

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS OF EMANCIPATION

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1. The persistent neglect of the national question.

ONE of the greatest impediments to the development of the much needed radical mass movement of the future is the persistent neglect of the national question in socialist ideology.

The reasons for this neglect had arisen both from some contingent but far-reaching historical determinations and from the complicated theoretical legacy of the past. Moreover, given the nature of the issues involved, the two happen to be closely intertwined.

As regards the practical/historical determinations, we must remember first of all that the formation of modern nations has been accomplished under the class leadership of the bourgeoisie. This development took place in accord with the socioeconomic imperatives inherent in the self-expansionary drive of the multiplicity of capitals from their originally very limited local settings toward ever greater territorial control, in ever-intensifying conflicts with one another, culminating in two devastating world wars in the twentieth century and in the potential annihilation of humankind in our own time.

A great thinker of the enlightened bourgeoisie, like Kant, perceived at a very early stage of the system's unfolding the immense danger of such conflicts and violent confrontations. He postulated the ideal solution of a coming "*perpetual peace*" among the rivals, within the framework of a universally beneficial "cosmopolitan order" and its "League of Nations". However, the solution stipulated by this great figure of the German Enlightenment was a noble illusion: a pure "ought to be". For Kant hypostatized that his "perpetual peace" was bound to prevail thanks to the "commercial spirit" – a concept he adopted from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. In reality, though, it was precisely the ultimately destructive and monopoly-producing struggle for economic and political domination, begotten by the idealized "commercial spirit", which necessarily resulted in the ravages of imperialism.

At a more advanced stage of capitalistic developments, when the bourgeois order was firmly consolidated in Europe and in North America, and at the same time most active in subjugating the rest of the world to the expanding empires of the dominant nations, Hegel offered an incomparably more realistic conception of the ongoing transformations than Kant, fully in tune with his war-torn age. But the philosophical justification offered by him for the prevailing and progressively more antagonistic state of affairs on an ever-extended scale was no less idealizing than the wishfully postulated solution of his philosophical ancestor. For Hegel had no theoretical difficulty, nor moral qualms at all, about accepting the complete domination of smaller nations by the "world historical nations". Nor indeed did Hegel concern himself with the tenability (or ultimately suicidal untenability) of the endless succession of wars in the future, with their increasingly more destructive modern weaponry "invented by thought and the universal"¹ which he considered both necessary and morally commendable.² All of that could be readily subsumed under the lofty concept of the self-realizing "world spirit", thereby removing all theoretical obstacles from categorically decreeing that "The *nation state* is mind in its substantive rationality and immediate actuality and is therefore the *absolute power on earth*."³

The system of inter-state relations constituted under the self-expansionary imperatives of capital could only be incurably iniquitous. It had to enforce and constantly reinforce the highly privileged position of the imperialistically poised handful of nations, and in complete contrast, it had to impose at the same time, with all available means, including the most vio-

¹ *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Translated by T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1942, p. 212

² In a biting comment on Kant's views Hegel insisted that "Corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged, let alone 'perpetual' peace." *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³ *Ibid.* p.212.

lent “systematically invented” ones, a structurally subordinate predicament on all of the other nations. This way of articulating the international order prevailed not only against smaller nations but even when the countries concerned had incomparably larger populations than their foreign oppressors, as for instance India under the British Empire. As regards the colonized nations, their conditions of economic and political dependency were ruthlessly enforced upon them by the dominant imperialist powers, thanks also to the subservient complicity of their indigenous ruling classes. Characteristically, therefore, the “postcolonial” changes had no difficulty whatsoever in reproducing, in all substantive relations, the earlier modes of domination, even if in a formally somewhat modified way, thereby perpetuating the long-established system of structural domination and dependency all the way down to the present. As the major Filipino historian and political thinker, Renato Constantino pointed out about his country’s experience:

“When the American forces invaded our infant Republic, unspeakable atrocities were committed to quell our forebears’ fierce resistance. In a sense, it was easier to fight the enemy at that time because it was a clear presence, with a visible cruel and malevolent face. ... The formal hoisting of the Philippine flag in 1946 did not really change things. The age of direct colonialisms was immediately followed by the period of neocolonial control, when the North, through its ideology of free trade, continued to hold (as it still does) the levers of power.”⁴

