

# Nationalism and Internationalism

Jack Woddis

In dealing with nationalism and internationalism today we are touching on one of the most complex and important aspects of the world process to socialism. The relationship between the national and international tasks facing working people, between the thrust of each people to achieve its own revolution and the mutually beneficial and voluntary co-operation of nations for their common aims and to safeguard their own particular interests has sometimes been bedevilled by twin errors, each of which feeds the other.

Thus, for some, the international has primacy over the national. For others, it is the national cause which predominates. The former leads to hierarchical conceptions and to big-nation chauvinism; the latter to narrow nationalism and isolationism. Only by grasping the essential unity of the national and the international, the inter-dependent character of their relationship, can we fruitfully discuss the problems that have surfaced in the realm of relations between socialist states.

For us, in Britain, the problem is, perhaps, rendered more difficult because of the traditional attitude taken by the English working class towards the national question, an attitude which finds its reflection in the approach of many communists. It takes the form of a rejection of other people's national identity, aspirations and problems, and a refusal to recognise one's own national question. This failure to take proper account of one's own national problem is expressed in two forms. Either there is an indulgence in leftist rhetoric, of being concerned with "socialism not nationalism"—a view which Marx described as a kind of "bourgeois-nationalist internationalism". Or we have the lapse into crude, narrow-minded jingoism and chauvinism.

At the risk, therefore, of saying things which, in other circumstances, might be reasonably obvious, I think it is necessary to make some preliminary

remarks regarding nationalism and socialist construction before touching on other aspects of this area.

## Class and Nation

To understand the relation of the national question to socialism it is necessary to understand the relationship between class and nation.

The nation is a reality. As a form of human community it evolves historically, on a given territory. It develops a common language and a common culture, and builds up a common economic structure. Different social classes, in totality, comprise the nation. For socialists and communists the question cannot be posed in terms of class versus nation. Rather, it is a question as to which class or classes are to be the decisive and guiding force in the nation. In whose class interests is the nation to be governed?

The working class cannot be indifferent to the nation. As Marx and Engels put it in *The Communist Manifesto* over 130 years ago:

"Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is *at first a national struggle*. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie." (Own italics.)

And, once again, the working class "must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself *the nation*". Developing this point, Lenin, in 1908, wrote:

"The fatherland, i.e. the given political, cultural, and social environment, is *the most powerful factor* in the class struggle of the proletariat (own italics). The proletariat cannot be indifferent to and unconcerned about the political, social and cultural conditions of its struggle and, consequently, cannot

remain indifferent to the fate of its country." (Vol. 15, pp. 171-2)

Of course, Lenin made the necessary qualification regarding the need for the working class not to be led astray by abstract formulations about the defence of the fatherland, but to examine each proposition historically, only in connection with others, and only in connection with the concrete experience of history. All this notwithstanding, it is essential not to forget Lenin's point about the nation as "the most powerful factor in the class struggle of the proletariat".

No people can construct socialism in the abstract. They can only build socialism on a specific territory, and within a given framework of the historic conditions, language, culture, national psychology and economic relations of the people living on that territory.

Moreover, the building of socialism requires the widest participation of the working people. But it is only when the working people of a given country themselves determine their economic and political aims that they are able to participate consciously and actively in accomplishing them.

### Respect for Sovereignty

The national question is, therefore, very much a democratic question, since it involves the rights of working people to determine their own affairs. This they cannot do completely if they suffer in any way, even to a limited degree, infringements on their national rights by another dominant nation.

As it was put in the 1961 edition of the *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*:

"No one can know better the requirements and potentialities of a given socialist nation than that nation itself, no one can more correctly take into consideration the specific features of its economic, political and cultural development.

"That is why any interference from the outside, even if dictated by the best of intentions, can prove not only out of place, but even harmful to the building of socialism in a given country." (pp. 770-1)

Thus mutual respect for national sovereignty is a necessary condition for the development of socialism in one country or another.

