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Nationalist Elements in the Work of Marx and Engels A Critical Survey

Erik van Ree

It is a common thing for scholars specialising in the history of the Soviet Union to argue that the nationalist development of Joseph Stalin's political thought and practice highlights his divergence from the Marxist tradition. In the mind of the pragmatist Stalin, Russian state interests and Russian national traditions carried more weight than any Marxist utopianism. Authors recognising the origin of bolshevik nationalism in Lenin's heritage will argue in a comparable way, only they will opt for an earlier date for Marxism's nationalist subversion. It will be held that, when avowing revolutionary defeatism during the Great War, Lenin acted as a true Marxist internationalist. But he was soon forced to partially abandon his internationalism. He preferred to save the existence of the Soviet state and conclude the Peace of Brest-Litovsk to staking everything on provoking world revolution through revolutionary war, the course desired by Nikolai Bukharin. The realities of the international state system overruled Marxist hopes of a unified world.

This kind of presentation will be classically underscored by the well-known passage from the Communist Manifesto, "the workers have no fatherland". During the Civil War, Lenin and Lev Trotski as well for that matter, declared openly that "the socialist fatherland was in danger". Stalin insisted later that the main criterion for a proletarian internationalist was to unreservedly defend the USSR. The shrill deviation from the original Marxism seems undeniable. Yet, the force of this line of argument rests crucially on the characterisation of that original Marxism as an internationalist tendency. If that characterisation proved to be untenable, the above model's presentation of bolshevism would be in trouble. One might still hold that Lenin and Stalin were inspired by motives of national and state power, but one could no longer hold that, in doing so, they were subverting Marxism.

The present article argues that scholarly work on Soviet history suffers from a lack of knowledge of Marxism. It is, of course, quite easy to agree on the blatant heresies of Lenin and his successors if one operates from a caricatured version of Marxism presented as a purely internationalist doctrine. But unfortunately the latter version is indeed no more than a caricature. There exists an enormous volume of scholarly literature on the nationalist and internationalist aspects of the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Even a casual glance at this impressive body of writing proves that it is a terrible simplification to treat

- the slogan of the workers "having no fatherland" as some kind of shorthand for Marx's and Engels's views of the national question.

As we will presently see, the naive standpoint that Marx and Engels were pure internationalists, propagating the brotherhood of man and far removed from any nationalist taint, is not represented among serious scholars of their work. The reality of the nationalist element is recognised by all. Almost all scholars further agree that, at heart, Marx and Engels were internationalists or even cosmopolitans. The nationalist element was an undeniable presence, but it did not dominate their ideas. However, students of Marxism are deeply divided over the nature and significance of that nationalist component. We may tentatively distinguish two main positions on the matter; though these can, of course, not be put in neat, separate boxes. For some, nationalism formed an incongruous aberration in the Marxist system, an odd element basically unrelated to the groundwork of the doctrine. For others, however, it was, paradoxically, a real aspect of Marxist cosmopolitanism.

This article is not based on new research on the writings of Marx and Engels. Instead, it should be read as a critical survey of some of the main studies made during the past decades of the problem of Marxist nationalism. My conclusion will be that, if one proceeds from Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism as "a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent",¹ the most convincing case is the one made for the second interpretation mentioned above. The original nineteenth-century Marxism was a fundamentally internationalist or even cosmopolitan system, but it contained a significant nationalist component, which should, again, not be depreciated as an oddity but grasped as an integral element of that system.

My discussion treats three more or less overlapping themes. Firstly, there is the question of the state. Though not an issue in itself in the present context, it must nevertheless be discussed briefly. It will appear that Marx's and Engels's understanding of the state has significant nationalist connotations. Secondly, there is the question of the nation itself. Like Hegel, Marx and Engels understood nations to be historical communities of people uniting into a state. In their analysis it was furthermore of strategic significance whether a people was capable of forming an extended enough state to enable healthy capitalist development. Only such peoples were nations in the full sense. In this context we will treat Marx's and Engels's distinction between civilised and barbarian peoples, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary nations. Thirdly, there is the utopian aspect of the matter, namely the international character of the world revolution as an integrated economic, political and military process. Will the nations survive when the working class takes over power everywhere?

¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford, 1983), p. 1.

1. Marxism and the State

To discuss the question of the nation in Marx and Engels' work obliges one first of all to discuss the question of the state. We are interested in finding out whether, and, if so, in what sense, the fathers of communism were etatists. In his *The social and political thought of Karl Marx*, Shlomo Avineri provides a lucid account of the development of Marx's concept of the state as opposed to Hegel's.² The latter observed that modern "civil society" tended to dissolve the social bond into loosely bound individuals, motivated by egoism. Only the state, representing the Spirit, prevented civil society from disintegrating. Representing the element of universality in relation to the particularity of civil society, the state was ideally structured by a bureaucracy, capped by a monarch and supported at the bottom by organised corporations, mediating between the state and civil society. But Marx did not believe that the state bureaucracy could ever serve as a true universal. It was only one more class with its own particular interests. Moreover, as long as private property divided civil society into competing individuals and classes, true universality could not be realised at all.

This problem could only be resolved by communism: by universalising the property of the means of production. This would provide a firm basis for "true democracy", a system in which the duality of civil society and the "political state" is overcome. Universal suffrage guaranteed a new unity of state and society. But according to Avineri, Marx went further than just demanding a democratic republic. For Marx, the "political state" in all its forms, including the republic, represented an alienated form of human society. Marx's *Aufhebung des Staats* aimed at a complete fusion of state and society – an abolition of the state and its replacement by collective, social self-government. Just as the socialisation of property transformed civil society into a single undivided world, likewise the fusion of state and society destroyed another factor dividing mankind against itself. The result would be a truly universal, communist society reunified, as it were, along two axes: horizontally, as well as vertically.³ Thus Marx seems to have been a consistent anti-etatist.

However, the above presentation is not complete. Firstly, Avineri notes Marx's admission that communist society will always require direction and planning. Whereas Engels spoke bluntly of the eventual *Absterben* of the state, its withering away, Marx used the Hegelian term *Aufhebung*, implying that the past stage of statehood will be somehow subsumed under the new communist self-government. Avineri insists that Marx did not simply aim for a democratic

² Shlomo Avineri, *The social and political thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1968).

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–27, 31–40, 43–52.

republic with nationalised means of production. Yet he also claims that, when speaking of the abolition of the state, Marx foresaw mainly the overcoming of the state *as a separate institution*. On occasion he even spoke of a communist *Staatswesen*, a statehood. Secondly, Marx and Engels unequivocally insisted that in the transitory stage preceding communism, i.e. prior to the complete nationalisation of all means of production, the state would remain in business, in the form of a democratic Commune without a separate bureaucracy.⁴ Avineri's work leaves no doubt that, though their general orientation was anti-etatist, Marx and Engels foresaw the survival of the state until the arrival of communism; and, as far as Marx was concerned, possibly even after that, though in an undefined, rudimentary form.