This is why Constantino – reminiscent of Lenin’s assertion of the legitimate self-defensive nationalism of the oppressed nations⁵ – stressed in an interview given to *Le Monde* that “Nationalism remains today an imperative for the peoples of the South. It is a *protection* in that it allows to assert one’s sovereign rights, and it is a framework to *defend oneself* against the practices of the North for dominance. Nationalism does not mean withdrawal into oneself: it has to be open; but for that it must presuppose a *new world order* which – in contrast to what we see today – does not consist in the hegemony of a super-power and its allies, without respect for the young nations.”⁶

Only through the force of a monumental miracle could have capitalistic inter-state relations of structural domination and subordination become significantly different from the way in which they actually turned out to be in the course of historical development. For capital, as the controlling force of the economic and social reproduction process, cannot be other than strictly hierarchical and authoritarian in its innermost determinations even in the most privileged imperialist countries. How could therefore a social and political system – characterized in its capitalist variety by the “authoritarianism of the workshop and the tyranny of the market” (Marx) – be equitable on the international plane? Capital’s absolute necessity to dominate internally its own labour force may well be compatible with granting some limited privileges to its indigenous working population, for the purpose of chauvinistic mystification, from the extra margin of exploitative advantage derived from imperialist domination. But such practices do not introduce even the smallest degree of equality into the capital/labour relationship of the privileged imperialist country in which capital fully retains, and must always retain, the

⁴ Renato Constantino, “Time Warp”, *Manila Bulletin*, June 16, 1996.

⁵ “an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must be necessarily made between *the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation*”. In “The question of nationalities or ‘autonomization’.”, Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 36, p. 607.

Moreover, Lenin adopted the general principle spelled out by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, according to which the only way to redress the violations of equality is to make “equality unequal”, that is: favouring the disadvantaged. As Lenin had put it: “it is better to overdo rather than underdo the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities. That is why, in this case, the fundamental interest of proletarian solidarity, and consequently of the proletarian class struggle, requires that we never adopt a formal attitude to the national question, but always take into account the specific attitude of the proletariat of the oppressed (or small) nations towards the oppressor (or great) nation.” *Ibid.*, p. 609.

⁶ “Un entretien avec Renato Constantino”, *Le Monde*, February 8, 1994.

power of decision making on all substantive issues. To suggest, therefore, that despite such unalterable internal structural determinations the external – inter-state – relations of the system could be other than wholly iniquitous would be quite absurd. For it would be tantamount to pretending that what is by its very nature deeply iniquitous produces genuine equality under the further aggravating conditions of necessarily enforced foreign domination.

Understandably, therefore, the socialist response to such a system had to be spelled out in terms of a most radical negation, stressing the need for a qualitatively different relationship among the great variety of nations, large and small, on the basis of the supersession of the prevailing antagonisms within the framework of a genuinely co-operative international order. The matter was, however, greatly complicated – and in reality gravely affected in the twentieth century – by the tragic circumstance that the first successful revolution which projected the socialist transformation of society broke out in tsarist Russia. For this country happened to be an oppressive multinational empire: a fact that significantly contributed to its characterization by Lenin as “the weakest link of the chain of imperialism”, and as such a positive asset to the potential outbreak of the revolution: an assessment in which he has been proved completely right. But the other side of the same coin was that not only the grave socioeconomic backwardness represented immense problems for the future but also the terrible legacy of the oppressive multinational empire.

The failure to properly address the potentially explosive contradictions of national iniquity after Lenin’s death carried with it devastating consequences for the future, ultimately resulting in the breakup of the Soviet Union. The contrast between Lenin’s and Stalin’s approach to these problems could not have been greater. Lenin always advocated the right of the various national minorities to full autonomy, “to the point of secession”, whereas Stalin degraded them to nothing more than “border regions”, to be retained at all cost, in strictest subordination to the interests of Russia. This is why Lenin condemned him in no uncertain terms, insisting that if the views advocated by Stalin prevailed, in that case “the *‘freedom to secede from the union’* by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist”.⁷ He underlined the gravity of the damage caused by the policies pursued and clearly named the culprits: “The political responsibility for all this truly Great-Russian nationalist campaign must, of course, be laid on Stalin and Dzerzhinsky.”⁸

Lenin never ceased to emphasise the importance of the full, not only formal but substantive, equality of all national groups. He repeatedly stressed not only the seriousness of the ongoing violations of proletarian international solidarity but also kept reiterating the Marxian point about the need to make “equality unequal” in favour of those who are disadvantaged and oppressed:

“The Georgian [Stalin] who is neglectful of this aspect of the question, or who carelessly flings about accusations of ‘nationalist socialism’ (whereas he himself is a real and true ‘national socialist’, and even a vulgar Great-Russian bully), violates, in substance, the interests of proletarian class solidarity; for nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice. [...] internationalism on the part of oppressors or ‘great’ nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question.”⁹

⁷ Lenin, op. cit., p. 606.

