarded as inferior to the ruling group or class and is oppressed and exploited that majority will owe little loyalty to the wider entity, although it might defend the wider entity against invaders. In reality, the emergence of genuine equality has been a long term process, occurring in fits and starts. The French Revolution is usually taken as a landmark. The emancipation of the serfs and the acceptance of everyone as citizens with equal rights meant that all could belong to a common entity — the nation.

There is the democratic absorption of the whole nation as one entity as opposed a division in the society between landlords and serfs, in which the serfs have few rights and are not citizens. This was the Rousseauan appeal but it was a real movement participating in the emancipation of the whole population. This absorption is present from the earliest capitalism but shows itself in full flower in the French revolution. It is not accidental that religion is rejected during the French revolutionary process under the banner of

Marxism, Nationalism

'equality, liberty, fraternity' because religion is in fact replaced with nationalism as the unifying factor for the country.

In this period nationalism could be harnessed both to overthrow the old undemocratic, semi-feudal rulers and to launch an expansionist imperial policy. As long as that policy was linked with emancipation it enjoyed a degree of success. Once, however, the link with emancipation was dropped, as it was during the later years of Napoleon, French nationalism was doomed. Napoleon, in effect, both raised the banner of nationalism and destroyed it in its initial phase.

While the rise of nationalism is often associated with Rousseau and the French Revolution, in fact various forms had already come into being in other more economically advanced countries. The French took it to its highest form at that time. The limits of nationalism were set by the restricted nature of the national economy at that time.

The Second Phase

It was only with the rise of industry and so industrial capital that nationalism grew in intensity and scope. Capital needed a geographic base for its means of production, a state to maintain internal and external stability and a market sufficient to absorb its products. Only a large national entity could satisfy these requirements, just as only a global capitalism can suffice for modern finance capital. As a result, the democratic demands of the rising peasantry and incipient working class could then be harnessed and then fused with the needs of the bourgeoisie to form a national state. The easiest solution was to establish a largely homogeneous entity even if that entity was largely fictitious, with a fictitious history and a language homogenised through the destruction of its competitors and their languages and dialects. In reality, the domination of the national state involved the destruction of the different self-governing ethnic entities that came under its domain. The language and culture that came to dominate was no more natural than a palace.

The nation came about, therefore, as a specific compromise between a rising bourgeoisie and the rest of the population as a means of providing support for a sector of capital, while conceding demands for civil rights to

the whole national population, and the particular language and cultural rights put forward by the rising intelligentsia. Where there was no single ethnic group the bourgeoisie of the area simply based itself on geography, and the pliant intelligentsia built up a common ethos. There is no nation-state which is historically homogeneous.

As a consequence, one would expect that a process of disintegration would set in once the era of nationalism came to an end. Thus, in the UK, there are a series of nations, in each of which there are also a number of different groups. In Spain, the different regions are demanding independence. In so far as nations are homogeneous today that is often the result of the forcible imposition of a single language and culture. Of its nature, the nation is a transitory phenomenon. Where everyone's cultural, civil and material rights are supported and guaranteed, there is no reason for the nation to continue. Indeed, one would expect the many suppressed traditions to express themselves, while the majority of the population will interact with people with other languages and cultures to an ever greater degree. In the present phase of the disintegration of capitalism, that is what is happening.

Nationalism in this phase down to the 20th century then played a role in the development of capitalism and the productive forces. Like capitalism, which came into being dripping with blood from head to foot, the nationalism of the nation-state served to subject peoples of national groups, other than the dominant one, to economic exploitation and the suppression of their culture; but it also led to massive industrial growth, the rise of working class movements and a limited acceptance of common civil rights.

In other words, nationalism in its first two phases played an ambiguous role in which the economy moved forward and there was a limited acceptance of the position of ordinary people.

The Third Phase

In its next, third phase, however, it played a wholly reactionary role by uniting a country behind an imperialist drive of war and conquest. Whereas its earlier role was also bloody and served to develop the means of production, it now served to raise the rate of profit through super-

Marxism, Nationalism

exploitation and mass murder, without any necessary connection with the development of the means of production.