In much of the Marx studies, a great deal of attention is paid to the question of the dictatorial or even totalitarian potential of the Marxist democratic utopia. Important though this theme is, it is however irrelevant for our purpose and therefore I will leave this matter untouched. Of more interest is the fact that other prominent Marx and Engels scholars, following up Avineri, do not differ fundamentally from him on the matter at hand. Richard Hunt, who makes no distinction between the transitional proletarian state and communist statehood, describes the dissolution of the state as a two-way process. On the one hand the professional bureaucracy disappears; on the other all citizens dedicate themselves actively, on a part-time or short-term basis, to the administration of their community. In that way the community, as it were, becomes the state. Legislation is arranged by referendum or through elected representatives, bound by their voters' instructions. Marx's ideal of radical democracy without professionals was according to Hunt inspired by the example of Periclean Athens. Accordingly, the main right Marx distinguished was that of political participation in the community, not civil rights proper.⁵ This *exposé* is not without interest for our purpose, because here we see the outline of a national community in the original sense of a polity based on an active citizenry.

According to Leszek Kolakowski, another commentator who does not make a very sharp distinction between the transitional state of the Paris Commune model and ultimate communist statehood, Marx hoped to thoroughly overcome the alienation of political institutions from their citizens. During the transitional period the state would remain active, but ultimately no longer concern itself with governing people, but instead focus on organising production. The implication in this formula of overcoming the hierarchical relations between people suggests the complete abolition of the state under communism, which was indeed Marx's purpose according to Kolakowski. Yet in another formulation this same author

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-20.

⁵ Richard N. Hunt, *The political ideas of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 1: *Marxism and totalitarian democracy, 1818-1850* (London, 1974), pp. 72-84.

notes that Marx believed himself to be aiming at the establishment of the first true state, the first true universality – a self-organising people instead of the existing foreign body placed over the people.⁶

In his *Marxism and the leap to the kingdom of freedom*, Andrzej Walicki supports Hunt's claim of Marx's sympathies for ancient democracy. In contrast to the modern (liberal) notion of freedom as an autonomous zone guaranteed against state interference, ancient democracy put participating in political power, that is, taking an active part in collective sovereignty, at the centre of attention. Likewise Marx defined freedom as participation. He understood his ideal of direct participatory democracy as the restoration of a communal freedom founded on commonly shared purposes and values. He hoped to replace *Gesellschaft*, society, by *Gemeinschaft*, community. Walicki notes that Engels, though speaking more unambiguously than Marx about the eventual abolition of the state, should not be taken for an anarchist. The latter was greatly annoyed by the anarchists' rejection of the principle of authority. According to Walicki, Engels's abolition of the state meant in practice the complete swallowing up of civil society by a centralised administration.⁷

The above survey allows us to conclude that it would be a simplification to take Marx and Engels for straightforward anti-etatists. They were hostile towards the bureaucratic model of organisation and foresaw the replacement of the existing bureaucratic state by a radically democratic order. However, in the period when the process of expropriation was as yet incomplete, that order was still considered to be a state. Under subsequent communist conditions, democratic self-government would be developed to such an extent that it is unclear whether one could still speak of a state. It is probably fair to say that, though Engels would have disagreed, Marx may not have. But in any case, communist-democratic self-government would have been an organised, even centralised system. Whether or not we call it a state is partly a matter of terminology.

In itself this is not the point at issue in this article. But what matters greatly, is that Marx and Engels obviously did not aim to dissolve the community into its components of autonomous individuals. Like Hegel, they hoped to solidify it rather than loosen it up. Their chosen method was the community's reorganisation on the basis of active participation of the organised citizenry. We recognise here not only an echo of Periclean democracy but also, and pre-eminently, the ideal of nationalism of the original, French type. This is based on the notion of a people no longer prepared to leave the monarch in charge but determined to turn itself into a political community – a nation; to transform itself, as it were,

⁶ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main currents of Marxism. Its origins, growth and dissolution*, Vol. 1: *The founders* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 122–5, 254–6, 358–63.

⁷ Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the leap to the kingdom of freedom. The rise and fall of the communist utopia* (Stanford, Cal., 1995), pp. 26–9, 91, 144.

into the state, by reorganising the state on the basis of collective civic participation. In other words, it is precisely Marx's and Engels's radical concept of democracy which provides their notion of the state with a definite "nationalist" flavour.

2. Nations as States

The above conclusion will gain weight if we now turn to the question of the nation proper. Here again we observe a strong link with Hegel's work. The German philosopher considered peoples to be vehicles of the Spirit. Some peoples represented the Spirit in a more complete way than others, and only a few represented it well. Hegel called these the world-historical peoples. Joseph McCarney argues that the philosopher did not think in ethnic but in political terms. World-historical peoples were generally of mixed stock, confluxes of nations. The criterion for whether a particular people was world-historical or not was whether it had proved able to form a viable state, the modern constitutional state being the highest mark of distinction. Those without proven state-building capacities were bound to remain in what was really a prehistorical stage. Hegel observed a hierarchy of achievement, with the Germanic peoples at the top and the Africans below.⁸

To make the state central in the analysis of the history of nations, is sharply at odds with Marx's and Engels's economic-materialist conception. Yet, one cannot rashly conclude that Hegel's perspective must have been completely unacceptable to them. After all, state formation, and especially the rise of the modern European state, has been an important factor in economic development. This implies that it would not be impossible as a matter of principle for Marx and Engels to integrate elements of the etatist model of history into their own.

To my knowledge, the first important work treating Marx's theory of the national question is Solomon Bloom's *The World of Nations*.⁹ The author observes that Marx believed in the existence of specific national psychologies, tracing them to economic and historical differences between countries. But he never attempted a definition of the nation and used the term loosely. Nevertheless, in Marx's work, the concept of nation mostly refers to an autonomous, integrated and self-conscious society, simply put: to a country or a state. The nation was no ethnic unit bound by blood ties, but represented precisely the overcoming of primitive man's biological and tribal formations. Nor did national unity rest on historical and cultural tradition. In addition, the nation was not determined by language. The determining factor was the existence of a people living jointly within a common economic system. The needs governing the economy determined the

⁸ Joseph McCarney, *Hegel on history* (New York and London, 2000), chapters 9, 10.

⁹ Solomon F. Bloom, *The world of nations. A study of the national implications in the work of Karl Marx* (New York, 1941).

natural boundaries of a country. To Marx, the modern nation was a people that had overcome its tribal past and historical culture, and formed a state rooted in a viable economic life.

Bloom expands on this analysis when he notes that Marx rejected the right to self-determination of nations as a principle. Only those peoples who have large enough numbers, a sufficiently extended and compact territory, and the resources, skills and social organisation necessary to create a great state have such a right. For only the context of a great state makes the development of an advanced, progressive economy possible, which is, again, the basic prerequisite for a functioning nation. Marx believed in what Bloom calls the "great society". Nations like the Germans, Italians, Poles and Hungarians had the potential to form such a society. Smaller nations, however, like the Slavic groups in the Austrian and Ottoman empires had no right to self-determination. Their exercise of it could only result in a stagnating quasi-state, economically stunted.¹⁰

Marx's standpoint on the national question was of course not as clear-cut as suggested here. Bloom amply shows that it changed in many important details in the course of Marx's long life as a prolific writer and political activist. Nevertheless a number of general observations can be made. To begin with, the significance of the fact that Marx never developed a formal theory of the nation should not be overstated. It need not express a lack of interest in the national question. After all, Marx never developed a formal theory of class either, and no one could hold that class was of minor importance in his thought. In fact, the only field in which he did elaborate his thought in any systematic way was the capitalist economy.