⁸ Ibid., p. 610.

⁹ Ibid., p. 608.

Reading these lines no one can be surprised to learn that Lenin's sharply critical document, written in December 1922 when he was seriously ill, was suppressed by Stalin and published only after Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956.

After Lenin's death in January 1924, following his long-time incapacitating illness, all of his recommendations on the national question were nullified and Stalin's "Great-Russian" policies – which treated the other nationalities as iniquitously subordinate "border regions" – fully implemented, contributing greatly to the *blocked development* that subsequently characterized Soviet society. Nor were the underlying problems resolved by post-Stalin changes, despite the prominence given to the publication of Lenin's damning comments in 1956. For Khrushchev himself, after castigating Stalin in early 1956, reverted to his methods by the autumn of the same year, repressing the Hungarian popular uprising of October by the force of arms. Later on the "*Brezhnev doctrine*" tried to legitimate explicitly and permanently the same untenable policies of reducing the occupied East European countries to the status of border regions of Soviet "actually existing socialism". Moreover, even the approach of Gorbachev and his followers was characterized by the same sense of tendentious unreality as the post-Lenin theorizations and practices, as I tried to stress well before the implosion of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ They maintained the fiction of the "Soviet nation", with its allegedly "*unified self-awareness*", naively or wantonly ignoring the explosive problems of the Russian domination of the "unified Soviet nation", notwithstanding the clear signs of a gathering storm which soon enough resulted in the breakup of the far from unified Soviet Union. At the same time they tried to justify the reduction of various national communities, including the Baltic, Byelorussian and Ukrainian, to the status of "ethnic groups". The total unreality of this approach could not have been more graphically encapsulated than what we find in the words of one of Gorbachev's closest collaborators, the principal officially appointed authority in the field, Julian Bromlei:

"the Soviet people is a *natural phenomenon* which differs from similar societies mainly in its Socialist parameters and corresponding spiritual values. Clearly, we should bear in mind that the *Soviet nation* consists of a variety of *ethnic groups*."¹¹

Under Stalin's rule, the acceptance of such wanton unreality could be imposed with the help of authoritarian repressive measures, going as far as even the deportation of entire national minorities. Once, however, that road had to be abandoned, nothing could make the terrible legacy of the oppressive tsarist multinational empire and the subsequent preservation of its antagonisms prevail. It was, therefore, only a question of time when and in what particular form the postrevolutionary Soviet state had to disintegrate under the intolerable weight of its manifold contradictions.

2. Crisis in the Western socialist movement.

THE persistent neglect of the national question was, to be sure, not confined to the vicissitudes of the Soviet failure to face up to its dilemmas, even if the direct consequences of such failure were far-reaching in the international socialist movement in that, for many decades, the adoption of a wholly uncritical attitude to the "Soviet model" was compulsory among the parties of the Third International, carrying with it theoretical confusion and strategic disorientation. Characteristically, in this respect, the Stalinist leader of the Party in Hungary, Mathias

¹⁰ See my discussion of these problems in "The dramatic reappearance of the national question", part of an article entitled "Socialismo hoy día", written in December 1989—January 1990 for an inquest of the Venezuelan quarterly periodical *El ojo del huracán* and published in its February/March/April 1990 issue. Republished in English in Part iv of *Beyond Capital*, pp. 965-976.

¹¹ Julian V. Bromlei, "Ethnic Relations and Perestroika", *Perestroika Annual*, Futura/Macdonald London 1989, vol.2., p. 119. Julian Bromlei was at the time "Chairman of the Inter-Departmental Scientific Council on the Studies of Ethnic Processes of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences".

Rákosi, declared that “the criterion of Hungarian patriotism today, by which we must judge it, is our love for the Soviet Union”. One can imagine the response generated by such remarks.

Nevertheless, the tendency in the West European socialist movement to move in the direction of a blind alley, as regards the national question and the closely associated issue of internationalism, appeared well before the Russian October Revolution. In fact Engels bitterly complained fortytwo years earlier, at the time of the discussion of the Gotha Programme in Germany, that in the document preparing the unification “the principle that the workers’ movement is an *international movement* is, to all intents and purposes, *completely disavowed*.”¹² The necessary radical negation of capital’s existing order from a socialist perspective was inconceivable without the adoption of a consistent and in reality fully sustainable international position. However, the opportunistic manoeuvre aimed at securing the unification of the political forces involved in approving the Gotha Programme carried with it serious nationalistic concessions for which a very high price had to be paid in the future. The total capitulation of German Social Democracy to the forces of aggressive bourgeois chauvinism at the outbreak of the first world war was only the logical culmination of that dangerous turn in German political development, sealing thereby also the fate of the Second International itself.