The case of the Congo where the Belgian King killed millions in forcing the population to work as slave labourers on rubber plantations is well known. Many also died in the gold and diamond mines of South Africa. There was little development of the overall means of production in these extractive industries in the early years of imperialism. The jingoism which accompanied modern imperialism was entirely decadent. Capitalism in its phase of decline could only spawn a decadent ideology. Its expression in the First World War, on both sides, represented a massive defeat for the development of mankind and for socialism.

Capitalism had evolved to the point where capital and labour stood directly opposed, where worker and capitalist were bound in conflict until one or the other won. Capital then absorbed the earlier nationalism and used it for its own ends so uniting capital and labour in a false unity. Because it is a false unity, it cannot develop anything. However this evolution of nationalism to chauvinism is a necessary and natural evolution itself. In an epoch of decline capitalism has nowhere else to go. The result, however, has been disastrous. The nationalism of the First World War led to mass slaughter on an unprecedented scale, for which the perpetrators ought to have been indicted before a human rights tribunal. Mankind has still not recovered from its effects. In so far as it has, it has more to do with the even worse cataclysm of the Second World War.

The essential point, however, is that the great socialist movements of Europe which had promised to stop the approaching war, which they had correctly predicted, not only failed to do so but succumbed to nationalism and so destroyed the socialist movement for several generations. It was not just that they voted with their conservative governments but they absorbed the nationalism of the time. Instead of the internationalism of the First and Second Internationals and of the early Third International, the new Socialist International was little more than a meeting of nationalist social democratic parties. The concept of socialism in one country was pursued by Stalin, but the only reason why one cannot say that the social democrats invented it is that they were not introducing socialism. Effectively, from 1914 onwards

all lines of the socialist movement took a nationalist turn (with the exception of the period between the USSR's formation and 1924 when it did take an internationalist line).

As nationalism necessarily places the working class under the control of its ruling class or elite, this simply means that socialism is abandoned. This process has been commented on many times, usually with a note that national feeling is somehow stronger than socialism, without any real exploration of the reasons for this state of affairs, apart from some references to human nature or the utopianism of socialism. It is enough to note that in the last year of the 1914-18 war troops from opposite sides were fraternising with each other and that the Bolshevik revolution met with considerable support among the populations of the warring countries. It also has to be remembered that since all sides were anything but democratic, the population had no alternative to the call-up, particularly when all the propaganda was from only one side.

In my view, we can only come to terms with the degenerate role of nationalism at this time by understanding that the period itself was one of the decline of capitalism.

Decline here has to be understood as the decline of the central driving force of capitalism, capital, and so value itself. Put differently, I am arguing that in this phase of capitalism it becomes more progressively more difficult to establish mediations for the contradictions within the system. As a result, the forms of value themselves move away from value, as in the case of governmental control or monopoly; or else become parasitic, as in the case of finance capital and its associate imperialism. Empirically, the difference between the potential surplus product and the actual surplus product grows or, more simply, the difference between what the standard of living could be in a rational planned society and what exists grows exponentially. Here one can point to the enormous waste caused by wars, mass unemployment and the gigantic waste of human talent on routine jobs. The fact that Stalinism and social democracy as well as nationalisation under capitalism are inefficient is no indication of the nature of socialism.

Marxism, Nationalism

A system in decline is compelled to use whatever instruments are at hand in order to ensure its survival and nationalism has historically been the system's most effective defence, whatever its destructive force.

The Response of the Left

At this point it is worth pointing out that Stalin's definition of a nation has played an enormous role on the left and only for the worse. His definition, which simply amounted to adding together a series of attributes — language, territory, economy and culture — adds nothing to understanding because it is both static and without any political economy. It also gives the impression that the nation is a necessary and natural phenomenon. Yet it has been much used and not only by Stalinists, as among theoreticians of the various communist parties, but even by those on the left. Lenin may have approved of the book, 'Marxism and the National Question', at the time.⁷ Some argue that the book could not have been written by Stalin and that it was written by Bukharin. Indeed Stalin could not write intelligently but while the book is coherent, it is simplistic. Its real meaning amounts to a statement that every language group based on a territory has a right to independence. It ignored the real formation of such groups and the historical emergence of the category of the nation itself. Above all, it ignored two central problems. The first was the political economic reality that both the forces of production and the market had gone beyond the nation state. The second was the conflict between working class solidarity and the nation state itself.