Does such respect for national sovereignty hinder internationalism and hold back the process of countries drawing closer together? On the contrary, the observance of the equality and sovereignty of nations is essential precisely to ensure that they draw closer together. Only when they are really free and equal, when no nation encroaches on the independence of another, is it possible to build relations of sincere trust and so take the path of voluntary co-operation.

At the same time international solidarity and

joint struggle of the international working class and democratic movement cannot be left for spontaneous growth. There needs to be a conscious and consistent effort to attain the international ideals set out in the *Communist Manifesto* which calls attention to a major distinguishing feature of communists, as follows:

"In the national struggles of the proletarians of different countries they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat independently of all nationality."

### Internationalism

The Manifesto summed up the concept of working class internationalism in the historic words: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite."

In other words, when we communists speak about working class internationalism we are not referring simply to elementary solidarity between workers of different countries during strikes, but to something quite different: "A world to win". That is to say, a recognition that the fight of each national contingent of working people for socialism is part of a world wide struggle because, as Lenin said: "Capitalist domination is international".

Today, this is more true than ever. This does not mean that a mere repetition of the historic slogan of the *Communist Manifesto* solves all problems. We live in a world which is very different from that of 1848. The necessity to adapt tactics and slogans was already evident in the post October 1917 period.

At the end of 1920, on December 6th, in a speech to Communist Party members in Moscow, Lenin recalled that at the Congress of the Communist International in Moscow he had said that the whole world was divided into oppressed and oppressing nations—the former comprising 70 per cent of the world's population. "We are really acting now", he said, "not only as representatives of the proletarians of all countries, but also as representatives of the oppressed peoples." He then referred to a new journal, and drew attention to its new slogan: "Workers of all countries and oppressed nations, unite!" He revealed that one comrade had asked: "When did the Executive Committee decide on a change of slogans?" Lenin commented: "Indeed, I cannot remember any such decision. And, of course, from the standpoint of the *Communist Manifesto* this is wrong, but then the *Communist Manifesto* was written under totally different conditions. From the standpoint of present-day politics, this slogan is correct."<sup>1</sup>

What Lenin said in 1920 is even more true today.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 453.

The world-wide anti-imperialist movement, a movement which is carried forward ever more emphatically, embraces the socialist states, the national liberation movement and the working class and its democratic allies in the capitalist states. Today internationalism requires the unity of these three powerful revolutionary streams.

### National Roads

All the above considerations govern our approach to the question of national roads to socialism. The taking of national roads to the assumption of working class power and the construction of socialism is not something which is decided subjectively by individual Communist Parties. It arises naturally out of the specific struggles of the working people in each country, out of their own history and striving, out of the concrete circumstances and traditions of the given country, and is conditioned by the interplay of international factors, too. In taking its own, specific road to socialism, each working class and nation asserts its right to make its own choice, to build socialism in the forms it considers most appropriate for itself.

Naturally enough, having set out on such a road, it will also do what it can to defend the road it has taken whatever the form of interference it may face, and from whatever quarter such interference may come.

Differences and conflicts between socialist countries have a number of causes. In part they arise because of ideological differences, although primarily there are other, objective and perhaps more weighty reasons.

One factor is the different approaches and views of the ruling parties, i.e. Communist Parties, which themselves arise because of the different conditions in which they are working for socialism in their respective countries. West European countries are not yet socialist but when they reach that stage the approach they take towards building socialism, which arises from the specific conditions and traditions of developed capitalist countries, could well be a source of disagreement and tension between some of them and existing socialist countries if one is to judge on the basis of current polemics on the subject of "Eurocommunism". At present the difference is expressed in political argument, but if some of the West European countries were socialist, and the Communist Parties had a weighty position in government in those countries, there could well be tension on the State level, too.

### Other Factors

Differences of view also arise because of objectively different interests of the various socialist countries, interests which at times appear to be opposed to one another. It is only proper that a

Communist Party, with roots amongst its own people, with a desire to help its working people achieve a new life, with a desire to develop the national economy and the national culture as far as possible, should look after the national interest and see that it is safeguarded. This principle still pertains under conditions of socialism. There is nothing wrong about this; on the contrary, it would be strange if a Communist Party did not look after the interests of its own working people, of its own nation. The problem only arises when the interests of the working people of one nation appear to come into conflict with those of another nation.