More importantly, Bloom's work allows us to understand the relative closeness of Marx's approach to Hegel on the subject of the nation. The centrality of the state in his model was only marginally less pronounced than in Hegel's. Marx more or less defined nations as states, or as societies capable of state formation. He shared Hegel's classification of peoples into two categories, those capable of viable state formation and those, according to their views, incapable of it. His division of the nations of the world into the respective two boxes would be very similar to the philosopher's. The point is that nations striving for the modern constitutional state – Hegel's criterion of civilisation – were often those on the way to modern capitalist development as well, which was Marx's criterion. Hegel and Marx equally appreciated the rise of the centralised modern state out of feudal Europe as a progressive development. The difference was that, for Hegel, state formation was the goal, whereas for Marx it served economic modernisation.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–22, 33–36.

Far from denying the progressive significance of the development of feudal nations into modern states, Marx wholeheartedly praised this development. His concept of the nation as a state, not a linguistically homogeneous entity, places him in the French tradition, though at a closer look this must be qualified. The French nation was conceived as a state, a political and not a cultural community, and therefore a model Marx felt comfortable with. But the Jacobins and their successors further hoped to recreate their state as a purely French cultural and linguistic entity. Marx took a position in the middle between the French ideal and Central-European realities. He hoped for multinational Austria to be exploded into several great political nations. But there was no fundamental reason why, for instance, the new Hungarian nation should not tolerate the Slovak, Romanian and Croat tongues. As the nation was a political and not a linguistic concept, all citizens would be Hungarians, whatever language they preferred. But, then again, Marx too would have found the cultural and linguistic assimilation of minorities to be preferable in the long run from the point of view of state centralisation – which brings him back to the Jacobin model.¹¹

Bloom's analysis has been challenged by Z.A. Pelczynski, who does find it significant that Marx failed to produce a formal theory of the nation. According to Pelczynski, Marx's conception of society and the state precluded such a theory from being produced. Pelczynski sets out with Hegel's concept of the nation as a state, a community at root not cultural, ethnic or linguistic but political. Like Bloom, Pelczynski notes that Marx followed Hegel in defining the nation mainly in political terms; nations are states. However, Marx's reinterpretation of Hegel's work was radical enough to turn this concept of nation into an empty shell. Firstly, Marx denied that the political state was a truly universal category. It should be abolished and replaced by a directly democratic community. Secondly, Marx reinterpreted Hegel's civil society, the national community itself, in terms of property and class, thereby in effect denuding it of specific cultural features. As a result, Marx was left with a Hegelian concept of nation, yet without its political form or its cultural marks. He was left, essentially, with nothing.¹²

Illuminating though this analysis is, it is not beyond challenge. The logic Pelczynski claims to have found is not compelling. To begin with, though Marx rejected the political state as a sham universality, he did not deny its existence. There is no reason why he could not define nations as political communities in an albeit imperfect, alienated condition. Moreover, though Marx in his analysis of civil society indeed focussed on political economy, there is no reason why

¹¹ See Ephraim Nimni, *Marxism and nationalism. Theoretical origins of a political crisis* (London, 1991), pp. 18-22.

¹² Z.A. Pelczynski, "Nation, civil society, state: Hegelian sources of the Marxian non-theory of nationality", in: Idem (ed.), *The state and civil society. Studies in Hegel's political philosophy* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 262-78.

he could not accept cultural identities of national communities as secondary, superstructural phenomena. Pelczynski shows that the nation can never be the fundamental category in a Marxist scheme; but he does not prove that in such a scheme the concept of nation must necessarily be without content.

To return to Bloom, that author discusses at length Marx's standpoints in the various national questions of the day. Most attention has been drawn to Engels's derogatory remarks on the Austrian Slavs, with which, Bloom holds, Marx was in substantial agreement. Some of the articles written by Engels from 1848 onwards contain horrifying judgements on such nations, sometimes bordering on the genocidal. Fundamental to these judgements was the division of the Central-European peoples into "revolutionary" and "counter-revolutionary" or "reactionary" nations, which Bloom calls "a clearly un-Marxian distinction". Alternatively, a duality was presented of "civilised" peoples and "barbarian" peoples.

Such distinctions referred basically to the question mentioned above of whether the respective nations were capable of forming a modern state and a modern economy. This was also what made Marx and Engels, to some extent, support British and French colonialism. However much the two men detested the brutal methods of these powers, their rule represented a civilising force. But this was not always the line of argument followed. For example, Marx advocated German annexation of Danish Schleswig-Holstein, irrespective of which of the two countries was the more developed. The interest in forming a unified, strong Germany was decisive. Similarly, he opposed any national movement, however progressive, if it lined up with Russia, the mainstay of bureaucratic reaction.¹³

The question arises as to whether in the light of all this Marx could be called a nationalist. This question cannot be properly answered outside the context of a discussion of the internationalism of the working class movement and of the proletarian revolution. However, it also concerns the preceding epoch. Schematically speaking, Marx saw two historical stages: that of unitary national states arising from the feudal world; and that of the emergence, within the capitalist nations, of a working class that was bound eventually to overcome nationalism. For now I will focus on the first stage.

Bloom acknowledges that Marx believed in an enlightened patriotism, directed not towards glorification of the past but to setting the national state on the road to progress. Yet according to Bloom, Marx and Engels were no nationalists. Undoubtedly, they had strong sympathies and antipathies for this or that nation and did on occasion make shocking discriminatory remarks. However, their prejudices were tempered in various ways.¹⁴

¹³ Bloom, *The world of nations* (n. 9), pp. 40-56.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75, chapter 14.

Actually, Bloom operates here with a definition of nationalism as chauvinism. But one can be a nationalist without being chauvinist. As far as the historical development from feudalism to modernity is concerned, Bloom offers enough material to make a case for a nationalist element in Marx. It is difficult not to conclude that Marx was a nationalist in the relative sense of being a supporter of the formation of unitary national states as a progressive historical development. Bloom shows, in particular, that both Marx and Engels consistently advocated the formation of a strong, unitary German state. National unification would promote economic development. Though they preferred a Greater Germany, in the end they accepted the Bismarckian solution. They supported the German war against France in 1870, though when the Paris Commune was established they switched sides.