National Liberation as a Concept and its Failure

It was Lenin who argued that there was a difference between the nationalism of the oppressor and the oppressed but he cannot be blamed for Stalinism and national liberation, with all its verbiage of national democracy and many stages before socialism. I have already pointed out the conflict between the demand for socialism and nationalism in the Lenin

⁷ . Stalin, J.V. (1954) *Marxism and the National Question*, in *Works*, vol II; Moscow: FLPH; p308-381.

years of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately it is able to draw on Lenin's original statement. The concept of national liberation, as a separate independent state, which was introduced later, is itself dubious but its theorists make much of Lenin's arguments.

The fact is that the Stalinists and so the Soviet Union were crucial in building up ideologically and materially the various national liberation movements in Africa and Asia and to an extent elsewhere. In that process, the left was crushed. In every country, from China in 1927 onwards the nationalist movements expelled and often gaoled and killed their left once they had no use for them. The left was usually crucial in attracting the working class and left intelligentsia but once the national liberation movement took power, it installed a new ruling group which immediately consolidated itself, preferably as a junior bourgeoisie where it could. Where it could not it became a bureaucratic type ruling group or elite, which lost no time in eliminating the left.

The Soviet Union produced an elaborate theoretical apparatus to justify its argument for national liberation as opposed to socialism. There is no point in describing what is little more than ideological justification for its foreign policy. The USSR elite was itself exploitative and would naturally tend to assist the building up of similar elites in other countries partly because it provided itself with a degree of stability. The very last thing that they wanted was a socialist revolution as that would have threatened them directly as well as ideologically. They, therefore, preferred to argue as far as possible in terms of stages, even for developed countries. For underdeveloped countries, their only fate could be national liberation, which basically meant rule by an indigenous elite with close ties with the Soviet Union itself. Such a country might or might not have a developed market.

Nationalism and the Left in the Developed World

The problem is not just in the Third World but also in the first world which has spent far too much time and energy supporting the wrong movements. While one always has to oppose racism, the effect of supporting nationalism is both to weaken the left in those countries but also to question the nature of the socialist programme of such people. Today such an example is the

Marxism, Nationalism

support accorded Islamists of various kinds. We ought to be denouncing them as medieval mystics or reactionaries. The fact that they are opposing the USA is neither here nor there.

One would expect the left to be denouncing anti-Americanism. We are not anti-American. We are against capitalism and so American capitalism and British and French capitalism. We are against the US ruling class because we are against all ruling classes. We are also against the US ruling class because it is the world finance capitalist power so extracting tribute from other countries as well as maintaining control over the world economy. But we are not anti-American. We do not oppose US policies because they are American but because we do not agree with them. Nor is the United States the world bogeyman. Capital is the enemy, not the United States. In the Critique 35 Notes I argued that some on the left denounce American actions with such universality and vehemence that they become a peculiar kind of American nationalist.⁸ We stand instead with the American working class.

Ultimately the cause of this degeneration of the left lies with Stalinism and its doctrines of two stage revolution: first stage, bourgeois democracy; and second stage, socialism. Even where there is bourgeois democracy Stalinists have invented a first stage and a non-socialist alliance — the anti-monopoly alliance. Today it is the anti-corporation alliance. Stalinism itself necessarily supports nationalism since it is inherently nationalist both with the doctrine of socialism in one country and in its daily practice which flowed from that doctrine. Stalinism in the Soviet Union was Russian nationalist, anti-semitic, and racist.

⁸ “Michael Moore...said modern Americans are the stupidest and greediest people on the face of the earth...Moreover the odd thing about the American left – at least from an international perspective – is how caught up it is in passion for America.” Lexington (19.02.2005) The Old Slur. The Economist; p51. Although the Economist has a broader view of the left than this article, they have accurately captured a real feature of the US left.