It is important to remember here that none of the four internationals founded with the expectation to make the power of international solidarity prevail against capital’s hierarchical structural domination of labour have succeeded in fulfilling the hope attached to them. The First International foundered already in Marx’s lifetime, as a result of the derailment of the workers’ movement as an international movement towards the end of the 1870s, sharply criticized by Engels as we have just seen. The Second International carried within itself the seeds of this contradiction and turned them into inexorably growing plants, however small at first, waiting only for the historical opportunity – provided by the first world war – before the members of the International sided with the rival warring parties, thereby fatefully discrediting the whole organization. This badly discredited “Workers’ International”, whose constituent national members throughout the war continued to identify themselves with their own bourgeoisie and thereby ceased to have anything at all to do with the vital requirements of socialist internationalism, was later reestablished as an organ of socioeconomic accommodation and the institutionalized denial of the class struggle. Rosa Luxemburg’s judgement summed up with great clarity the meaning of these developments by stressing that “in refuting the existence of the class struggle, the Social Democracy has denied the very basis of its own existence.”¹³ It was, therefore, only a question of time before the Social Democratic parties all over the world went on adopting a position openly in defence of the established order.

Against the background of the Second International’s ignominious failure, the Third International was founded in the aftermath of the October Revolution. However, as a result of the progressive imposition of Stalin’s authoritarian policies, which treated international matters, including the relationship with the parties of the Third International itself, in strict subordination to Soviet state interests, also this organization failed to fulfil the role of developing genuine socialist internationalism. Its dissolution as the Communist International (the Comintern), and its metamorphosis into the Cominform – i.e. an international organization of information – did not solve anything. For even the Cominform was a one-way street. This was because any critique of the Soviet system remained an absolute taboo during Stalin’s lifetime. And even after he died, Khrushchev’s severe critique of his “personality cult” and of its negative consequences failed to address the fundamental issues of Soviet type society as a mode of social metabolic reproduction, despite its ever intensifying crisis symptoms.

By the time the gravity of the crisis itself was acknowledged, under Gorbachev’s “glasnost and perestroika”, the envisaged corrective efforts were conceived in a way which was in-

¹² Engels, *Letter to August Bebel*, 18-28 March 1875.

¹³ Rosa Luxemburg, *Junius Pamphlet*, A Young Socialist Publication, Colombo 1967, p. 54.

was inseparable from embarking on the road for the restoration of capitalism. As to the Fourth International, founded by Trotsky, soon to be assassinated on Stalin's orders, it could never attain the status of an international organization with *mass* influence, despite the intentions of its founder. Yet, if the envisaged strategic vision cannot "grip the masses", in Marx's words, in that case the task of developing the necessary socialist internationalism and the appropriate "*communist mass consciousness*" (Marx again) cannot be accomplished.

Given this unfulfilled history of labour's attempts to produce an adequate organizational framework for asserting its vital interests in its international confrontations with capital, as the hegemonic alternative to the latter, we cannot turn away from the difficult question of why all this happened. After all Marx characterized capitalistic developments a very long time ago, already in his share of *The German Ideology*, in this way:

"Generally speaking, large-scale industry created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the peculiar features of the various nationalities. And while the bourgeoisie of each nation still retained separate national interests, large-scale industry created *a class which in all nations has the same interest and for which nationality is already dead.*"¹⁴

However, twelve years later he had to acknowledge that the prospects for a socialist revolution had been greatly complicated by the fact that in the world as a whole the development of bourgeois society was still in the ascendant.¹⁵ Moreover, further developments made these matters even more difficult and disappointing. The aggressive imperialist drive of the dominant capitalist countries became visible only decades later – in its full extent well after Marx's death –, bringing with it grave implications for the working class and for the hoped for "development of communist mass consciousness". This was dramatically highlighted right at the beginning of the war when countless numbers of workers, and not only their socialdemocratic leaders, sided with their national bourgeoisie, instead of turning their weapons against their ruling class, as revolutionary socialists like Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg wanted them to do.

