

The idea of nation in the 19th century and Marxism

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The idea of nation in the 19th century

BEGIN with Otto Vossler (1949, p.1): “Nationalism is the most characteristic political power of the 19th and the 20th Centuries. In the same way that the 16th and the 17th Centuries can be called the centuries of religious wars, the late 17th and the 18th Centuries can be called the centuries of Enlightenment, it can be said that the 19th and the 20th Centuries are the centuries of nationalism. In fact, all the great political movements after the French Revolution are expressions and effects of the national desire.”

Vossler’s book mentioned above discusses both the concept of nation and some of its most significant interpreters, from several political and ideological positions: Rousseau, Burke, Jefferson, Fichte, Wilhelm Humboldt, Mazzini, Hegel, Ranke.

That list, more than an arbitrary collection, synthesizes the wide range of perspectives that the topic “nation” brought about: the democratic romanticism of Rousseau and Jefferson; the fanatic conservatism of Burke; the idealism of Fichte and Hegel; the liberalism of Mazzini; the conservative historicism of Ranke. In fact, both the idea of nation and the concrete materialization of the nations and of the nationalisms from the French Revolution on are characterized by the disputes and the tensions, by the conflicts and the wars.

To state the central nature of the French Revolution as the initial mark of the expansion of the modern nations and nationalisms must not mean ignoring the existence of antecedents, of “protonationalisms” to use Hobsbawm’s expression, such as the case of the ideas by Lessing, Rousseau and Herder.

A decisive name of the German Enlightenment, Gotthold Theodor Lessing (1729-1781), is brought here to represent an attitude that inaugurates a strategy of national affirmation based on the valuation of a cultural *ethos*, of a moral appearance that structures a sense of “belonging”, which calls the nation. In the case of Germany in the first half of the 18th Century, still perfectly fragmented and, for that reason, reduced in the face of already established National States, such as France and England, for example, the strategy to overcome the “backwardness”, to reach the European powers, mobilized, among other instruments, a questioning to the French cultural hegemony. Lessing presented that problem to himself based on the development of a specifically

German dramaturgy, which meant, promptly, a confrontation with the “theatrical Reform “ of Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), a critic and professor greatly renowned at the time, who wanted to introduce in the German scene the rules of the French classical theater, of Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) and Jean Racine (1639-1699). Lessing fought Gottsched`s project opposing to the French classical tragedy the “genius” of Shakespeare, the excesses, the rage, the encyclopedia of the human feelings contained in his theater. But if Lessing is an extraordinary critic, both cultured and sensitive, perfectly in control of the aesthetic-literary issues, his basic motivation transcends the theatrical scope. His purpose, according to Anatol Rosenfeld (1964, p.17), is

the struggle for a national and a bourgeois theater, for a theater that participated in the problems of the bourgeoisie to which it was tied, at the time, indissolubly, the progress of the nation: struggle for the emancipation which, in the concrete situation, necessarily had to move against the French Classicism (and against Gottsched, its German exponent), since it represented at the time a foreign theater, which hindered the emergence of the national potentialities, and it symbolized, above all, the spirit of absolutism.

Lessing, rhetor spirit of the German Enlightenment, fetched in the Baroque, in Shakespeare, the weapons against a Classicism which “supposedly universal” was, under those circumstances, the convalidation of the authority and of the orthodoxy, which obstructed the formation of the nation, of freedom and of tolerance.

To discuss Lessing`s attitude towards Classicism places a complex issue, with something paradoxical. It`s that there is, with reason, a strong affinity between the Enlightenment and Classicism, and, nevertheless, Lessing`s Enlightenment must deny Classicism to affirm the national, the political and cultural autonomy. That same standard can be seen in the case of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Undeniably one of the great names of the French Enlightenment, the Geneva native was as more Enlightened as more he was recognized as the pioneer of the Romantic trend which, for all effects, was almost in a self-ascribed manner, a reaction to the Enlightenment, in several aspects. To the Enlightened Rousseau, direct and legitimate inspirer of the French Revolution, one should add the romantic and inspirer Rousseau of the national feeling.

According to Otto Vossler (1949, p.13): “Rousseau was the first and, it can be said, the most important propeller of the desire and of the idea of nation”. A strong advocate of Geneva`s autonomy, the author of a Constitution project for Corsica, of a proposal of reform of the Polish Constitution, Rousseau also inspired the project of North American nation, which is associated to Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). Rousseau was the author of the ideas of a social republic based on the small agricultural estate, protected from corruption, which wouldn`t be separated from the great city.

More than once, Rousseau registered the importance of John Locke (1632-1704) as a reference for the elaboration of his own political thought.

