

TOWARD A SOCIALIST THEORY OF NATIONALISM

Of all the historical phenomena discussed by Karl Marx, his treatment of nationalism, nationalist movements, and the emergence of the nation-state is the least satisfactory. It also left a problematic heritage to the socialist movement, with a veritable “black hole” where a confrontation with one of the most potent social and political forces of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries should have been.

Marx never discussed nationalism in any systematic way, and what we have are a number of disjointed statements dealing with the issue, sometimes on a very general level, sometimes in response to specific historical events on which he had been commenting in newspaper articles. A careful study of these scattered references will show that there are two distinct analyses of nationalism in Marx, one pre- and one post-1848. The pre-1848 I would like to call the premodern paradigm, the post-1848 the bourgeois paradigm.

The *locus classicus* for the premodern paradigm (Paradigm I) is to be found in *The Communist Manifesto*, where the universalizing power of the capitalist market is sketched by Marx in memorable and pithy language. This universalizing thrust, according to Marx, does away with everything that is particular, be it regional or national. The capitalist mode of production is to Marx the first to have

given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption. . . . To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction

becomes a life and death question to all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed not only at home but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in the material, so also in the intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature

And furthermore:

National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding to them.¹

Hence Marx's famous dictum that “the workingmen have no country” and his postulate that in the future “the supremacy of the proletariat will make [these differences between the nations] vanish still further.” National differences thus are likened in this paradigm to other premodern traits, like local customs and dress: they are all due to disappear before the universalizing onslaught of the bourgeoisie and be even more perfectly integrated into a world-culture by the proletarian revolution.

It was this aspect of Paradigm I of Marx's thoughts on nationalism that came to characterize the cosmopolitan and internationalist heritage of the socialist movement. Yet Marx himself subtly changed his views, though without ever admitting that he had done so. The experience of the revolutions of 1848-49, during which nationalism appeared as a major force for the first time, occasionally proving to be much stronger than class interests, was followed very closely by Marx as editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, and his journalistic writing of this period abounds with many insights into the emergence of, and clashes between, various national movements—in Germany and Italy, in Poland and Bohemia, in Hungary and Croatia. Obviously such a powerful force evidently changing and redrawing the map of Europe, reordering borders and state structures, could not any more be subsumed under the antiquated paradigm as a mere appendix of premodern economic formations, about to be swept into the dustbin of history by the universalizing forces of market capitalism.

What Marx developed after 1848-49, and mainly in response to the developments leading toward the unification of Germany and Italy, was Paradigm II—the explanation of nationalism as a modern superstructural expression of the bourgeois need for larger markets and territorial consolidation. In this paradigm, far from being an exotic and romantic, or romanticized, relic of the pre-industrial age, nationalism becomes (to use Eric Hobsbawm's later phrase) a “building block” of capitalism.

According to this paradigm, capitalism needs large economic entities: it cannot function and develop properly when Germany, for example, is divided into thirty-seven states, ministates and city-states, each with its own laws, customs arrangements, political structures, and currency. The unification of Germany—and of Italy—is no longer just a dream of the romantics, yearning for elusive and imaginary Teutonic forests or Roman glory: it is in the direct economic interest of the bourgeoisie, and nationalist ideologies are nothing other than superstructural strategies of legitimation for

these economic interests. The *Zollverein*—the mainly North German customs union that preceded the political unification of Germany under Bismarck—is the model for the emergence of modern nation-states. Nationalism is no longer premodern for Marx—it is the epitome of the processes of capitalist development and industrialization.

Because of this, Marx now supports, for instrumentalist but not immanent reasons, the unification of Germany and Italy: whatever helps develop capitalism is, of course, ultimately hastening its demise. Furthermore, only in large, unified entities can the proletariat develop an adequate class consciousness and not be sidetracked into secondary efforts. Marx's support for Prussia, for example, in the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War was argued in terms of the instrumentality of this war toward Germany's unification and as an important step in the development of industrialization, capitalism, and the ensuing strengthening of the working class. As one might imagine, such a view, overlooking the immediate causes of the war, did not always sit well with others within the radical movement, with its emphasis on ethical considerations and opposition to the kind of regime epitomized by Bismarck. Yet Marx never wavered from this instrumentalist approach, eschewing merely “moral” approaches.