The Fourth and Present Phase

Today we are liberated to a considerable degree from Stalinism with its fall but it would appear as if nationalism lives on, most particularly in Eastern Europe. This is, in fact, a partial illusion but it is illustrative of the reality of a world in transition in which the new world has yet to appear.

Whereas the nationalism of the imperial countries was based on a real shared prosperity in part deriving from a common exploitation of other countries, and the nationalism of the Third World derives from a shared exploitation by those metropolitan countries, the nationalism of the former Stalinist countries derives from a common despair among those of a similar ethnic background.

In a sense all working class nationalists share that despair. It is a despair born of a dying world in which everyday life is thrown into doubt and a common struggle against another nation appears to offer new hope.

How Do We Understand the Nationalism of the Present Time?

This is the last throw of nationalism. We see the chaos of Eastern Europe, the permanent war on terror and thirdly the nationalism and racism which is whipped up among the lumpen elements but also among sections of the unorganised workers against so-called immigrants. All three elements despair at a world which appears to be dissolving, an uncertain war against an unknown and apparently inhuman enemy, and the collective antagonism against exploiting ethnic groups, always mythical, have co-existed since the end of the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

It was most apparent in Weimar Germany where Radek, to his eternal disgrace, floated the idea of National Bolshevism in 1923. Lenin cannot be blamed for his legacy but his apparent concession to nationalism opened wide all kinds of alternative uses to his unfortunate formula. Had the German Communist Party fought nationalism hard and consistently from the beginning and given it no quarter they could have prevented Hitler even getting to the point when they allied with him in a number of state governments, to their eternal disgrace.

Marxism, Nationalism

The explanation behind the modern forms lies in the concepts of decline and transition. On the one hand, both the means of production and particularly finance capital have gone beyond the nation state but on the other the petite bourgeoisie and the working class remains bound to the particularity of industrial capital. Capital is necessarily schizophrenic in that it is both against nationalism and its consequences, like protectionism and reduced labour flexibility, and in favour in so far as it maintains stability and order both for sections of the class against other sections as well as against the working class. This implies that capital swings from one strategy to another depending on the balance of class forces and the state of the economy. At the present time, we can see the way the US capital has been trying to maintain and extend its own forms of protectionism both within the territory of the United States and beyond, using the IMF, while at the same time trying to establish a global capital market. The consequent rise of first anti-Japanese and now anti-Chinese nationalism is in no way checked, although much of the imports from China are by US owned firms. In the United Kingdom the government has effectively used a racist and nationalist card against immigrants although capital wants immigration in order to undercut wages.

When capitalism itself is in decline both because it is challenged by the working class and because the forms within capitalism have gone beyond the market uncertainty, confusion and barbarism rule. Both ideologically and materially the world is more uncertain for more people than possibly ever before. Levels of unemployment are at phenomenally high levels and capital has largely smashed security of employment, wages and pensions. In Eastern Europe and the Third World the market has patently failed, while in the first world people are moving in the same direction. Nationalism appears to some as a refuge from despair.

Disintegration

The logic of this nationalism has already shown itself in the rise of disintegrative nationalist movements. They are most clear in former Eastern Europe because the old forms of integration have disappeared but disintegration is the fate of a world where the old order, and hence the law of value, is in decline. The poles of the contradiction cannot interpenetrate

and the result is that the system disintegrates. We are also seeing such forms in the West. The capitalist class itself is no longer held together by the Cold War and sections are fighting one another. The war on terror is intended to develop a form of integration by establishing a common enemy.

The various demands for independence in the developed countries — in the UK, Spain, France, etc — are themselves a reflection of a country in dissolution. There can be no question of their national and historic grievances but they have only been able to show themselves with any force at the point where the state itself was in retreat. In the former Soviet Union, the demand for independence for the Baltic Republics was supported by the Russians living there, even though they were subsequently excluded from citizenship, precisely because they thought that they would be better off without the Soviet Union, given the relatively higher standard of living of that region.

Summary and Detailed Conclusions on the Nature of the Present Stage of Nationalism

In my view, there are four aspects of present day nationalism, which itself is a declining form of a nationalism, which once genuinely embraced the interests of the whole population.