The national question inevitably assumed the form of polarization between the handful of oppressor states and the overwhelming majority of imperialistically oppressed nations: a most iniquitous relationship in which the working classes of the imperialist countries were deeply implicated. Nor was this relationship confined to direct military domination. The purpose of the latter – whenever it was brought into play either through some major military operations or through the exercise of "gunboat diplomacy" – was to secure the maximum feasible exploitation of labour in the conquered countries on a continuing basis, imposing thereby the characteristic mode of capital's social metabolic control ultimately in the entire world. This is why in the course of post-second world war "decolonization" it was quite possible to abandon the direct military/political control of the former empires without changing the substance of the established relationship of structural domination and subordination, as befits the capital system.

The United States were the pioneers in this respect. They exercised direct military domination in some countries, whenever it suited their design, wedded to socioeconomic supremacy over the populations involved, like the Philippines, for instance. At the same time they secured the massive domination of the whole of Latin America in the form of imposing on the countries of the continent structural dependency without necessarily intervening militarily. But, of course, they unhesitatingly resorted to open or covert military interventions in their proclaimed "backyard" whenever the maintenance of their exploitative domination was put into question. One of their preferred ways of imposing their rule was the "indigenous" military overthrow of elected governments and the establishment of "friendly" dictatorships, with the most cynical and hypocritical justification for such acts on numerous occasions, from

¹⁴ Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5., p. 73.

¹⁵ See Marx, *Letter to Engels*, October 8, 1858.

Brazil's military dictatorship to Pinochet's Chile. Nevertheless, for a long time their principal strategy for asserting their exploitative interests in the post-second world war period was through the exercise of economic domination, wedded to the deceitful ideology of "democracy and liberty". This was well in tune with a determinate phase of capital's historical development, when the political/military shackles of the old empires proved to be rather anachronistic for realizing the potentialities of capital-expansion better suited at the time to neocolonial practices. The United States were in a nearly ideal position in this regard, both as the most dynamic constituent of global capital in its drive to productive expansion, and as a country which could claim to have no need for a direct political/military domination of colonies, unlike the British and French Empires. It is therefore highly significant – and in its implications for the survival of humanity most dangerous – that in our time this "democratic" superpower had to revert to the most wasteful and brutal form of military interventions and occupations, in response to capital's structural crisis, in a vain attempt to resolve that crisis by imposing itself on the rest of the world as the master of global hegemonic imperialism.

3. Patriotism and internationalism.

IN the light of these developments we can clearly see that the potentiality of international solidarity put into relief by Marx, with reference to "*a class which in all nations has the same interest and for which nationality is already dead*", not only did not come close to its realization but actually suffered a major setback through the successful unfolding of modern imperialism and of its subsequent transformation into a system of neo-colonial and neo-imperialist structural dependency after the second world war. This newer version of imperialism was (and remains) a form of domination no less iniquitous for the great masses of the working people than its predecessor. Accordingly, it is inconceivable to realize true internationalism without the radical emancipation of the many oppressed nations, not least in Latin America, from their continued domination by the oppressor nations. This is the meaning of legitimate defensive nationalism today as stressed from the very beginning by Lenin. A defensive nationalism which must be complemented by the positive dimension of internationalism in order to succeed.

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 on the left with bourgeois *chauvinism*. This confusion happens to be quite often a more or less conscious excuse for denying the necessity for breaking the chains of exploitative structural dependency of which even the workers of "advanced capitalism" are undeniable beneficiaries, even if to a much more limited degree than their class antagonists. But patriotism does not mean identifying oneself exclusively with the legitimate national interests of one's own country, when it is threatened by a foreign power, or indeed by the capitulatory behaviour of one's own ruling class for which Lenin and Luxemburg rightly advocated turning the weapons of war against the internal class exploiters. It also means full solidarity with the genuine patriotism of the oppressed peoples.

The condition of realization of such patriotism is not simply a change in the prevailing inter-state relations, countering thereby to some extent the foreign dictates of the established political, or military/political, dependency. Far from it. For the condition of lasting success can only be a sustained struggle against capital's hierarchical structural domination, for as long as it takes, all over the world. Without it also the now and then successful casting off of the earlier political/military supremacy of the foreign power can be reestablished, in the old form or in a new one, at the next turn of events. International solidarity of the oppressed, therefore, requires the full awareness and the consistent practical observance of these vital strategic orienting principles.

It is not accidental that the bourgeois form of nationalism can only be *chauvinistic*, which means simultaneously the necessary *exclusion* of the legitimate patriotism of the other

nations. For capital either succeeds in dominating – both *internally*, its own labour force, and *externally*, the other nations with which it must periodically enter into major conflict – or it fails in exercising its indivisible control over the social metabolism as strictly defined by its own systemic imperatives. To share capital’s control over societal reproduction with labour is just as absurd a notion (of Thatcherite conservative “people’s capitalism” or, for that matter, of the fully accommodatory “third way” fantasy of social democracy) as the constantly promoted idea of a harmoniously functioning future world government, under the actually existing conditions of global hegemonic imperialism.