For example, the proposed Mekong Development Project, a huge system of hydro-electric and flood control dams involving Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea and Thailand was apparently resisted by the Pol Pot government in Kampuchea on the grounds that Vietnam and Thailand would benefit, but that Kampuchea would suffer ecological alteration and population displacement. That there should be differences of view about this project is not at all strange. I am in no position to say whether Kampuchea's criticisms were correct or not. She certainly had a right to express them, and to decide on her attitude according to her assessment of the facts. So here was an apparent conflict of interests between two socialist countries.

On a different level, but illustrating the same kind of problem, there are opposing views expressed by the French and Spanish Communist Parties concerning Spain's entry into the EEC. The French Communist Party is against, arguing that it would cause immense damage to the interests of French peasants in the south, as well as to the textile industry and sections of engineering. The Spanish Communist Party is for entry, arguing that it is in the interests of the Spanish working people. If these two Parties were key components of their respective governments, then there would clearly be an expression of this difference at the State level.

The point I am making is that genuine conflicts of interest can arise, conflicts which can involve Communist Parties being found in opposition to one another. The existence of socialist states does not rule out such problems. In fact, Lenin once said that *long after world socialism was achieved* national differences would continue to assert themselves. Experience has certainly borne this out—and this observation of Lenin's is, in a certain sense, a necessary qualification of the argument used by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* when they wrote:

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

within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end."

True enough in general, but in terms of the time required to achieve such a state of bliss this is possibly open to too optimistic an interpretation. It is not only that *ideas* of separate national interests cling on long after the bourgeoisie has been vanquished; but even during the building of socialism there can be differences of interest as between one socialist state and another, as we have seen only too well.

This in itself is not a tragedy. In any case, it is a fact of life. The tragedy arises when a socialist state allows its correct and natural concern to safeguard its own national interests to become distorted into an attempt to advance national claims and ambitions at the expense of another socialist state, even to the extent of backing up its aims by economic or political pressure, or even by the threat or the actual use of armed force.

### The National Question

There are three other fields in which differences between socialist states can find expression.

First, there is the national question itself. Historical evolution has resulted throughout the world in contradictions between state boundaries and national formations. As a consequence problems of state frontiers sometimes arise; and furthermore, within the frontiers of a particular state there may exist a national minority whose national brothers and sisters live in substantial numbers within the state boundaries of a neighbouring state. As a consequence there can be claims and counter claims made by neighbouring states as regards territory occupied by people of similar national origin. Such problems exist in Africa, Latin America and Asia. They exist in Europe, too. Between capitalist states these questions frequently lead, naturally enough, to attempts to "solve" them by force.

Such problems can arise between socialist states, too. Leaving aside the question of South East Asia, national problems between socialist states in Europe have also found expression over the past 30 years or more. Thus, in assertion of national claims, the Soviet Union, during the second world war, incorporated Carpatho-Ukraine (or Ruthenia) which, up to then, had been part of the Czechoslovak State; a large part of the Polish State on the grounds of it being really territory of the Ukraine and Byelorussia; and adding part of what had been Romanian territory, i.e. Bessarabia, to the existing Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, claiming it as part of Moldavia. At least in the latter case, such action may well have given rise to feelings of grievance on the part of the smaller of the two States involved, thus causing an aggravation in relations

between socialist states, thereby weakening their solidarity. National problems of this kind have not yet been eliminated in Eastern Europe. There is, for example, the well-known conflict between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria on the Macedonian question. There are problems, too, concerning the position of the Hungarian minority in Romania.

If we consider one or two other examples relating to countries which are not yet socialist we can see again how such problems can arise and so cut across the essential solidarity between progressive and socialist states. Thus, there has been a long-standing conflict between the Japanese Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union concerning the Japanese islands that were taken over by the Soviet Union at the end of the second world war. If, by the time Japan becomes socialist, this problem has not been solved, then there will clearly be a State problem between the two Socialist states which could give rise to acute tension. Again, we have seen the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden territory, a conflict which led to war between the two States. The two states in question were led by military forces which, in both cases, stated that they were inspired by the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. We need not accept such protestations on the part of such governments, but the existence of claims and counter-claims concerning national rights and national territory could still arise when these states become socialist.