It was therefore wholly consistent with the consequences of Paradigm II that Marx opposed the various national movements in Central and Eastern Europe of those people who tried to secede from the Austro-Hungarian Empire or achieve autonomy within it—mainly the Czechs and the Croats. They, and other Slavonic groups, by trying to “Balkanize” the Hapsburg Empire, are “reactionary” in the sense that should they succeed, industrialization and economic development in Central and Eastern Europe will be slowed down, and hence the eventual victory of the proletariat will be hampered. Czechs, Croats, and Serbs should not set up separate states but be integrated into the one, larger market of Germany-Austria. Similarly, Marx argued on another occasion, Denmark should be absorbed ultimately by Germany—and Mexico by the more developed and capitalist United States.

What hastens capitalist development is “progressive,” what hinders it is “reactionary,” and should be opposed.² Less developed areas and populations should be integrated into the more developed ones, and thus the Czechs, who have no bourgeoisie, will eventually be able to develop an industrial society only in connection with the German-Austrians. Nowhere in Marx is there any mention of a right to self-determination or support for “national liberation” as such.

This appears as a straightforward view, which, while wholly instrumental and devoid of any substantive assessment of nationalism, is consistent with Marx’s general view about the relations of “developed” to “nondeveloped” societies.³

Yet a curious inconsistency becomes apparent. Given the theoretical argument in favor of larger economic entities and absorption of less developed regions within the larger, more developed ones, one would have expected Marx to support the integration of the Polish lands into the three empires (German, Austrian, and Russian) that have divided the historical Polish commonwealth among them. Had Marx been consistent, the fate of the Poles should not be different from that of the Czechs, Slovenes, and Croatians. After all, the Poles had a highly archaic, feudal social structure, there was no ethnic Polish bourgeoisie, commerce was in the hands of Jews and Germans. Yet throughout his life, Marx strongly supported Polish independence and the restoration of its political integrity.

It could be argued that Polish independence was such a central platform for the European left in the nineteenth century that it would have been extremely difficult, if not politically impossible, for Marx to dissociate himself from it, regardless of whatever theoretical grounds he might have had that militated against Polish independence. But it appears that other considerations were at work—considerations related to an overall revolutionary strategy that eventually overruled Marx’s own theoretical considerations.

Ever since the failure of the 1848–49 revolutions, Marx became obsessed with the

fear that a Czarist Russian military intervention might frustrate whatever gains a revolutionary movement would achieve in Western and Central Europe. This was not an imaginary or groundless fear: both from 1812 to 1814 and in 1848 and 1849, Russian military forces secured the victory of reactionary and conservative regimes in Europe—first against Napoleon and the heritage of the French Revolution, later against liberal uprisings in Vienna, Prague, and Budapest. In both instances, the reactionary regimes in Europe were able to maintain or regain their hold on their people by calling on the Russians and thus tipping the balance of forces. In the 1850s, this fear of Russian intervention became one of Marx’s central concerns—and it was for this reason that he supported the independence of Poland. The very reemergence of an independent Poland would be a severe setback to Russia, and—this was central to Marx’s thinking—it would set up a buffer state between a weakened Russia and the West, thus making Russian counterrevolutionary intervention more difficult and less likely. It was for similar reasons of containing Russia that Marx in the 1860s and 1870s supported the British policy of propping up the Ottoman Empire: the emergence of Slavonic nation-states in the Balkans would greatly strengthen Russia, and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire would also bring Russia to Constantinople and the shores of the Bosphorus. This would greatly enhance Russia’s power to intervene and frustrate revolutionary developments in Europe. In this context Marx saw Pan-Slavism as a mere Russian imperial device, and hence opposed Czech and Serbian nationalism also because of their connection with Pan-Slav ideologies.

These views made Marx into a strange ally of British conservative politicians, who were basing their policies on the “Eastern Question” on an attempt to curb Russian influence in the Levant. This position also moved Marx in the wake of the initial Russian defeats in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78 to postulate the possibility of a revolutionary situation in Russia and the eventual dissolution of the Czarist Empire, thus liberating the European revolutionary movement from the nightmare of

another Russian counterrevolutionary military intervention.

The complexities of Marx's attitude to the question of nationalism left an ambiguous heritage to the socialist movement insofar as it relied upon Marx as a guide to its policies toward the national question. The fact that there were two paradigms in Marx's own thinking—and that Paradigm II has been mitigated and greatly circumscribed by strategic considerations—did not make it easier to come up with a coherent theory of nationalism. The intensification of the development of nationalist movements toward the end of the nineteenth century also made the articulation of a socialist policy toward these phenomena into an exercise in frustration and sometimes incoherence.⁴

By and large, however, the instrumentalist approach as expressed in the bourgeois paradigm (Paradigm II) remained dominant. It was to be summed up in perhaps the most succinct way by Trotsky, who maintained that “the national state is erected as the most convenient, profitable and normal arena for the play of capitalist relations.”⁵