Roman Rosdolsky's *Engels and the "nonhistoric" peoples* was written in 1948 although it was published only in 1964. Concerning the national question, Engels expressed himself often more strongly than Marx. Commenting on the Slav alliance with the Habsburgs against German and Hungarian nationalism, he mentioned hatred of the Russians, Czechs and Croats as the "first revolutionary passion of the Germans". He called for a "*war of annihilation and ruthless terrorism*" against Slavdom. Rosdolsky treats such remarks as part of Engels's theory of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary nations. That theory had two pillars. Firstly, it insisted on the progressiveness of centralisation compared to obsolete particularism. The Austrian Slavs, who were described as "*national refuse*" and "*ruins of peoples*", had no capacity for independent existence. They could only participate in modern civilisation if they allowed themselves to be absorbed by the superior German and Hungarian nations. Historically, even Habsburg centralism was progressive compared to Slavdom. Secondly, their lack of an independent future made the small Central-European peoples a natural tool of the counter-revolution, which is what they had been throughout their history. Engels compared them to nationalities such as the Gaels, Bretons and Basques who had in their respective countries also supported monarchical counter-revolution. The point was, that the only option left to small, dying nationalities was to turn to the counter-revolutionary powers of the day if they wished to prevent themselves from being overrun by the process of modernisation in which they could not independently participate.

According to Rosdolsky, this theory was "un-Marxist", first of all because it was inconsistent with the internationalist principle of equality between nations. Moreover, like Hegel, Engels believed that the potential of a specific people, or the lack of it, was proved by its history. But the only reason he gave for why a lack of achievements in the past could not be made good in the future – why some nations were inherently counter-revolutionary – lay in their less vital character. That claim, amounting to a resurrection of Hegel's concept of "national minds", was far removed from the materialist conception of history. Rosdolsky

concludes that Engels adopted this Hegelianism on tactical grounds. Only the German, Hungarian and Polish bourgeoisies and nobilities were strong enough to challenge the monarchies. The revolutionaries had no other option but to support these nations, even if that meant temporarily sacrificing the interests of other, smaller nations. The Hegelian theory served as a mere justification.¹⁵

In contrast to Bloom, Rosdolsky does not hesitate to recognise the nationalist character of Engels's pronouncements, but he sacrifices the essential unity of the latter's thought, considering his theory of counter-revolutionary nations to be a mere aberration.

Rosdolsky is on firm ground when he regards suggestions of a fixed, unchanging psychological profile of nations as incompatible with the dynamic perspective of historical materialism. However, he ignores the significance of the fact that the main point Engels made, was that counter-revolutionary nations were incapable of the formation of a modern state and economic modernisation. The psychological reasons Engels provided for this were odd for a Marxist, but the concern itself was not. Moreover, as Bloom shows, it was in fact not only national character but also factors of number and territory which made some peoples incapable of independent development. Left on their own, they were doomed to remain backward, peasant nations, without a bourgeoisie and proletariat. In itself this thesis was compatible enough with the Marxist perspective of historical development; it was only that Engels preserved a Hegelian, "spiritual" element in it, which he could easily have abandoned without sacrificing the thesis as such.

In his *The Difficult Dialogue*, Ronaldo Munck concludes that Marx's and Engels's interest in the national question was so peripheral to their real concerns that they turned to Hegel's duality of "historic" and "historyless" peoples to make any sense of it. However, as this scheme did not meet their own insistence on a class perspective, it could never form the basis of a real Marxist analysis of the national question. Only when they took up the Irish cause in the 1860s, did Marx and Engels begin moving gradually towards a more authentic perspective of a duality between oppressed and oppressor nations; through this they replaced the old Hegelian duality, though they never fully embraced the new model. Similarly, Marx's views of colonialism became gradually dimmer, when he perceived that it was precisely from the perspective of economic progress in Asia that much could be said *against* colonialism.¹⁶

Munck shares Rosdolsky's generally positive view of Marx and Engels as revolutionaries. His embarrassment about their less than flattering remarks on the Croats and the Indians shines through all too clearly. But, ironically, one

¹⁵ Roman Rosdolsky, *Engels and the "nonhistoric" peoples: The national question in the revolution of 1848* (Blaneville, 1986), pp. 86, 104-8, 111, chapter 8.

¹⁶ Ronaldo Munck, *The difficult dialogue. Marxism and nationalism* (London and New Jersey, 1986), chapter 1.

could argue that the perspective of supporting great and strong nations against the small and weak is better integrated in the Marxist perspective of economic progress than the alternative of supporting the nationalism of all oppressed nations. It can be argued that to have accepted a general right to self-determination – which Marx and Engels, to Munck's regret, never did – would have meant that they had had to abandon the materialist conception of history as a process of economic progress making its way forward relentlessly at the cost of all forces in its way. To support all nations regardless of their socio-economic significance might be praiseworthy from a humanitarian perspective but not from a hard-boiled Marxist one. One wonders: weren't Marx and Engels perhaps more true to Marxism than Rosdolsky and Munck?

One of those to challenge Rosdolsky is Ephraim Nimni. His central thesis is that the Marxist concept of the national question was fully coherent and based on the socio-evolutionary parameters of that doctrine. In Nimni's interpretation, Marx and Engels generally used the term "nation" in its English and French meaning to designate the population of a nation-state. In contrast, a "nationality" was an ethnic group without a state of its own. Some nationalities, such as the Poles, could become nations; others could not, unable as they were to adapt to capitalist development. The seeming incoherence of supporting some nationalities to the detriment of others, is at a second glance coherent. It is based on the overriding importance attributed to economic development, which means abandoning those nationalities which do not have this in their destiny. The weak point in Nimni's argument concerns his explanation of why Marx and Engels found some nationalities incapable of forming a national state. The author mentions two criteria as essential to them: that the respective population should be large enough to allow for an internal division of labour characteristic of capitalism; and that the territory should be sufficiently large to make the respective state viable. However, the third point, that some nationalities allegedly were of a weak character profile, though condemned by Nimni as abusive, is strangely enough no reason for him to soften his claim of Marxist coherence. Whereas Rosdolsky focusses on the Hegelian-psychological aspect, Nimni concentrates one-sidedly on the, albeit more important, political and economic side of the matter.¹⁷

Another author to have even more forcefully challenged Rosdolsky is Andrzej Walicki. In an incisive contribution to the debate he argues that Marx's and Engels's theory provided no basis for treating nations differently than classes. Engels only followed the logic of Marxism when he treated entire nations as hindering the development of civilisation. To deny small and weak nations the right to self-determination is simply an unpleasant consequence of the Marxist concept of

¹⁷ Nimni, *Marxism and nationalism* (n. 11), chapter 1.

historical necessity.¹⁸ Despite his provocative formulations, Walicki makes, in my opinion, a powerful point. That point is that, in the end, neither was class the basis of Marx's theory. Even classes were only embodiments of economic progress or decline. Marxism was a theory of the advance of civilisation. The proletariat was acclaimed not as a goal in itself, for sentimental reasons or because of its suffering, but as the universal class, i.e. the segment of the population whose interests coincided with the universal interest of society as a whole. Conversely, the bourgeoisie was not found wanting because it was immorally rich or decadent, but because its rule began in time to impede further socio-economic progress. Within such a mode of analysis there was no obvious reason why some nations could not be acclaimed as progressive and others judged as doomed.