There is a similar problem as regards Morocco and Western Sahara. The people of Western Sahara, led by Polisario, are conducting an armed struggle in order to exercise what they consider is their right to self-determination and to establish their own independent state. The reactionary state of Morocco is trying to crush this national movement. Many communist parties in the world support Polisario, but the Party in Morocco itself supports its own government on this question. So again, a situation could arise in the future of a socialist government in Morocco being in conflict with a socialist government in Western Sahara.

### Internal Interference

A second field of conflicts between socialist states arises when one state, for whatever reason, interferes or attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of another socialist state. There were a number of obvious examples of this in Eastern Europe after the second world war, including the instigation of the trials and mass repression, the "ex-communication" of Yugoslavia, the events connected with the return of Gomulka in 1956, and the economic policy pursued by the Soviet Union towards the East European socialist states and which was the subject of self-criticism by the Soviet Government and the Central Committee of the CPSU in their joint

statement of 1956. Such interferences have not been confined to that period, and naturally enough they cause tension between socialist states.

Similar problems can arise when one of the States is not yet Socialist. Thus there has been a long-standing problem between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Japanese Communist Party concerning the support which has been given by the CPSU to a small, unrepresentative group around Shiga who were expelled from the Japanese Communist Party for working against Party decisions and voting in Parliament against Party policy. Fortunately, recent discussions between the two Parties indicate that this long-standing problem is near to solution.

This experience indicates that problems of interference of this sort, if they arise between Communist Parties in two Socialist countries, could lead to State differences as well.

The difficulties that arose in the case of Japan are unfortunately not confined to relations between the CPSU and the Japanese Communist Party. There have been other instances of such interference, despite the fact that documents of the International Communist Movement have called for *strict* adherence to the principles of relations between Communist Parties and Socialist States, principles which include the question of non-interference in internal affairs. When such interference is carried out by the Communist Party of one Socialist country in the internal affairs of the Communist Party of another Socialist country, State relations become strained and new difficulties arise.

### Ideological Conflicts

Many of the problems dealt with above come to a head in connection with ideological conflicts which centre around two basic questions. One is the concept of what has come to be known as the "single model" of socialism; the other is the complex of ideas connected with what is known as "the primacy of the international" over the "national", or more often the "theory of limited sovereignty".

First, on the "single model". In a certain sense there is no disagreement here. Nearly 60 years ago, Lenin, in his "*Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*", advised the Communist Parties that they could only conduct a successful struggle if they took into account "*the definite peculiar features*" of the struggle in each country which arise from the specific features of its economic life, politics, culture, national composition, religious divisions and so on.

Thus Lenin set out very early on in the history of the Communist International a concept which today we refer to as taking of different national roads to socialism. This idea has also found expression in international conferences and documents, including the international conference of 1969, the

Brussels Conference of West European Communist Parties in 1974, and the Berlin Conference of European Parties in 1976.

Notwithstanding the apparent theoretical acceptance of these ideas, in practice there have been difficulties. Naturally, Parties have a right to hold and express ideas about other Parties—and it is hoped that when they do so they will act with a sense of responsibility and solidarity. But to go beyond the expression of ideas, to try to exert political influence on another Party in order to change its policy or even its leading personnel, is a clear case of intervention. When such pressures are backed up by other sanctions this is still more reprehensible. When such relations begin to develop between socialist States the most acute tension can occur.

No Party and no socialist State has any right to interfere in the affairs of another. Even the claim that it is to safeguard socialism and to prevent a socialist state deserting its principles is no justification, because, in any case, who is to decide who is faithful to socialism and who is not? No Party can have special privileges, no matter how strong or experienced it may be. The idea of a leading Party or a leading socialist State is no longer acceptable in the international movement; and any attempt to impose such hegemony is bound to lead to tension and conflict.