Yet in the process of the political struggles of the various socialist movements, especially in Eastern Europe, and the emergence, through civil war and outside intervention, of the Soviet state, this general theory and its proponents found themselves facing a recalcitrant political reality that pushed them in opposite directions. The conditions of the multi-ethnic Czarist Empire introduced into Lenin's thought and revolutionary strategy the notion that all the nations of the old Empire would have—come the revolution—the right to self-determination and secession. Such a view, which still failed to define what is a nation, and basically had no grounding in Marx's own thought, proved extremely difficult to maintain, given the vicissitudes of the political realities of the Bolshevik revolution—as the history of the Ukraine and the Transcaucasian republics would show in the years 1917–1923.

Even before this Lenin had to clarify his position on the national question within the socialist movement, for example in relation to

such an issue as the place of the Jewish and Polish socialist parties within the structure of the overall Russian socialist movement. The details of Lenin's controversy with the Jewish Socialist *Bund*, and to what degree it determined later Soviet attitudes to the Jewish question and to Zionism, do not need to detain us here.⁶ Suffice it to say that some of the more convoluted arguments used by Lenin and his followers, in combining highly theoretical constructs with crude political necessity, amply show how inadequate the legacy Marx left to his followers on the national issue really was.⁷

The same lack of theoretical consistency could be seen in the controversy between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg on the question of Polish independence. Lenin advocated the establishment of an independent Poland and advised Polish socialists to fight for the victory of the working class within a future independent Polish state; to him, the Poles, like the Finns and the Baltic nations, had the right to secede from Russia (as well as, in their case, from the German and Austrian Empires). Luxemburg and her party (with the carefully chosen name of the Social Democratic party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, clearly excluding the Polish lands under German and Austrian rule) opposed Polish independence. They argued—following the bourgeois Marxian paradigm—that it was in the interest of capitalist, and hence proletarian, development not to break up large economic entities, and that the underdeveloped structure of Polish society would hinder economic and social development if Poland became independent. The paradox was that although the Luxemburgian conclusion about Poland was the exact opposite of that of Marx (who saw an independent Poland as a cornerstone of his revolutionary strategy), its argument in favor of large economic entities could be presented as being truly within the Marxian theoretical construct of Paradigm II. To Luxemburg, nationalism was nothing more than a “false consciousness” exploiting genuine feelings of solidarity based on a common culture cynically manipulated by bourgeois demagogues.⁸ The main Polish socialist party, the PPS, however, took a different path—in a

way following the Leninist approach but from different (that is, Polish national) motivations. That the PPS leader, Josef Pilsudki, eventually left his own party on the issue of nationalism and later, as a commander of the Polish Army, confronted the Red Army at the gates of Warsaw, only proves once more how extremely malleable the Marxian attitudes to nationalism really were. As a guideline to politics, especially in the highly charged and volatile atmosphere of a revolutionary situation, they were hardly of any use.

Yet Lenin's main contribution to the Marxian theory of nationalism and its adaptation to twentieth-century conditions appear in his theory of imperialism: it is here that he widens the scope of the Marxian Paradigm II and argues that nationalism appears not only with the emergence of capitalism but is intensified in the era of imperialist expansion to universal dimensions. In this process, however, nationalism dialectically becomes an anticapitalist force, as the national movements in the non-European colonies emerge as a response to the exploitation of the colonial people by the European capitalist powers. On the other hand, a "chauvinistic" form of nationalism appears within the imperialist societies themselves, in response to these national liberation movements.⁹

Although this is obviously an elaboration of the basic ideas underlying the Marxian Paradigm II, it gives rise to a new ambivalence about the political classification of national movements. In Marx the national movements calling for political unification of large units (Germany, Italy) were called progressive whereas the nationalism of small nations (Czechs) were reactionary, but Lenin now called Asian and African nationalism progressive while European nationalism came to be seen as reactionary. Although this distinction may have been politically helpful despite the strange bedfellows with which it occasionally saddled the Communists (like the Communist-Islamic alliance in Palestine, when the Soviets supported the Mufti of Jerusalem in the 1930s), it was intellectually problematic from the point of view of Marxist class analysis: most European socialist movements did not disasso-

ciate themselves, until World War II, from the imperialist nationalism of their countries. Indeed, the French Communist party continued to support French rule in Algeria well into the 1950s.

This allows one author of a recent attempt at vindicating the Leninist position to maintain that the strength of Lenin's views was due to his "leaving open the question of the nature and role of nationalism and its relationship with socialism."¹⁰ The intent of this observation is obviously laudatory: it is, however, an admission of Lenin's failure to develop a general theory of nationalism and its relationship to a Marxist socialist analysis.