We would do good to realise furthermore that Engels's approach harmonised with the revolutionary traditions of the day. His mentioning of the Gaels, Bretons and Basques shows the context in which he viewed small nations, namely as obstacles to the great revolutionary process rolling through Europe from the seventeenth century onward. In his study on the nation in the history of Marxist thought, Charles Herod directs our attention to this fact. Arguing that Hegel fathered the concept of "nations without history" with which Marx and Engels operated, he points out that Marx's lifelong admiration for the French Revolution was also significant in this respect. According to Herod, the latter's criticism of the Slavic national groups was based upon the model furnished by the Alsatians and Bretons within France.¹⁹ Walicki too mentions Hegelianism and the Jacobin belief in national centralisation as the two sources of Engels's model.²⁰ The Jacobins had in any case been doing exactly what Engels was advocating, namely to stamp out the autonomy of the small non-French nationalities as counter-revolutionary and force them to become French. Nineteenth-century revolutionary nationalists would not then have frowned upon Engels's bloodthirsty appeals but would have found them, on the contrary, only too familiar.

Mikhail Agursky stands alone in drawing the opposite conclusion to Rosdolsky's, namely that Marx's and Engels's internationalism was only declaratory. Marxism was in fact only "German revolutionary nationalism". Their theoretical thought was in essence a case of window-dressing. This becomes clear enough when one reads their journalistic writings, which expressed their real concerns. Agursky takes the depreciatory comments on the Asiatic and Slavic peoples as

¹⁸ Walicki, *Marxism and the leap to the kingdom of freedom* (n. 7), pp. 163-6.

¹⁹ Charles C. Herod, *The nation in the history of Marxian thought. The concept of nations with history and nations without history* (The Hague, 1976), p. 37.

²⁰ Walicki, *Marxism and the leap to the kingdom of freedom* (n. 7), p. 155. See also: Nimni, *Marxism and nationalism* (n. 11), p. 17.

proof that Germanocentrism was the core of Marxism.²¹ In proving his case, the author takes an easy road, for by selecting only Marx's and Engels's journalistic comments as representative of "true" Marxism, the rest of their writings can be safely ignored. More problematic is the fact that, even when taking only journalistic works into consideration, the conclusion remains untenable. To begin with, not only did they support German nationalism but many other nationalisms as well. Furthermore, their support for German national interests was never unconditional. The German-nationalist element in Marx and Engels was part of a wider nationalist concern: the hope for a new Europe consisting of a number of great, progressive nation-states.

Horace Davis, in his study of Marxist and labour theories of nationalism, was the first to provide an abstract definition of how, in Marx's work, the nation formed a component part of his internationalism. The community could not do without some form of nationalism, in the sense of a collective organising principle. Believing as he did in international free trade as conducive to economic development, Marx's nationalism – in contrast to Engels's – lacked a protectionist component, though it was still real enough. According to Davis, Marx's internationalism as it were contained the nation. Firstly, internationalism is not cosmopolitanism; it is a system of co-operating nations. As capitalism was an inevitable historical development, so was the nation. Secondly, internationalism for Marx and Engels did imply international co-operation, but not necessarily international equality. The economically more advanced nations – the large and the industrial ones – were entitled to a privileged position in terms of power.²²

Davis supports Bloom's case that Marx was no German nationalist in the unconditional, chauvinist sense. He considers the same to apply to Engels. In his last years the latter repeated the traditional Marxist position to the effect that, should Germany enter into conflict with Russia and its allies, the German social democrats would be forced to line up behind their government. In a war against France and Russia, Germany would be fighting for her national existence. However, should Germany attack France, the French workers should defend themselves. According to Davis, Engels remained a revolutionary internationalist, though in the limited sense as defined above.

The author further notes that Marx's and Engels's support for European colonial expansion should be put in perspective. They did indeed argue that imperialism was, on balance, favourable. Furthering as it did the industrial and commercial development of the barbarian parts of the globe, it drew the "lazy Mexicans" and the Bedouin "nation of robbers" into the civilised world. But in

²¹ Mikhail Agursky, *The Third Rome. National Bolshevism in the USSR* (Boulder and London, 1987), pp. 16-27, 61-7.

²² Horace B. Davis, *Nationalism & socialism. Marxist and labor theories of nationalism to 1917* (New York and London, 1967), pp. 6-8, 13-15.

their later years they somewhat softened their position. Their eventual support of the Irish cause was typical of the change. At first Marx found Irish independence a backward demand, but in due course he came to see Fenianism as an instrument with which to break the power of the British landed aristocracy. But then again, it never became for him a question of a general right to national self-determination. It remained a matter of political expediency. Davis concludes that Marx and Engels never developed a consistent position on the national question because their denial of national rights as a principle made their standpoints, by definition, shifting and dependent on circumstance.²³

This analysis alerts us to an important conceptual problem. Basically, nationalism is the ideal of reconstructing the world as a community of nation-states, each nation having its own state. Within this definition, true nationalism must be internationalist. It must respect the equality of nations, for imperial expansion destroys the concurrence of state and nation. From this angle Marx's and Engels's model is problematic. Subordinating national self-determination to economic progress, they were, strictly speaking, neither nationalists nor internationalists but cosmopolitans. However, at the same time they believed that economic progress was served by reconstructing the world community along the lines of a relatively small number of great national states, cooperating on an equal basis. The result, then, would in fact be a nationalist system of sorts.

A case for the fundamentally non-nationalist character of Marxism is made by Walker Connor, in his *The national question in Marxist-Leninist theory and strategy*. To begin with, the author observes, correctly in my view, that nationalism and Marxism are philosophically incompatible. Nationalism is predicated upon the assumption that people are fundamentally divided vertically into nations, which is at odds with the horizontal principle of class. More than Bloom, Connor emphasises that the concept of the nation Marx operated with was vague; nation was sometimes equated with a state, sometimes with the citizenry of a state and sometimes with an ethnic group. Connor distinguishes three approaches to the problem in Marx and Engels, none of which however amounted to a real acceptance of nationalism. "Classical Marxism" rejected it out of hand, as an attempt to reconcile the working class with its bourgeois enemy. "Strategic Marxism" judged nationalisms by their effect on economic progress and by strategic considerations of the international workers' movement. The third strand, "national Marxism", strongest in Engels, attributed class-transcending and enduring psychological traits to whole nations. Late in life the latter even expressed sympathies for the idea of drawing state borders along ethnic lines, with all nations, including the small ones, now being entitled to states of their own. Connor acknowledges that this third approach is a nationalist one. But it

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-51, 59-71, 79-82.

remained an isolated element in an otherwise cosmopolitan doctrine aiming for the transformation of the global economic system.²⁴

This analysis seems somewhat artificial. The three strands Connor constructs are not easy to distinguish separately in Marx's and Engels's works. Moreover, it does not really take account of the problem of nationalism in Marxism. It is possible that Marx's and Engels's support for nationalist movements was motivated by non-nationalist considerations. But that does not change the fact that time and again Marx and Engels did support such movements. More importantly, as Connor acknowledges, there was a strong logic in this. The materialist theory of history observed a progression from feudalism through capitalism to communism, the formation of nations being part of the first transition. Therefore, Marxist analysis, though based on class and economic structure, nevertheless allowed the nation a more or less fixed place in historical progress. Connor's thesis that Marx and Engels basically rejected nationalism as an ideology of class conciliation is therefore of dubious value. The point is that Marx and Engels *welcomed* some degree of class conciliation at the early stages of capitalism.