A. Unity that is in conflict with itself

In the first instance nationalism serves to maintain a unity among those of the ruling class, and one between itself and the working class. But, as we have seen, capitalism has gone beyond the nation state and yet continues to use nationalism, so while the unity exists, it is constantly at odds with itself. This is more true in the 21st century than at any previous time; but it was true a century ago and hence the utility of war and imperialism in providing a necessary unity, even though it is at often at odds with private property and threatens the system itself.

However, chauvinism and imperialism today stand condemned and so the bourgeoisie finds it harder to use these forms of nationalism, particularly when sections are totally opposed to it in the first place. Capital, in its expanding, mature phase (or in its essence) is colour, gender and ethnically

Marxism, Nationalism

blind because it needs a flexible, workforce that can be homogenised at the workplace. Thus, the use of any of these forms of division has an economic cost, which it tries to avoid. This is even especially true today under conditions of so-called globalisation.

B. There is a conflict between global finance capital and localised industrial capital

As a result there is a constant demand for protectionism, which appeals to the displaced workers as well as to the owners of local capital. Big capital wants to have open borders both for capital and labour, but it is compelled to limit labour movement and accept a compromise with small capital. The effect is also nationalist.

It has led to, and is leading to, anti-immigrant racism and support for historically fascist organisations.

C. Despair

In the third place we can see the 'despair' of the working class and peasantry at the system and, indeed, at points when the social disintegration throws them into an abyss. Here we can see the events before the Second World War, what has happened in much of the Third World today, Eastern Europe after the fall of Stalinism, and 9/11, and a combination of these. Despair has become the hallmark of most of the last 100 years.

It can be analysed as consisting both of a real material degradation without any apparent material alternative, and of an abandonment of hope consequent on a failure to understand the complexity of the system under which we live. If we look at the Yugoslav descent into barbarism, we have to explain why the local populations accepted the guidance of their nationalist elites and then perpetrated the most horrendous and inhuman crimes. The same applies to Ruanda, the Congo and to parts of the former

Soviet Union, though there was not the same degree of criminal slaughter, except in Chechnya.⁹

While each case is specific, we can see how the population had lost all perspective in the wider society in which they lived and had sought salvation in the killing of an enemy which was mythical in their understanding but all too material in reality. In exactly the same way, we can analyse the success of Zionism among the Jewish population as despair in the socialist alternative and indeed any alternative and it is a despair which even now holds together the Israeli population. Their oppression of the Palestinian population in turn has roused a Palestinian nationalism which itself reflects the despair of that population. Their despair, in its turn, has taken the mythical enemy to even greater heights by moving to religion and self-sacrifice.

The attempt by the Tsarist Empire (and by others in the west) to use a mythical common enemy to engender nationalism, through the anti-semitism (ie, protocols of the Elders of Zion) which found its apotheosis in

⁹ "In his report, Alkhanov emphasized that security issues in Chechnya are closely connected to economic development. 'Unemployment and poor living conditions are forcing people to join criminal groups,' he said. He added that 'as long as social problems remain unsolved, complete stabilization will be impossible.' This is true not only in Chechnya but throughout the North Caucasus, where there are few employment opportunities outside of law enforcement, the narcotics trade, and war.

Indeed, much of the time law enforcement, the illegal-drug trade, terrorism, and war are essentially four branches of the same encompassing and self-sustaining enterprise. Some North Caucasians are turning to drugs to help them cope with anxiety, frustration, and despair. The drug trade is rapidly expanding in the North Caucasus through the growth of efficient, hierarchical, criminal organizations. The expansion of the drug trade not only feeds other forms of organized crime, but also creates employment opportunities in law enforcement. Additional law enforcement jobs are created when militants and Islamist extremists pay young men to attack police stations and targeted police officials. In Daghestan more than 20 of these officials have been murdered so far this year; more than 20 were killed in 2003. Police officials were primary targets in the 22 June attacks in Ingushetia." ALKHANOV is the Kremlin candidate to succeed the assassinated Chechen stooge President and he was reporting to the Russian Federereration Council ie the Upper House of the Russian Parliament." Ware, R.B. (2004) *The Caucasian Vortex*. #12 RFE/RL Newline, Johnson's List-8344-26/08/2004. Robert Bruce Ware is an associate professor at Southern Illinois University who studies the Caucasus.