In recent decades there have been some serious attempts within Marxist circles to restate and reformulate what became known as the Marxist-Leninist theory of nationalism. These attempts were part of a wider context of trying to restructure Marxism and salvage some of its theoretical constructs and its radical emancipatory vision from the detritus of Soviet reality. The inadequacies of the Marxian paradigm with regard to nationalism were discussed here with a candor and open-mindedness rare in previous discussions of the subject within the socialist and communist movements.

Thus we find a number of Marxist theoreticians affiliated with different groups of the New Left admitting for the first time that Marx—and Marxism—never had a theory of nationalism, or that whatever theory on nationalism Marxism did develop was inadequate and utterly wrong. John Ehrenreich maintains, "It is time to admit that as Marxists we simply have no understanding of the phenomenon [of nationalism]."¹¹ Calling his studies "a work of destruction," Ehrenreich does not offer an alternative theory but hopes to stir up a debate and shock orthodox Marxists out of their complacent reiteration of pious platitudes about "proletarian internationalism." Similarly, Regis Debray, in a long interview in which he tries to trace his disillusionment with Marxism, points out that the inadequacy of Marxist theory with regard to nationalism was the first issue that raised doubts in his mind about Marxism in general.¹²

Nicos Poulantzas, apparently totally despairing of salvaging any Marxian component for a theory of nationalism, reverts to what appear as echoes of Lévi-Strauss—but are ultimately a mere tautology—when he says, “Territory and tradition are inscribed in the underlying conceptual matrix of space and time,” and postulates a total autonomy of the state—via nationalism—from class structures.¹³

Horace Davis, on the other hand, tries in his studies to retain some of Lenin’s theses by arguing that although in general national liberation movements are “emancipatory,” there are cases in which a national struggle does not possess class components (as in some “classless tribal societies in Africa”), while on other occasions a national struggle becomes the struggle of all classes (as in the case of Castro).¹⁴ Although he admits that Lenin’s analysis of the class basis of nationalism is “in need of re-formulation,” the pattern emerging from Davis’s serious and detailed study is so fraught with reservations and exceptions as to verge on the incoherent. This leads another Marxist scholar, John Blaut, to argue that if one tries to tinker with the Leninist model the consequences leave Marxism with no adequate guidelines whatsoever for political action.¹⁵

A versatile new chord was struck in the late 1970s and early 1980s by Marxist writers laboring under the impact of developments in Northern Ireland—and to a lesser degree the emergence of nationalist tendencies in Wales and Scotland (as well as in Quebec), which were associated with left-wing ideologies. Brian Jenkins and Günter Minnerup argue that although Marxism has “converted progressives of all shades to the cosmopolitan dream of One World as the antidote to the nationalist fever,” it cannot anymore avoid admitting the autonomous power of nationalism in terms of class structure, nor the emancipatory power of nationalism as such, not as a mere adjunct of the class struggle:

Far from being the dark source of most modern evil, the nation state actually represents the pinnacle of human development in the field of political emancipation.

The common view that the nation state is an anachronism which has been long outstripped by the development of productive forces . . . [is

shared] by bourgeois liberalism and Marxist socialism.¹⁶

Such iconoclastic revisionism is shared by Tom Nairn, perhaps the most radical of the New Left thinkers on nationalism. In a number of publications he presents a complex—and perhaps confusing—picture of how to fit nationalism into Marxism. On the one hand, he calls nationalism “the pathology of modern development” and in a Marxist orthodox fashion sees it as traceable to economic factors—but in a novel way: nationalism is the outcome of the *uneven* development of capitalism (hence the “pathology”). Its sources are transnational in the sense that the upper classes of less developed societies, who are most directly hit by the unevenness of economic developments, succeed in sweeping with them the other classes of colonial societies into the national liberation movements. On the other hand, all nationalisms are reduced to this model, and therefore fascism and Castroism belong to the same category and are merely two facets, albeit with clearly distinguishable consequences, of the same “inherent unity,” however differently they are to be judged from the revolutionary point of view. For a Marxist scholar thus to claim, “Fascism is the archetype of nationalism”¹⁷ and yet support some forms of nationalism suggests an admission that nationalism has no fixed class matrix, and therefore Nairn still has to agree that the theory of nationalism is “Marxism’s greatest historical failure.”¹⁸ All this is then used to play around with the idea of advocating the break-up of Britain and the possible emergence of independent nation states on its Celtic fringe as being in tune with such a reading of Marxism.