In his work on Marx, Engels and national movements, Ian Cummins tackles, among many other points, the question of the role of the national state in the early stages of capitalism. He treats it from the angle of the Marxist penchant for state centralisation. According to Cummins, the idea that political centralisation was a prerequisite of economic development runs like a red thread through Marx's writings. Autonomous provinces, each of them with their own separate laws and governments, are consolidated into integrated states, which make up the modern nations. Localism, provincialism, federalism – all of these were impediments to be removed in order to create the centralised nation, which was an absolute condition for economic development.²⁵

It is important to note that, for Marx, it is not pre-existing nations that unite into states. Instead, Marx saw a process of economically motivated centralisation resulting in the formation of integrated states which he then defined as nations. This means that, without initially having to take any account of nations, he inevitably ended up with them. By identifying it with the state, he made the nation an inescapable element of the modern world. State centralisation, brought about by the needs of economic progress, creates nations for the simple reason that it creates states. Connor is right when he argues that, essentially, Marxism is incompatible with nationalism. But at the same time, there is no conceivable way to cut out the nation from the Marxist historical scheme.

²⁴ Walker Connor, *The national question in Marxist-Leninist theory and strategy* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), chapter 1. For the later Engels on small nations also having a right to independent state formation, see also: Roman Szporluk, *Communism and nationalism. Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (New York, 1988), p. 184.

²⁵ Ian Cummins, *Marx, Engels and national movements* (London, 1980), pp. 20, 29, 31–4.

But then again, this conclusion may be just a little too strong. What I have failed to discuss until now is the possibility that a revolutionary leap could have been made, an immediate giant step, from the very underdeveloped capitalism of the early nineteenth century to a European communism. Should Marx have believed in this, he could have done without the stage of the great capitalist nation-state.

That is precisely the thesis defended by Roman Szporluk in his important study, *Communism and nationalism*. Szporluk supports Connor's "three strands" model. Observing a major break between pre- and post-1848 Marxism, he locates Connor's "classical Marxism" in the years before 1848. The author treats first of all Marx's 1845 critique of Friedrich List's model of independent German capitalist development organised by a protectionist state. According to Szporluk, in these early days Marx hoped for a quick communist breakthrough in Germany which would make a national-capitalist road unnecessary. He pleaded for free trade, which would sharpen class contradictions internationally and further a German and pan-European revolution. The French and English had already national states and therefore the communists of these nations need not fight for the national cause; the Germans on the other hand might skip this stage entirely. In this model of immediate communist revolution there was no place for the nation.²⁶ In 1848–49 however Marx and Engels lost their faith in the possibility of immediate pan-European revolution. Further capitalist development of countries like Germany now seemed inevitable. In that new context, nationalism became acceptable, though in a purely instrumental sense. And we are then back to the nationalist element in Marxism discussed above.²⁷

Szporluk's work makes a reassessment of the national factor in the work of Marx and Engels inevitable. But it does not undo my earlier conclusions, as this author himself recognises that the principled cosmopolitanism of the young Marx was later abandoned by him. Most importantly, in Szporluk, the link between capitalism and the nation in Marx's work, pointed out by Nimni, remains unbroken. Before 1848 Marx was able to deny the political relevance of nationalism precisely because he denied the need of further capitalist development in countries like Germany. But as soon as he understood his own naivety and accepted the inevitability of this development, he accepted the concomitant of the nation. Szporluk's work brings us then to the next and final section of this survey which deals with the nation in the era of communist revolution.

²⁶ Szporluk, *Communism and nationalism* (n. 24), pp. 23, 31, 34–5, 37, 41, 44, 47, 169.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 176, 178, 185–6, 190–2.

3. *The Working Class and the Nation*

The first author here under discussion is again Bloom. He points out that, for Marx, to treat the nation as a coherent group with one interest means to create an imaginary entity, a false abstraction. Class interests do not coincide. Yet, Marx's theory was subtle enough to embrace the nation. History is about the development of the productive forces. Particular classes represent either stagnation or growth. The respective socio-economic systems they embody either promote or hinder the economic development of society. In that scheme there is always one class whose own particular interest coincides with the interest of universal economic progress, i.e. with society's interest in general. This, then, is the "national class" – a Marxist term very close in meaning to "universal class". It is the class which leads the nation and society along the path of progress. In other words, though the particular interests of classes are mutually conflicting, there is after all such a thing as a general interest. The point is that one class, by serving its own particular interest, serves the general interest as well; whereas the interest of the other classes harms it. The proletariat was no exception in this historical model. During the nineteenth century, as the bourgeoisie grew ever more obsolete, it became the new national class.²⁸

Quoting Marx to the effect that, in form though not in substance, the proletarian struggle was a national struggle, and that the workers of every country must first settle accounts with their own bourgeoisie, Bloom concludes that, for Marx, the nation was the irreducible unit for the establishment of socialism. Each national proletariat's first task was to socialise its own economy. Yet, the communist movement remained internationalist in outlook. Without a concerted effort of the various workers' parties there would be no successful revolution. Initially Engels even proceeded from the assumption of simultaneous revolutions in all civilised countries. Soon it dawned on him that this might be too simple an assumption. But that did not change much. There was to be no communism within "national walls". If only one country, for instance France, should turn communist, international economic interconnectedness would undo it. In any case the capitalist world leader, Great Britain, also had to turn communist. Moreover, revolution in one country was bound to lead to world war. The capitalist states, especially Russia, would not sit with folded arms, but would intervene.²⁹

This makes for an interesting summary of Marx's and Engels' views of the international revolution, but leaves an important question unanswered. Once the working class was securely in the saddle in the main "civilised" countries, i.e. Germany, France, Britain and the United States, what would happen to the

²⁸ Bloom, *The world of nations* (n. 9), chapter 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 90, 95-8.

nation? Would there be a merger of the respective nations? Bloom does not believe that Marx and Engels foresaw a uniform communist world. Having taken power, the working class would form a "socialist nation". True, the *Manifesto* held that workers have no fatherland. But that meant merely that, without property and the vote, they had no fatherland *now*. Now they did not have a stake in their respective country. But the *Manifesto* added that, by taking power, the proletariat would "constitute itself as the nation". According to Bloom, the whole tenor of the discussion in the *Manifesto* was to deny that socialists were opposed to nations.