As a matter of innermost historical and structural determinations, all-round beneficial *internationalism* is totally incompatible with capital’s necessary mode of operation, developed in the course of history as a multiplicity of particular capitals bent on conflictual exclusiveness and on grabbing the maximum feasible advantage to themselves. The material ground of this incompatibility on the international plane is the radical impossibility of introducing *substantive equality* into the capital system. Only the *formal camouflage of inequality* as equality is acceptable. To give a characteristic example, on December 13, 2003, the discussion of the projected “European Constitution” in Brussels ended in complete disarray. The issue at stake was both mystificatory and farcical. Attempts were made to dress it up as a matter of high principle concerned with the noble observance of equality.

In reality the utterly hypocritical advocacy of the so-called “*proportionality of voting*” by the member states, as the proof of equitable intentions, had nothing whatsoever to do with genuine equality; only with the vacuous *formal transfiguration* of its diametrical opposite. For if in reality the question of equality could be taken seriously, in that case every member nation of the far from united European Union should be given *one* vote only, instead of allocating the disputed “27 or 29” votes to a few of them and much less to the others. Thus the pretended equality in terms of the “*proportionality of voting rights*” is nothing more than a masquerade for the maintenance of the existing *gross disproportionality of economic and social/political powers* among the member states. These powers, which are the embodiments of deeply entrenched *substantive inequality*, are decidedly not going to change within the established framework of the “Union”, whatever mystificatory compromises are going to be reached in the end, as no doubt there will be, on the debated “European Constitution”. And while the practice of managing society’s problems on the basis of vacuous formal equality is noisily pursued as the proclaimed objective of constitutional propriety, the institutional practice of *outlawing solidarity strikes* – a blatantly authoritarian measure of outrageous inequality, enacted in Britain under Margaret Thatcher and retained by her “New Labour” successors –, together with the continued attacks in several countries on the workers’ hard-won pension rights and on their shrinking social security benefits, is considered perfectly acceptable to the rulers of the European “democratic community”.

Socialist internationalism is inconceivable without full respect for the aspirations of the working people of other nations. Only that respect can create the objective possibility of positive co-operative interchanges. Ever since its first formulation, Marxist theory insisted that a nation which dominates other nations deprives itself of its own freedom: a dictum which Lenin never ceased to reiterate. It is not difficult to see why this should be so. For any form of inter-state domination presupposes a strictly regulated framework of social interchange in which the exercise of control is expropriated by the relatively few. A national state which is constituted in such a way that it should be able to dominate other nationalities, or the so-called “peripheral” and “border regions”, presupposes the complicity of its politically active citizenry in the exercise of domination, thus mystifying and weakening the working masses in their aspiration to emancipate themselves.

Thus the radical negation of the long prevailing system of most iniquitous inter-state relations is an absolutely unavoidable requirement of socialist theory. It provides the conceptual basis of *defensive* nationalism. However, the necessary positive alternative to capital’s

social order cannot be a defensive one. For all defensive positions suffer from being ultimately unstable, in that even the best defences can be overrun under concentrated fire, given the suitably changed relation of forces in favour of the adversary. What is needed in this respect, in response to capital's perverse globalization, is the articulation of a viable positive alternative. That is: an international social reproductive order instituted and managed on the basis of the genuine equality of its manifold constituents, defined not in formal but in materially and culturally identifiable substantive terms. Thus, the strategy of positive internationalism means replacing the absolutely iniquitous – and insuperably conflictual – structuring principle of capital's reproductive “microcosms” (the particular productive and distributive enterprises which constitute the comprehensive “macrocosm” of the system) by a fully co-operative alternative.

The destructive drive of transnational capital cannot be even alleviated, let alone positively overcome, at the international level only, through the action of particular national governments. For the continued existence of the antagonistic “microcosms”, and their subsumption under increasingly larger structures of the same conflictual type (like the giant transnational corporations, as they arise through the concentration and centralization of capital today), of necessity reproduces the temporarily placated conflicts sooner or later. Thus positive internationalism defines itself as the strategy to go beyond capital as a mode of social metabolic control by helping to articulate and comprehensively coordinate a non-hierarchical form of decision making at the material reproductive as well as the cultural/political plane. In other words, by a qualitatively different form of decision making in which the vital controlling functions of societal reproduction can be positively *devolved* to the members of the “microcosms”, and at the same time, the activities of the latter can be appropriately coordinated all the way to embrace the most comprehensive levels, because they are not torn apart by irreconcilable antagonisms.