As one could imagine, such a complete breakdown of the Marxian paradigm evoked a response, and the most sophisticated attempt at restating, though in a nuanced way, the classical Marxian position came from Eric Hobsbawm. With his erudition and combination of historical analysis and theoretical sophistication, Hobsbawm set out to demolish what he considered a revisionist outpouring of sheer nonsense. This was done with verve, wit, and obvious impatience, and while sometimes

caricaturing his opponents' views, he points out that when speaking within the Marxian tradition, one cannot go beyond certain conceptual boundaries. Hobsbawm argues that the revisionists—especially Nairn—have totally misunderstood the historical function of nationalism. Yet he admits that Marxism itself does not and should not offer overall theoretical political answers to the phenomenon of nationalism. It is worthwhile to cite him at some length:

Marxists . . . have to come to terms with the *political fact* of nationalism, and to define their attitudes towards its specific manifestations. Ever since Marx, this has for the most part and *necessarily*, been a matter not of theoretical principle (except for the Luxemburgian minority which tends to suspect nations *en bloc*) but of *pragmatic* judgment in changing circumstances. In principle, Marxists are neither for nor against independent statehood for any nation.¹⁹

In the nineteenth century, Hobsbawm argues, the emergence of nationalism in Europe created the “building blocks” of capitalism—though even in Europe there have been cases of “Ruritarian” nationalism. In the twentieth century things have changed. First of all, the further development of capitalism, which needed national states in its first stage, now tends toward multinational developments, and the salience of nation-states decreases. The disintegration of the European empires has now totally divorced the link between anti-imperialism and national liberation movements, and opposition to neocolonialism is not a struggle for self-determination, which has already been achieved through decolonialization.

In this changed world, Hobsbawm argues, the nationalist movements—like those defended and advocated by Nairn—are very different from those of the nineteenth century: the classical nationalism of the nineteenth century aimed at uniting different provinces and regions into one nation-state and into one economic market. The new nationalisms of the second half of the twentieth century are not unifying but, on the contrary, aim at the fission of developed capitalist states (Britain, Spain) and as such are reactionary. This new nationalism leads to absurd concepts of national

sovereignty that have nothing to do with Marxist principles. In a scathing set of commentaries on what has become a new fetishism of sovereignty, Hobsbawm writes,

The majority of the members of the United Nations is soon likely to consist of late twentieth-century (Republican) equivalents of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and Schwarzburg-Sonderhausen . . .

Any speck in the Pacific can look forward to independence and a good time for its president, if it happens to possess a location for a naval base for which more solvent states will compete, a lucky gift of nature such as manganese, or merely enough beaches and pretty girls to become a tourist paradise. . . .

If the Seychelles can have a vote at the United Nations as good as Japan's, then only the sky is the limit for the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands . . .²⁰

Hobsbawm's critique certainly restored to the debate its historical seriousness and extricated it from some of the narrower sectarian interests of some previous participants. Yet Hobsbawm was not able to suggest a fundamental Marxian attitude to nationalism beyond the merely instrumental approach postulated by Marx's Paradigm II. The problem remained where it has been since Marx left his followers with his unwillingness to discuss nationalist phenomena on their own merits.

Where does all this leave Marxism today? The basic flaw of the Marxian analysis of nationalism has been the attempt to reduce all its phenomena—including the cultural aspects of nationalism—to socioeconomic causes and deny nationalism, and culture in general, an autonomous status in the human scheme of things. Viewing nationalism as merely superstructural is, of course, only one facet of the general Marxian analysis of historical development—yet it makes it extremely difficult for Marxists to assess concrete nationalist movements. There is truth in the feeling that the Marxian Paradigm II limited the scope of nationalism to generalizations based on the example of the *Zollverein*—and the *Zollverein* happens to be a very limited model for the explication of such an enormously powerful

and universal social phenomenon subsumed under the general heading of nationalism.

But just as one can find in Marx himself more differentiated views in some of his *obiter dicta* on literature (such as the excursus on the Greek classics in the *Grundrisse*, where Marx admits that they have validity beyond the concrete class structure that gave rise to their writing), so the socialist movement itself, both within the Marxist tradition and on its periphery, did bring up alternative, nonreductive models. Any attempt to revive interest in a socialist theory of nationalism must take these into account, and a few of these attempts will be mentioned here as the possible context within which a future debate about socialism and nationalism will have to take place.

In the writings of Moses Hess one can find a complement to Marx's reductivism. Despite Marx's disparaging remarks about Hess in *The Communist Manifesto*, the confluence of many of their ideas continued throughout their lives, though Hess never developed a theoretical edifice comparable to the one erected by Marx. Perhaps because he was no system builder, Hess could be more attuned to social developments happening in his own time, while Marx occasionally had to force all phenomena into the Procrustean bed of his theoretical matrix. While Hess later became known for his proto-Zionist *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862), his views on nationalism were not limited to Jewish issues but rather the other way around: because he had a general awareness of the rise of nationalism, he applied it also to things Jewish.