Dealing with these problems in a recent article in *L'Unita*, Luciano Gruppi argues that not enough has been done to develop one of the key ideas of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, namely the growing differentiation of the revolutionary processes, which is "the basis for a new internationalism". He writes:

"When a difference in political line occurs, a struggle for a determined goal becomes inevitable. This manifests itself inside parties and in the relations between parties. When this is true for States the struggle becomes inevitable. At this point the logic of the State prevails over other considerations and that hits internationalism at the foundations. Hence actual conflicts.

"I speak of supremacy and the struggle for supremacy. I do not speak of imperialism, because this corresponds to a different economic structure, to the laws of the export of capital and the conquest of markets. . . ."

The most outstanding example of interference by one socialist state in the affairs of another was that of the intervention, by heavy armed action followed by direct political interference, carried out by the Soviet Union, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria in Czechoslovakia in 1968/69.

I do not wish to examine this problem in detail today. In any case, time forbids. But it is relevant

to today's discussion insofar as it illustrates how ideas of a "single model" and of the primacy of the international over the national can cause tension and eventually acute conflict between socialist states.

### Voluntary Co-operation

As I have explained earlier, international solidarity between socialist states is only possible on the basis of *voluntary* co-operation, equality, independence, and non-interference. International solidarity cannot be imposed. On the contrary, internationalism demands above all that each nation, each national contingent of working people, makes its first duty that of carrying through its own socialist revolution. That is why, in the main document adopted at the international Communist conference in Moscow in 1969 one can read:

"The winning of power by the working class and its allies is the greatest contribution which a Communist Party fighting under capitalist conditions can make to the cause of socialism and proletarian internationalism."

This brings us back again to the question of the relation of each national struggle for socialism to the common interests of all peoples striving for socialism, the relation of the national to the international.

There is no doubt that practices and habits of thought connected with the past, and especially with the Communist International, still play their part.

Dealing with this problem, Aleksandar Grlickov, head of the international department of the League of Yugoslav Communists, points out that during the period of the Comintern there was a "uniform political line, uniform strategy and tactics, democratic centralism on a world scale and monolithic unity based on the latter, as well as international class discipline".<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, he argues, both in theory and practice there was a strengthening of hierarchical relations between the national and the international. Priority was accorded to the international, with the national revolutionary forces reduced to being mere detachments of a unified, international organisation. The problem today, he states, is that although such a monolithic international organisation no longer exists, "basically the old theoretical model has not yet been rejected and replaced by a new one which would correspond to the newly created revolutionary conditions". Consequently, despite some adjustments, the substance of the former concepts of the relations between the national and international "still persist in present-day relationships".

My own opinion is that this presentation is too

one-sided. This is not to pretend that such views which Grlickov correctly criticises do not still exist, even with considerable weight. Yet the whole trend of our times surely is that socialist states and Communist Parties are *having to* establish their relations on a new basis, that the whole of the past 35 years has been marked by strains in the international movement precisely because of the agonising, painful and often bitter striving towards and searching for a new relationship.

### A New Relationship

The 7th World Congress of the CI in 1935, the dissolution of the CI in 1943, the "excommunication" of Tito and Yugoslavia in 1948, the Belgrade Declaration of 1955, the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, the Statement of the CPSU and Soviet Government in 1956, the Soviet-Yugoslav Declaration of 1958, the break with China in the early 1960s, Czechoslovakia 1968, the international Communist Conference in 1969, the emergence of new roads to socialism in developed capitalist countries in the 1970s (of which our own *British Road to Socialism* was a proud precursor in many ways), the Brussels Conference of West European Communist Parties in 1974, the Berlin Conference of all European Communist Parties in 1976, Vietnam's struggle for independence—what are these if not the birthpangs of a new pattern of relations, an attempt to establish a correct relationship between the national and the international, an attempt which is sometimes bitterly fought out because it has to be carried on often in the face of dogmatic resistance, and because it is an attempt being made in a complex world in which, despite all the differences, the communist, revolutionary and progressive forces, and especially the socialist states, have to combine their efforts against the hostility and aggressive intentions of the imperialist powers.