There is, of course, the further passage in the *Manifesto* holding that "national differences and antagonisms [*Absonderungen und Gegensätze*] between peoples" were fast disappearing under capitalism, and that the rule of the proletariat would efface them even more. Bloom tackles this problem by claiming that the phrase refers to undesirable and invidious differences, but not to distinctions in general. To support this claim, he quotes further passages to the effect that the exploitation of one nation by another and hostility between them would disappear.³⁰

This interpretation is not completely convincing. Bloom does make an important point when he notes that the remarks on the proletariat constituting itself as the nation show that Marx and Engels foresaw the survival of the nation at the very least in the transitional stage preceding communism. Though it is questionable to build a case on individual quotations, the conclusion seems convincing because there is no counter-evidence available. Thus, at the time when the proletariat had not yet completed the process of nationalisation of the means of production, i.e. when communism was not yet introduced, the world was to remain divided in something like proletarian nation-states. But Bloom's claim that Marx and Engels did not foresee the complete abolition of nations under communism remains unproven. The fact that Marx and Engels predicted the disappearance of hostility and exploitation between nations does not imply that they did not foresee an even more far-reaching merger.

Davis takes the same line as Bloom. There are in his view three possible ways to interpret the claim of the workers "having no fatherland". It may mean that the proletariat is so downtrodden that it is incapable of absorbing any national culture. In addition, it could mean that as long as the workers do not have property and the vote they have no stake in their fatherland. They are not in fact citizens although by taking power they become so and acquire a fatherland. Finally, it might mean that class-conscious workers feel more at one with their fellow-workers abroad than with their respective nation. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive. The second point, made earlier by Bloom, is obviously the most significant for our purpose.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-8, 70.

Davis proceeds to claim that Marx and Engels recognised nations as necessary and desirable, because of the essential functions they performed. When they wrote about the withering away of the state, they did not have the nation in mind. "The *nation*, in their view, should survive as the unit around which would be built the international society of the future." Unfortunately, however, Davis does not prove this claim any more than Bloom. He makes mention of a number of positive remarks by Marx and Engels about the nation, but they all concern the era of capitalism.³¹

Connor takes explicit account of Marx's differentiation between the transitional period and communism. In Connor's opinion, the remarks to the effect that the proletarian struggle is at first national in form (as each working class must first settle accounts with its own bourgeoisie) and that the victorious proletariat constitutes itself as the nation, are convincing proof that Marx and Engels expected the transitional stage preceding communism to recognise national states. However, this does not lead Connor to assume that Marx stopped being an internationalist. He quotes the latter's angry comments on the passage in a draft programme of the social-democratic party to the effect that the working class strives for its emancipation first of all within the framework of the present-day national state. But this does not change matters much. In his comments, Marx recognised that it was self-evident that the immediate area of a proletariat's uprising must be its own country. The formulation of the draft was only unacceptable because it ignored the need of international cooperation.

But what about the communist era? Does it, in Connor's terms, merely mean the definitive end of national antagonism or, alternatively, the end of all national distinctions, including for example separate languages? On this issue Marx proves a poor guide. If taken literally, the key passage in the *Manifesto* mentioning the vanishing national differences suggests that all differences will eventually disappear. But this is not stated literally. Connor lets the matter rest.³² In his *National Communism*, Peter Zwick draws a similar conclusion, namely that Marx believed in proletarian nation-states during the transitional stage, but that it remains unclear whether he visualised the final socialist world as cosmopolitan or internationalist.³³

Finally, Szporluk takes the other extreme. According to him, the Marxist conception as expounded in the *Manifesto* held that capitalism was essentially anti-national. It was the potential of the world market to overcome all national divisions, which were essentially pre-modern. Szporluk acknowledges that Marx continued to speak of the bourgeoisies of various nations. But he surmises that Marx used such expressions casually and without theoretical significance. It

³¹ Davis, *Nationalism & socialism* (n. 22), pp. 10-8, 76-9.

³² Connor, *The national question in Marxist-Leninist theory and strategy* (n. 24), pp. 7-8, 18-9.

³³ Peter Zwick, *National communism* (Boulder, Col., 1983), pp. 20-1.

would have been inconsistent for Marx to believe that a cosmopolitan economy could sustain nationally separate states for long. Szporluk seems to overstate his case. Marx certainly did not consider nations to be pre-modern as such. On the contrary, he recognised them as phenomena of modernity, responsible for consolidating the decentralised feudal world into larger units. It is another matter that capitalism subsequently moved on even further. By creating a world market, it began in due course to undermine its own product – the nation. But that again does not necessarily mean that under capitalism this process would in Marx's view proceed far enough to make nations definitively obsolete.

But Szporluk is on safer ground when he holds that Marx and Engels believed in the eventual complete disappearance of nations under communism. He acknowledges that this is hard to prove on the basis of quotations. Both mentioned the hostility between nations eventually becoming a thing of the past; but that is not the same thing as predicting the demise of nations as such. However, according to Szporluk, they must have meant that the nations themselves were bound to disappear. Otherwise their argument about the world market would have been inconsistent. This does not make a water-tight case, for why couldn't they have been inconsistent? Yet, one must admit that it would be going against the drift of their system, had they assumed that nation-states were there to stay. At some point the ever deeper unification of the global economy was bound to deprive them of their basis. Moreover, it would be out of character for those who foresaw the fusion of state and society and the elimination of all private property of the means of production, of all money and market forms, and of all great social divisions of labour, to presume the endless viability of the nation. Moreover, Szporluk does produce an 1847 quotation by Engels, which says literally that under communism the various nations would merge and supersede themselves just as surely as the differences between classes would disappear. According to Szporluk, for Marx and Engels nationality was comparable to religion. In the end it was bound to go.³⁴ His case cannot be considered proven, but it has a definite plausibility.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this survey of scholarly literature has been to discuss the question of the nationalist element in Marx and Engels. To bring order to the broad range of themes involved in this, I have treated consecutively the questions of the state, the nation and communism. As was to be expected, in all three fields the problem has proved to be a complex one. In the first section we discovered that Marx's

³⁴ Szporluk, *Communism and nationalism* (n. 24), pp. 52–4, 64–8.

and Engels' ideal of the abolition of the state did not entail the dissolution of society into its individual components. They foresaw a compact, self-administering society organised on a basis of wide citizen participation. In other words, they foresaw the rise of a true community. That ideal is close to the original French concept of the nation as a collected citizenry. However, this does not imply that Marx and Engels foresaw the survival of the nation *ad infinitum*. On a flight of fantasy one can imagine the whole world to be reorganised as a single self-administering popular community. It would be odd to treat such a globally collected citizenry as a nation. Nations, after all, presuppose the existence of other nations.

In the third section of the present article a tentative solution for this problem was formulated. I concluded that nation-states were expected to survive during the transitional period of proletarian dictatorship. It seems more likely however that Marx and Engels did not expect separate national communities to survive into the stage of communism. As Szporluk argues, it seems that they ultimately foresaw a complete merger of nations. This historical sequence is significant for the underlying motive it reveals. Fundamentally, Marxism was a cosmopolitan ideal. In the end the world would be one. No classes, no nations. But this was no total, uncompromising cosmopolitanism. Nations were acknowledged to have an inevitable role to play during the transitional era of proletarian rule. For the time being the nation remained the only framework within which the ideal of the collected citizenry could be realised. For a global framework to emerge, the process of economic globalisation would first have to develop more intensely. Only in the future world of communism would the cosmopolitan ideal be realised.