In his views on nationalism, Hess was close to Mazzini's thinking, which saw the nation as a laboratory for solidarity, as the fulcrum where human beings are educated to behave in nonegotistical ways, learning how to transcend their merely individual interests for the sake of communal other-directedness. Hess also viewed the national community as an element of mediation, and thus introduced a Hegelian theoretical dimension that was curiously lacking in Marx, for whom mediation was exclusively focused on class solidarity at a universal level—hardly the kind of concrete-

ness called for by a Hegelian understanding of mediation. Moreover, with the victory of the proletariat and the abolition of class differences, even this aspect would be eliminated, with only a very abstract notion of humanity holding together all humankind. Hess, on the other hand, maintains,

Nationality (*Nationalität*) is the individuality of a people. It is this individuality, however, which is the activating element; just as humanity cannot be actual (*wirklich*) without distinct individuals, so it cannot be actual without distinct, specific nations and peoples (*Nationen und Volksstämme*). Like any other being, humanity cannot actualize itself without mediation, it needs the medium of the individuality.²¹

To Hess, the revolution, which will abolish classes, will also abolish national conflicts—but not the existence of nations. Culture—mores, tradition—all have an autonomous existence related to class structure (as in the case of the uneven socioeconomic structure of the Jews in the Diaspora), but not exclusively reducible to it. The emancipation of subject nations is itself a cornerstone of the cause of proletarian revolution according to Hess, and while Marx envisages the disappearance of most nations into the larger economic units dominated by two or three European cultures, Hess postulates a postrevolutionary future in which all nations will be free and able to develop their own culture, and this will include even the smallest nation, whether it belongs to the Germanic or Romance race, to the Slavonic or Finnish, to the Celtic or the Semitic.²²

Hess's views did not have much impact (except eventually within the limited sphere of the socialist Zionist movement), yet a similar challenge was posed on a much wider scale to the Austrian socialist party. The unique contributions of Austro-Marxism to socialist theory—its introduction of nonreductivist aspects into historical and economic analysis—has often been noted, though for obvious historical reasons, it is today much less acknowledged than it should be. But on the national question, the Austrians had to face a specifically complex situation, growing out of the fact that with industrialization in Austro-Hungary the major-

ity of the proletarianized former peasants who crowded into Vienna were not of German stock and did not speak German: they were Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Croats, Slovenes, Poles, and Jews. For a socialist party (based as it originally was on German-speaking, Viennese activists) to carry out its political propaganda in German among such a polyglot non-German proletariat posed a number of excruciating problems. The party leaders realized that they might not be understood at all, literally—but worse, they might be perceived by the non-German workers as just another example of German-language hegemonism, and the socialist message would be totally lost in this misconception. As a consequence, the Austrian party decided to organize itself in different language sections, so that a worker in Vienna could join a Czech or Slovenian socialist club in which his or her language, not German, was used. This gave the overall party organization a federalist structure, in which cultural pluralism became the cornerstone of political organization and practice.

Moreover, on the theoretical level, some of the Austro-Marxists like Otto Bauer and Karl Renner also tried to relate class structure to national problems through a sophisticated historical approach. They argued, for example, that subject nations like the Czechs lost their upper classes when conquered by the German Hapsburgs—either through massacres or cultural assimilation. As a consequence, the disappearance of such national elites meant that the Czech nation remained a nation of peasants—with no social and political leadership, with no literary elite, and with economic dependence on German-speaking landlords. Capitalist development thus started with the German-speaking traditional elites, and the Czech peasant-turned-proletarian found himself subjected to a double exploitation—economic and cultural. It was the impoverished cultural sphere of the Czech lower classes that the Austrian socialist party set itself to salvage in its political and cultural activity, thus giving the Czech (or Croatian) worker both economic and cultural empowerment.

This is obviously an attractive project, and in

the Austro-Hungarian context it tried also to supply a “third way” between German-speaking hegemonism and the xenophobic nationalism of the various nationalities of the empire, whose nationalist movements were calling for the break-up of the Dual Monarchy and the establishment of numerous nation-states on its ruins. The Austro-Marxist alternative was to preserve the old empire but transform it from a hegemonic structure of national and social subjection into a federation of national and cultural groups—a model for a truly internationalist socialism in which nations are not subsumed under each other but coexist in a pluralist structure. Bauer and his colleagues also envisaged that in such a socialist federative commonwealth there would be two tiers of representation: one territorial, the other national-linguistic. The first would deal with the obvious issues common to all citizens of the territory; the second, election to which would be reserved for members of each specific group, would deal with problems of education, language, culture, historical heritage, and so on. It was in this pluralistic system that the Austro-Marxists saw a guarantee against a hegemonism imposed by the economically stronger groups (like the German-Austrians) over the weaker and less developed national entities.