### The Role of Imperialism

Furthermore, imperialism itself works all the time to utilise the divisions that exist between socialist states. And as long as imperialism exists there will remain the danger that differences between socialist countries will be distorted, manipulated and inflamed, even to the point of armed action by one socialist state against another.

An examination of US policy towards Vietnam, Kampuchea and China since 1945 (and even earlier) certainly bears this out. In an important survey appearing in *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, September-October, 1978, Lowell Finley asserts that long before the US final defeat in Saigon in 1975 a "sweeping reassessment" of US policy was underway.

"Leading the conversion," writes Finley, "were Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and top US military leaders in the Pacific, who saw an oppor-

<sup>2</sup> A. Grlickov: *Socialist Thought and Practice*, April 1977, pp. 3-36.

tunity to exploit the growing Sino-Soviet rift. By playing the Chinese against the Soviets, they hoped to gain greater leverage in US relations with both. They also hoped to drive a wedge between both the Soviet Union and China, on the one hand, and Vietnam on the other." He goes on to explain that a key part of this new US policy would be "US support for China against Vietnam". He adds that, "From the start, Kampuchea played a prominent role in the calculations".

In support of his argument he cites a quite extraordinary article by arch-reactionary Joseph Alsop (*Readers' Digest*, December 1975) which refers to the Vietnamese "threat" to China.

As if to prepare the US people for taking action against Vietnam, Alsop warns that unless China is able to stop Vietnam the rest of South-East Asia would be threatened "and the whole hard-won American position in the Western Pacific will begin to founder".

Alsop's article is clearly sympathetic to Kampuchea under Pol Pot and this, according to Lowell Finley, was to prepare the American people "for the mind-boggling prospect of de facto US support, via China, for communist Kampuchea against communist Vietnam". Alsop concludes the argument with these words:

"If all this seems bewildering, it is because a wholly new political game—begun soon after the fall of Saigon—is under way in Asia."

Remember that Alsop wrote as far back as December 1975.

No one pretends that imperialism is the *cause* of differences arising between socialist countries; but neither should we ignore the existence of imperialism and its inevitable attempt to utilise and exaggerate such differences whenever they arise.

We have always said capitalism causes war, socialism brings peace. Do the recent conflicts between socialist countries, which have involved the use of arms, invalidate this argument? First, as far as capitalism is concerned, the whole of its epoch has been one of wars, becoming particularly destructive in the 20th century. Moreover, the main threat to peace today, the main threat to the independence of nations, and the major obstacle to complete and general disarmament, are the major capitalist states which are the driving force behind the ever-mounting arms build-up.

As for the socialist states, as long as they remain socialist and follow socialist policies in their relations with one another, the trend of their policy will be one of peace, not war. It is only when socialist principles are violated, when national chauvinism, a striving for hegemony or supremacy, begins to take over that serious conflicts arise between socialist countries.

### Overcoming the Problems

In conclusion, I would like to say that although we are acting as a seminar and are not a policy-making body, it would be un-Marxist for us to limit ourselves to analysing the problems without expressing some views as to how to overcome them. We already have a set of principles governing relations between socialist states, as set out in the Soviet-Yugoslav/Belgrade document of 1955, the Statement of the CPSU and the Soviet Government in 1956, the Moscow Declaration of 1958 of the CPSU and the LCY, the main document of the 1969 international communist conference, and the document of the 1976 Berlin Conference. These principles, if implemented, provide for safeguarding the sovereign rights of each socialist state as well as their equality and independence, while ensuring non-interference and, at the same time, providing for their international solidarity.

These principles, if implemented, lay the basis for stopping interference, for reconciling conflicting state interests, for overcoming problems in the realm of nationalities and the national question.

But there is no guarantee that this will happen. On the contrary, experience shows, as Lenin predicted, that national and national-State differences will continue to assert themselves. The task is to strive to ensure that such clashes of view and/or of interest, do not lead to open conflict, to the use of arms to settle the problem, but that every possible effort be made to carry out these principles in life.