Marxism, Nationalism

the mass killing of the Jewish population in Europe, has been succeeded by new myths and new mythical enemies.

The most elementary needs of much of mankind are not being met and the population has turned to barbaric nationalist forms, precisely because the socialist revolution is so long delayed.

D. National liberation

As I have argued the case, this is essentially a Stalinist concept reflecting the two stage argument and the fact that the Stalinists wanted no other regimes to go socialist. It has been responsible for the growth of Third World nationalism on a vast scale. Today, the fact that it has failed means that the social and political movements associated with it are in considerable trouble. Nonetheless, countries like India and China continue to have powerful nationalist movements or tendencies, which continue to rely on the resentment against the evident imperial control of the Western powers, as well as the lack of any alternative.

A new and fourth stage

With the end of the Cold War and Stalinism there is a new stage in the nationalist concept. The end of Stalinism itself means that the whole concept and support for National Liberation has lost out and is being phased out. It was dying in any case because it failed, but there is no USSR to string out the life of the dying entity. The whole concept of socialism in one country is now dead. In turn, social democracy is dead or dying in large part because in its last phase it relied to a considerable degree on the existence of the Communist Parties and the USSR, and their assistance from time to time. So the concept of national socialism is now dying.

The essential problem here is that a considerable section of the left seems to prefer to maintain the old ideology of support for Third World nationalism and protectionism. It continues to be anti-American. It has not yet caught up with the fact that the old policy was itself a cause of stasis and decay and is today unviable. And it has very little analysis of the present.

The horrendous actions taken out of despair are themselves at a dead end. Now, however, we are in a period where that despair has reached the ultimate mythical form of hope in an after life. This kind of reactionary, feudal-type ideology can only fail but it has provided an after life to a nationalist reaction in the United States and in turn to anti-Americanism throughout the world.

The whole turn to fundamentalism is itself very similar to episodes in world history when the masses could find no way out of their increasingly desperate situation. Desperate here does not necessarily mean that their situation is getting worse, only that people despair of ever living a human life, which is often identified with that of the so-called middle class in their countries or that of the majority in the developed world. We have only to look at the origins of Christianity when the impoverished masses turned to the fantasy of a messiah arriving in their lifetime;¹⁰ or the fantasies imagined by tribal societies when in the process of being vanquished by their imperial conquerors. In this case, the nationalists and the Stalinists have each had their turn in the Middle East and failed the population. As these ideologies, or proto-ideologies, are identified with the only worldly options available — national capitalism and a national socialism — a real alternative lacks credibility. Hence a fantasy which incorporates aspects of nationalism and egalitarianism can take hold. The fact that it is a ‘middle class’ which takes up the cudgels is only to be expected as it is always the intelligentsia which formulates the ideas and acts as the leaders and standard bearers of ideologies and new ideas. It does not mean that the masses do not follow or respect those leaders.

This religious fundamentalism then incorporates a new form of nationalism in its reaction to the imperial overlord. Although it is new, its basis is limited in that the nationalism it espouses requires individual sacrifice and not mass action. Religious observance makes up for that lack to some degree, but it remains rooted in another dimension and in so far as people have to live on this earth, disillusion must follow. The disillusion with nationalism itself follows on the expulsion of the colonial overlord and

¹⁰ For a compelling account of this kind for the origins of Christianity see Erich Fromm: *The Dogma of Christ*, Routledge, 2002.

Marxism, Nationalism

disillusion with religious fundamentalism follows on the rule of the clerics and the failure of terror to accomplish its object. In the long run, only a socialist movement can wipe out this awful and pathetic fantasy.

However, we have only to stand back and compare the present grandiose failure of the US imperial enterprise and the attempted use of nationalism to see that the restriction on civil rights, the war on Iraq and the futile actions of Al-Quaeda are very different from previous episodes of nationalist outbreaks.

Nonetheless, we can see today that nationalism is in the process of dying but it is nonetheless being held together by three forces: the backwardness of the present day left; governmental policy in order to shore up support; and the mystics.