The impact of these ideas can, of course, be identified in different ways in such disparate areas as the Soviet nationalities policy, the Yugoslav model, socialist Zionism, and some aspects of Quebecois and Basque nationalism.

It is in this context that Joseph Stalin deserves to be mentioned. While the political consequences of his nationalities policies as carried out by Lenin and then by himself have in many cases been catastrophic and brutally repressive, it cannot be denied that some of the smaller peoples of the Soviet Union owe a cultural revival to these principles. Although Stalin in his 1913 brochure on the nationalities problem disagreed with the Austro-Marxists with regard to the nonterritorial aspects of their nationality policy, his very definition of a nation—not always adhered to by Soviet practice—does evince a sensitivity to the cultural aspects of

nationalism and goes beyond the classical Marxian reductivist paradigm. It is worth quoting Stalin's definition of a nation:

A nation is a historically evolved stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological makeup manifested in a community of culture.²³

One should obviously be careful not to advocate a revival of interest in Stalin, but this aspect of his thought should not altogether be forgotten, especially as it is so near in its openness to the Austro-Marxist pluralist approaches in realizing the autonomy of cultural dimensions. The tragedy of the matter, however, is that the repressive nature of the Soviet state vitiated the realization of this politically pluralist program.

And last, we come to a rather unknown contribution (outside of Israel) of a Zionist socialist thinker, Chaim Arlosoroff. Born in the Ukraine, educated in Germany, emigrating in the 1920s to Palestine, Arlosoroff tried to define his Zionism in terms of a general theory of the relationship of socialism to the national question. At the age of twenty he wrote a brochure called *On Jewish People's Socialism*, owing its terms of reference both to the Russian populist and the German youth movement tradition. Before dealing with the specific Jewish problem in post-1918 Europe, Arlosoroff addressed the wider problem of the failure of the Socialist International in the summer of 1914 to maintain internationalist class solidarity. According to Arlosoroff, the blame lay with the abstract internationalism of the Marxist tradition, where general commitments to international solidarity across national boundaries were reiterated again and again—but without being anchored in a concrete mediation of institutions and behavior patterns (an argument reminiscent of Hess's insistence on mediation). The workers consequently did not find in the socialist movement a response to their concrete consciousness regarding their culture and heritage—and hence went somewhere else. In the charged atmosphere of 1919 Arlosoroff warned the socialist movement, almost prophetically, to substitute for its abstract universalism a universalism mediated

by concrete identity with historical cultures, otherwise it might lose working-class support to the right wing. For even if the worker is alienated from the elites of his society and its high culture, he does have a concrete cultural consciousness that binds him to the language and culture of his national environment:

The community of national life and destiny moves the hearts of the workers as strongly as it does that of any other member of society. He too loves his mother tongue, in which the sparse lullabies were sung to him, in which the spirit of his parents lived and created. He too loves his homeland, the people of his homeland, their manifold manners and traditions [*Sitten*], their multicolored artifacts, the sky of his homeland and the fields and towns of his fatherland. He too carries the culture of his nation within himself: his being, his emotional life, is its being, its life.²⁴

The Second International overlooked, according to Arlosoroff, this aspect of the concrete consciousness of the working class and substituted for it an abstract universalism, which was never anchored in the praxis of the proletariat. Hence its brittleness in the face of the nationalist onslaught of the summer of 1914.

Arlosoroff further warns that if the newly organized socialist movement, trying to resurrect itself after the war, will not take into account this cultural content of the concrete consciousness of proletarian life, the working class may go somewhere else—to a movement or a leader who would address these issues. Bearing in mind that this was written in 1919, the prophetic force of this statement cannot be overlooked.

Socialism has thus been burdened with an antinational bias, which drawing on the universalist ideas of the eighteenth-century enlightenment did not make it especially capable of meeting the challenges of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this blindness and in a very profound sense, Marxism shares this poverty with its rival, classical liberalism. Both, being offsprings of the universalist ideas of the Enlightenment, have difficulties in perceiving and granting legitimacy to historical entities that cannot be subsumed under purely universal criteria. Even as the proletariat is central to Marx because it is a "universal"

class, so the market is for liberalism the epitome of universal modes of human conduct.