In the above-mentioned article in *L'Unita*, Luciano Gruppi asks: "What then must be done?" He goes on to suggest: "There should be a great movement in defence of peace, which affirms the right of people to their independence and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of States. On this basis the solution of current conflicts can be demanded".

And he then calls on the Communist Parties in Europe to provide a "positive example of international relations and so make a contribution, which is not easy or near, to a new internationalism".

### A Cautious Note

I think Gruppi is right to end on this cautious note about things being "not easy or near". As I have tried to show, the problems arise out of the soil of the revolutionary process; they are compounded of influences from the past, present-day structures, and a constant but not always clear pressing forward by each people, each nation, each state, to a new future. Amidst the welter of conflicting conceptions and conflicting interests, of misunderstandings and distortions, the common interest of working people everywhere—for peace, national liberation, democracy and socialism—increasingly asserts itself.

We have no magic formula for solving the problems we have discussed this weekend. But we can, nevertheless, make our modest contribution not only in theory but above all, in practice, to strengthen internationalism, bearing in mind always, the advice of Marx that "only free nations are

capable of fulfilling their international obligations"; and the advice of Engels that "to ensure international peace, it is necessary, in the first place, to eliminate all possible forms of national friction, and every people must be independent and master in its own country".

## Discussion

### Paul Fauvet

The problem with Jack Woddis's definition of a nation is that it just doesn't fit large areas of the world. The development of a common language and a common culture are included as necessary characteristics of a nation: by that definition, then, a great many of the entities seated at the United Nations aren't nations at all. And the definition is almost totally inapplicable to sub-Saharan Africa. The problem is that the national question as formulated by Marx and later by Lenin was Eurocentric. The founders of marxism were looking at Central Europe and at Poland. The very concept of "nationhood" that they were examining had been formed through the specific trajectory of European history, and particularly through European bourgeois revolutions. There is no reason why that concept of nationhood should be universal.

This has obvious implications for that much-loved Leninist slogan about the "right of nations to self-determination". If "nations" as Lenin understood them are not a universal phenomenon, then their right to self-determination is unlikely to be an eternally correct political principle. The demand for self-determination for Poland or Finland in the early part of this century cannot be equated with, say, the demand for Eritrean self-determination. You are simply not comparing like with like.

### Howard Smith

Existing socialist societies are no more or less than the product of their current stage of historical development, which has occurred in a real and complex global historical context. I accept as necessary to the application of Marxist theory the predominance given to the nature of the economic base in determining the broad category into which any given society is placed.

Recognition that the capacity, function and performance of the state may in practice be at variance with the historic character of the (temporarily) established economic base of a given society, requires that the term state be used to convey a precise and defined concept or element of society. If the term state is used loosely and taken as including wider concepts such as nation, people, country or

even movement, instead of being confined to refer to the system of class rule, then that potential variance cannot be accommodated within one's analysis and understanding. The consequences are either the "traditional" condemnation as "not socialist" of societies whose victory over imperialism one recently celebrated, or a newer tendency to question the validity of describing as socialist any society which has not yet made great strides along the road of socialist development. I would argue that both these responses are fatalistic—the former positive and the latter negative—and do not assist a Marxist understanding of social progress. Rather our interest should be directed towards an objective analysis of the capacity of the state, in a given socialist society, to develop that society along a socialist path. If that state is seen as the instrument of the victorious class or classes, then our analysis must investigate the dynamic relationship between the state and the class or popular movement whose instrument it should be.

#### Interview with Nicos Poulantzas

Unfortunately, due to postal delays, Nicos Poulantzas was unable to see the finalised text of the interview before it went to press.

## SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please post "Marxism Today" to me every month. I enclose:

£5.10 for one year UK and Eire

£7.00 for one year Abroad

(Delete the line which does not apply)

Name .....

Address .....

Post with remittance to:

**CENTRAL BOOKS LTD.**

14 The Leathermarket, London SE1 3ER