The point to stress here is that so long as “activity is not *voluntarily* divided”,¹⁶ but regulated, instead, by some kind of unconscious quasi-natural process (theorized by the uncritical champions of the bourgeois order as a *natural* system, in a literal sense of the word, and thus forever insurmountable), in the form of international competition and confrontation, there must be in existence social structures capable of imposing on the individuals a structural/hierarchical (and not simply a functional) division of labour. (The fundamental structures of such an enforced hierarchical division of labour are, of course, the antagonistically competing social classes.) And conversely, even the potentially most destructive antagonisms are always reproduced on the broadest international plane, because capital cannot operate the reproductive “microcosms” of the social metabolism without submitting them to its strict vertical/hierarchical structuring principle of control.

Naturally, the same correlation remains valid for the positive alternative as well. Accordingly, the necessary condition for the genuine resolution (and not temporary postponement and manipulation) of conflicts and antagonisms, through socialist internationalism, is the adoption of a truly democratic/co-operative structuring principle in the social reproductive microcosms themselves. The positive self-management and “lateral coordination” of the associated producers on a global scale – as opposed to their now prevailing vertical subordination to an alien controlling force – first becomes possible only on such a basis.¹⁷

In this sense, the question of realizing the positive potentiality of socialist internationalism – beyond all chauvinistic/nationalist antagonisms, the way in which it was anticipated by Marx one hundred and fifty eight years ago – cannot be raised without reference to the reproductive conditions of a radically different social order. We have to remind ourselves, again, of the relationship between potentiality and actuality. For the common interests of all ~~working people can be practically realized~~ when following the road toward a new social order

¹⁶ *The German Ideology*, MECW, vol. 5., p. 45.

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of these problems see *Beyond Capital*, Chapter 5.1: “Transnational Capital and National States”, pp. 152-170.

people can be practically realized when following the road toward a new social order becomes both necessary and viable in their attempt to extricate themselves from the perilous contradictions of their present-day predicament. Success depends on the maturation of certain conditions which turn a vital need – and its justifiable ideological advocacy, which could be legitimately indicated in that form many decades ago – into the *objective possibility* of a sustainable social development.

What is at stake, then, is not an abstract theoretical principle, and not even a positive *desideratum*, however desirable. What decides the issue in the final analysis is the fundamental difference between *abstract possibilities* (rightly condemned by Hegel as “bad infinity”), whose number can be multiplied no end without getting one step nearer to the desired aim, and the *objective possibility* of actual development in the advocated direction.

The ground for the feasible realization of the objective possibilities of socialist strategy, with its sustainable internationalist aspirations, cannot be other than the historically unfolding dynamics of the capital system’s global transformations. This is significantly different today from its phase prior to the second world war, and much more so in comparison to Marx’s lifetime. We are certainly contemporaries to the system’s transnational “globalization”, although our view of what is actually evolving could not be more different from that of the uncritical defenders of the established order.¹⁸ The latter must always find an “eternalizing” explanation for everything, also when some major crisis symptoms are undeniable even by them.

Characteristically, this is the way in which they interpret the already mentioned grave problem of chronic structural unemployment in evidence in all parts of the world. They cannot say that it does not exist, but they must turn it into a fictitiously positive asset. This they do by twisting the concept of structural unemployment to mean that it is unproblematically permanent because it is “only structural”, in the sense of being an unavoidable consequence of universally beneficial “advanced technology”. As such, it is not the inhuman and destructive manifestation of capital expansion at their system’s present phase of unsustainable development, to be remedied by the institution of a viable alternative social reproductive order. It is simply a feature of the unalterable (“natural”) reproductive structure in existence, to be dealt with by the appropriate neutral technical/economic devices of expansionary “flexible casualization”.

It is equally characteristic that when it comes to the question of actual historical developments on a global scale, which could in principle significantly change the existing conditions and relation of forces, the same people speak like the cunning horse-trader in a Hungarian adage: “Ha akarom vemhes, ha akarom nem vemhes”. That is, “if it suits me, the mare is pregnant, if it doesn’t, she is not”. In the same way, the propagandists of the system suddenly forget their favourite fairy tale of all-justifying “globalization” whenever it happens to be inconvenient. Ignoring the precarious predicament of the overwhelming majority of humankind, as arising from the untenable domination of the rest of the world by a handful of “advanced capitalist” countries, they arbitrarily decree that the workers of the “advanced” countries shall never assume a radical critical position in relation to their own system. Thus, in this regard there can be no change through globalization. Social democratic accommodation is supposed to remain with us to the end of time, even though the privileges sustaining it in a few countries are categorically denied to the billions of the “wretched of the earth”.