The most complex question, treated in the second section, concerns the role of nations and nationalism during the capitalist era. Szporluk, again, argues that in their early years Marx and Engels hoped for an immediate pan-European proletarian revolution. As a result, working class power would be established in all "civilised" countries of Europe. Europe would then remain divided among several great proletarian nation-states, but the problem of the creation of new capitalist nation-states was, as it were, passed over. There was, for example, no sympathy for nationalist efforts to create an independent capitalist Germany. Soon, however, Marx and Engels abandoned this utopian view and began to work feverishly on the reconstruction of Central Europe as a selective community of great nation-states. The Italians, Germans, Hungarians and Poles were allowed to join the company of the British and French (and the Russians for that matter). But for the Czechs and Slovaks, Croats and Serbs, Romanians and many others the future looked bleak. They were expected to let themselves be absorbed by more worthy nations and relinquish the possibility of an independent existence.

This treatment of the national question has given rise to continuous interpretative debate. In the introduction to the present article I mentioned two models to be found in the existing literature. The majority of scholars conclude that Marx's and Engels's championing of the nationalism of a number of "great" nations

stands comparatively unrelated to their general system. The nationalism is undeniably there and it cannot be argued away. But it is "un-Marxist", an unfortunate flirt rather than a real love affair. For Rosdolsky and Munck, Marxist nationalism is an unfortunate Hegelian relic in a system which had otherwise overcome Hegelianism. For Szporluk (adhering to Pelczynski's theoretical model) and Connor, the cosmopolitan "classical Marxism" remains the basic "strand". The other two lack the necessary consistency to be taken entirely seriously.

Bloom and Davis represent interesting intermediary cases. These authors also insist that Marx and Engels were no nationalists; by which they mean to say that, despite their championing of German national unification, their support of the German cause remained conditional. International working-class unity remained a preponderant concern. However, Bloom presents a case for the implicit presence of a theory of the nation in Marx's work, resting on an approximate identification of nation and state. He thereby provides a means to integrate this aspect of Marx's work in the latter's overall theoretical concept. Similarly, Davis presents a scheme integrating nationalism in a Marxist internationalist model. According to him, Marxism is not a cosmopolitan but an internationalist system. By that very fact, it provides room for nationalism, as internationalism logically presupposes a world of nation-states – a point also made by Zwick.

The case for nationalism being an integral element of the Marxist world view is most consistently – and in my opinion convincingly – argued by Nimni and Walicki. According to the former, Marx and Engels recognised the nation-state as a precondition for successful capitalist development. Their discriminating between great and small nations is coherent enough in that context. Small and scattered nations could allegedly not produce a state framework large and dense enough to allow economic progress to take its course. In other words, selective defence of the great nation-states was a logical element in the Marxist theory of socio-economic development rather than a deplorable Hegelian relic. Cummins makes the same point from a slightly different angle, when he notes that in Marx's work state centralisation was considered essential for economic modernisation. And centralisation produced, almost by definition, the nation-state, which, thereby, became likewise essential. Walicki treats the matter most fundamentally, when he argues that, given the fact that economic progress and not class was the fundamental issue in Marxism, there is no problem integrating the nation into it. This indeed happens automatically, and just as smoothly as classes are integrated, once one recognises that nations may serve or hamper economic progress. It would, then, be inconsistent from a Marxist point of view to ignore them.

The complexity of the problem of Marxist nationalism consists in its multi-layered character. At its most fundamental level Marxism has nothing to do with nationalism. As Connor notes, philosophically Marxism and nationalism are incompatible. Nationalism takes the nation as the fundamental unit of society, and the creation and preservation of nation-states as its most lofty goal. Marxism

argues in completely different terms of the development of the productive forces and the succession of different relations of production, embodied in corresponding classes. At this basic level it ignores nations as well as states, and takes a cosmopolitan view of the world. Its end goal is cosmopolitan. But at a more concrete level, economic progress does not only give birth to certain productive systems and classes, it also calls in to life centralised nation-states. These states form a co-operative "international" system which will only be overcome in the very long run. In other words, on the ground level of cosmopolitanism there arises a second floor, occupied by nationalism and internationalism.

This being said, the question remains as to whether Marx and Engels were indeed nationalists. This question gives rise to three considerations. Firstly, the fundamental answer must undoubtedly be negative, on the grounds presented above: the nation was not their main concern. Secondly, as defenders of the institution of the nation-state during the capitalist and proletarian eras they did however integrate a nationalist element in their doctrine. As we saw, this was no sign of lacking consistency, but of coherence, for it grew out of the basis of their theory of economic progress. Only in their cavalier attributing of fixed psychological profiles to nations do we find an incongruous, "un-Marxist" element in their work.

Thirdly, there is the question of Marx's and Engels' meting out unequal treatment to different nations. This took mainly two forms. The national aspirations of some nations were supported, those of the Germans for instance, whereas those of others, such as the Czechs, Indians or Algerians, were denied. And sides were freely taken in wars of some capitalist states against others, for example Germany against France or *vice versa*. This is the point which makes many authors decide that the nationalist element in Marx and Engels was at odds with their proletarian internationalist position. That however depends crucially on one's definition of proletarian internationalism. Marx and Engels never took the unprincipled position of chauvinism, "right or wrong, my country". Their choices were made on the basis of principled considerations, namely on the questions of which states and nations were allegedly most progressive, and which position in national and state conflicts served the international working class movement best.

Proletarian internationalism is a model of concerted effort, reflecting as it does the cooperation between the working classes and communists of all nations. However, as Walicki points out, Marxist logic positively demands that this cooperation is *not* based on equality among the cooperating partners but on the interests of the movement as a whole. Marxist internationalism follows a Benthamite, utilitarian approach, with the common good of the whole serving as the highest standard and overruling the rights of the individual participants. And it is not only applied to individuals but also to entire classes and nations.

The fact that this "utilitarian" approach was chosen is again only natural. In Marxism, historical progress is not measured by the standard of equality of rights

– whether between individuals, classes or nations – but by the question of which individuals, classes and nations best serve the development of the world towards communism. Logically, in such a system, rights can never be the standard themselves, but must be subjected to the higher standard of the alleged common good. Differently put, to introduce a principle of formal equality between nations or national proletariats, regardless of the significance of individual nations and classes to the global march to communism, would have unhinged the system. Marx's and Engels's refusal to accept the principle of equal self-determination of nations does not signify the rejection of internationalism, but adherence to one particular interpretation of it. This refusal does not signify their fore-swearing of proletarian internationalism but confirms their commitment to it.

To return, then, to the question we set out with, namely whether nationalist elements in Leninism and Stalinism can be taken as indicating a distancing from the fountainhead of Marxism, we are justified to conclude that this is at the very least a rash conclusion. The above critical survey of studies of Marx and Engels amply shows that it simply will not do to take the formula of the workers "having no fatherland" as the Marxist programme in a nutshell. To weigh nationalist elements in bolshevik theory and practice against this slogan, and then to draw hasty conclusions about a divergence from the Marxist tradition, is untenable, even primitive. At the very least, we can say that the question of the background and significance of bolshevik nationalism in the context of the history of Marxism needs careful reconsideration.