Nationalism relates to the particular, but this particular can be woven—as it has been by the Austro-Marxists—into the universal realm. It is a mode of human communication, perhaps the

strongest mode because it relates directly to language, and modern communication is anchoring it even deeper in the concrete consciousness of human beings. For anyone thinking in communitarian terms, this is a veritable challenge. □

Notes

¹ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (Garden City, 1959), p. 345.

² In the case of Engels, condescending remarks on the nonhistorical nature of Slavonic nations added some venom to these comments. For some Yugoslav critical comments, see France Klopčič, "Friedrich Engels und Karl Marx über die 'Geschichtslosen' slawischen Nationen," *Marxismus und Geschichtswissenschaft*, ITH Tagungsbericht, vol. 19 (Wien, 1984), pp. 217–249.

³ See the introduction to my edition of Karl Marx's *On Colonialism and Modernization* (Garden City, 1968), pp. 3–31.

⁴ For some of the recent critical literature, see Walter Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, 1984) and Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism* (New York and Oxford, 1988), esp. Parts I and III.

⁵ Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1967), III, p. 39. That Trotsky is aware that such a theory does not fit into any concrete analysis of the historical emergence of capitalism is evident from the fact that he immediately remarks in the following sentence that the rise of the capitalist mode of production in the Netherlands and in England preceded the formation of national states, and that basically his generalization is drawn from the example of the German *Zollverein*.

⁶ See Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews 1862–1917* (Cambridge, 1981), esp. pp. 171–257.

⁷ A detailed list of Lenin's writings on the national issue can be found in James M. Blaut, *The National Question* (London and New York, 1987), pp. 220–221.

⁸ For a useful collection of her writings in English on these issues, see Rosa Luxemburg, *The National Question—Selected Writings*, ed. H.B. Davis (New York and London, 1976).

⁹ The most important texts are "Report of the Commission on the Nationalities and Colonial Question," "The Question of the Nationalities," and notes for a lecture on "Imperialism and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in V.I. Lenin, *Works* (Moscow, 1965).

¹⁰ For a recent Soviet restatement of Lenin's position, cogently argued and trying to distinguish national liberation movements from "bourgeois" nationalisms, see K.N. Brutens, *National Liberation Movements Today* (Moscow, 1977), 2 vols. An earlier attempt by a sympathetic Western

observer to vindicate internal Soviet policies on the nationality problem can be found in an almost forgotten volume by Hans Kohn, *Nationalism in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1933).

¹¹ John Ehrenreich, "The Theory of Nationalism: A Case of Underdevelopment," *Monthly Review*, vol. 27, 1 (1977): 67. See also his "Socialism, Nationalism and Capitalist Development," *Review of Radical Political Economists*, vol. 15, 1 (1983): 1–40, where he says that "Marxists have failed in their efforts at incorporating the reality of nationalism into their theoretical understanding, and . . . this failure is deeply rooted in the nature of Marxist thought itself."

¹² Régis Debray, "Marxism and the National Question," *New Left Review*, 105 (1977): 25.

¹³ Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London, 1978), pp. 97 ff.

¹⁴ Horace B. Davis, *Towards a Marxist Theory of Nationalism* (New York and London, 1978), pp. 202–40, 189–191.

¹⁵ Blaut, *The National Question*.

¹⁶ Brian Jenkins and Günter Minnerup, *Citizens and Comrades-Socialism in a World of Nation States* (London and Sydney, 1984), pp. 144–145.

¹⁷ Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," *New Left Review*, 94 (1975): 17.

¹⁸ Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain?* (London, 1977), p. 329.

¹⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, "Some Reflections on *The Break-Up of Britain?*" *New Left Review*, 105 (1977): 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

²¹ Article in the *Kölnische Zeitung*, 14 October 1843, in Moses Hess, *Philosophische und sozialistische Schriften 1837–1850*, ed. W. Mönke, 2nd ed. (Berlin-DDR/Vaduz, 1980), p. 251.

²² *Rom und Jerusalem*, in Moses Hess, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. H. Lademacher (Köln, 1962), p. 320. In his vision of a Jewish socialist commonwealth in Palestine, Hess accompanies this with a call for the resurrection of independent Arab states in Syria and Egypt. See my *Moses Hess: Prophet of Communism and Zionism* (New York, 1985), p. 228.

²³ Quoted according to the German text of Stalin's brochure, *Der Marxismus und die nationale Frage* (Vienna, 1913), pp. 10–11.

²⁴ Viktor Chaim Arlosoroff, *Der jüdische Volkssozialismus* (Berlin, 1919), p. 11.