In reality nothing could be more fallacious and crudely biased in its pretences to ideological neutrality than arguing the proverbial horse trader’s way. For the radical potentiality of labour, as the hegemonic alternative to capital – also as regards its objectively feasible power for instituting a qualitatively different system of inter-state relations – “can only be judged in terms of its proper frame of reference – i.e. the fully developed global system of capital – and

¹⁸ Readers of *The Power of Ideology* will find the differences indicated throughout the book.

not on the limited ground of a few privileged and exploitative ‘advanced capitalist societies’.”¹⁹ Consequently, one should either openly admit that the much propagandized process of “globalization” is a tendentious conservative fiction: a concept used only when it suits one’s retrograde ideological convenience (as happens to be the case today on countless occasions); or one would have to leave open the question of prospective historical developments on the issue of labour’s hegemonic alternative to capital’s social metabolic order. For it is just as grotesque to project the universal diffusion of the favourable material conditions of the handful of highly privileged capitalist countries – which in reality must greatly rely for their privileges on the continued structural dependency and misery of the others, secured to them through the now prevailing differential rate of exploitation – as it is to suggest that potential changes negatively affecting labour in the dominant capitalist countries cannot happen at all, or if they do, they do not matter. It is quite absurd to say, or to quietly imply, that whatever happens to the standard of living of labour in the capitalistically advanced countries, under the conditions of capital’s structural crisis and the resulting attacks on that standard – through the necessity of a downward equalization of the differential rate of exploitation on a global scale –, that is not going to alter in the slightest the attitude of capital’s hegemonic antagonist from its present position of resignation or accommodation to one characterized by a potentially assertive combativeness.

International solidarity through which the required changes can be realized is not an abstract ideological postulate. It is materially grounded in the unfolding conditions – and contradictions – of actual historical development which deeply affect the totality of labour, even in the capitalistically most privileged countries. Raising the issue of international solidarity today cannot be seen as an idealistic moral imperative addressed to politically alert groups of workers. “It could not be defined simply as ‘the work of consciousness upon consciousness’, even if the appropriate reconstitution of social consciousness is, of course, an integral part of the overall process. It is the necessary response to the objective challenge posed by the global articulation and integration of capital that in the course of twentieth-century developments (and particularly in the last few decades) acquired a most effective transnational dimension against its workforce. At the same time, it is a response made not only necessary but also materially feasible by the selfsame material structures of capital’s transnational articulation which – in the absence of international solidarity – can be easily and with great efficacy used against the workers. [...] To be sure, what we can clearly identify here is a *potentiality* that cannot be turned into *actuality* without the development of the necessary *organizational framework* of international working class solidarity. Nevertheless, this is a potentiality sustained by the *material structures* themselves which *objectively* facilitate the necessary countermoves to the ‘carefully controlled and coordinated’²⁰ domination of labour by capital at the present juncture of history.”²¹

This is how the national and the international dimensions of emancipation come together. Capital, under the pressure of its structural crisis, is now forced to take back even those concessions which it could confer in the postwar decades of Keynesian expansion on limited sections of labour. It is not possible to reverse these developments by a nostalgic advocacy of the particular privileges acquired in North America and in Western Europe in the “golden age” of postwar development; capital simply cannot afford them. It needs all the available resources for ever more absurd and potentially catastrophic military adventures and for maintaining its system of increasingly wasteful production dominating society. Today not even the achievement of the most limited demands of labour can be assumed, given their unaffordable impact

¹⁹ First edition of *The Power of Ideology*, Harvester/Wheatsheaf, London, and New York University Press, New York, 1989, p. 373.

²⁰ Reference to the words of a former head of General Motors, quoted in Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present*, Monthly Review Press, New York 1978, p. 180.

²¹ *The Power of Ideology*, pp. 376 and 380.

on the structurally troubled global system. The local/national is becoming inseparable in our time from the global/international: in a sense of ultimately weakening, and not strengthening, capital's domination of labour, contrary to the self-serving propaganda of capitalist globalization. Under these circumstances, the failure to realize even some modest progressive objectives (not only in the economic field but also in politics, as shown, for instance, by the authoritarian measures of British "New Labour"), and the continued erosion of what was once taken for granted as the self-proclaimed "raison d'être" of the capital system, call for the institution of a radically different social order.