A reader and enthusiast of the great political thinkers of the classic Antiquity and of the civic virtues of the ancient people and of the civic humanism of the Renaissance, Rousseau took Locke as an interlocutor whom he respected, but whom he can't follow completely. In the center of Rousseau's criticism is the invocation of the "general desire" against the dictation of Locke's privatist individualism. The synthesis of that opposition was placed, in an exemplary manner, in the differences between the triads of Locke and those of Jefferson, who was a disciple of Rousseau. According to Locke, on the *Second Treaty on the Civil Government*, written in 1690, the three inalienable rights of men are: the right of life, the right of liberty and the right of property. Jefferson, who wrote the *Declaration of the Independence of the United States*, in 1776, comes back to Locke's triad changing it, as follows: the three inalienable rights of men are: the right of life, the right of liberty and the right of the pursuit of happiness. Those triads summarize both basic matrices of the bourgeois State: the liberal one, inspired by Locke and the democratic one, tributary of Rousseau's lesson. In fact, with Rousseau there was the constitution not only of an idea of democratic republic, but there was also the outline of a *nation*.

Several authors pointed to the many and sometimes lacerating ambiguities of Rousseau's thought, and they were right. As far as his conceptions of *democracy* and *nation* were concerned, there was also a strong ambiguity that had to be seen as transcending his biography. It has to do with a dilemma, which has presented itself many times, with serious political and social consequences, and that has to do with the indissociability of the democratic imperative for the legitimacy of the nation. In fact, the history of the capitalist States is marked by the recurrent mobilization of anti-democratic and discretionary political instruments, presented as essential measures either to *build the nation* or to *guarantee its preservation* against their internal and external enemies. The core of that issue can be seen in Rousseau, and Luis Roberto Salinas Fortes (1976, p.25-6) surprised him as follows:

A great political distance seems, for example, to be in force between the *Contract* and the *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, a text in which, asked to guide the Polish nobility that was facing the problem of the nation, in view of the foreign threats, Rousseau sponsored the cause of an aristocratic *conservatism* which is not very compatible with the republican egalitarianism which he advocated in the realm of theory.

That issue was raised here to indicate a decisive contradiction, which moves alongside the relations between democracy and nation, which is the systematic belittling of the democracy on behalf of the interests of the nation turned into absolute and scared reality. And that issue was also raised to register that it is present among the most expressive and unsuspected names.

The second name among the proto-nationalists considered here is that of Herder. Also identified as one of the inaugurators of the Romantic movement, Herder will be acknowledged in the history of thought as one of the pioneers

both of nationalism and of historicism. Before Herder, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) had already dealt with those themes with an originality that wasn't noticed in his time.

Both Vico and Herder were authors from the periphery. Isaiah Berlin (1982, p.6) called the attention to that, to the fact that Vico and Herder were able to formulate ideas displeasingly innovative starting from the European periphery. That's where: "more relevant original ideas [were] generated in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and, even more, in Western Prussia, often described as culturally backward places, in a time of intensive scientific and cultural activity".

It's sustained here that that "originality", that the capacity of certain authors from peripheral regions, in some moments, to innovate, to revolutionize the thought and the world, are manifestations of a desire for affirmation and autonomy present in the processes of national building. Both Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and, after him, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), from that point of view, are expressions of the long and winding path of the building of the German nation. Both the book *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, by Herder, of 1784, and the *Speeches to the German Nation*, by Fichte, made on December 13th, 1807 and March 20th, 1808, belong to the same process which, very late, will result, in 1871, in the unification of the German National State.

Herder brought to the idea of nation the romantic accent, the valuation of the national spirit identified with the popular spirit: "Herder's fame is due to the fact that he was the father of the nations related with nationalism, historicism and *volksgeist*, as well the leader of the romantic revolt against Classicism, rationalism and the faith in the omnipotence of the scientific method..." (Berlin, 1982,

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Jean Jacques Rousseau.

p.133). Or still, according to Otto Maria Carpeaux (1961, p.1552): “Herder was the first European who, remaining a cosmopolitan, in the Enlightenment sense, interpreted Europe as a symphony of several different voices, of the national voices, knowing how to distinguish them and characterize them...”.

The third name of the proto-nationalist ideas, which will be presented here, is that of Fichte. The circumstances that surrounded his “speeches” tell as much about his purposes as the own content of his preaching. Fichte made his speeches at the moment when Germany was occupied by the Napoleonic armies, and his message is, at the same time, the calling together to the building of the nation, that is, to the overcoming either of the age-old feudal structures, which still prevailed in Germany and that hindered its unification, or of the immediate foreign domination under Napoleon, without that meaning a denial of the political and cultural advances that resulted from the French Revolution.

Fichte (1943, p.309 and 315), in a country militarily occupied, in a country both materially and institutionally backward, dared to complain to Germany: “to shelter the people, who among all the modern people, was the one who conserved the best the germ of human perfectness”, “the only (nation) among the neo-European people which demonstrated, centuries ago, through its bourgeois cities, that is liable to cope with a republican Constitution”.

About that, Francisco Ayala (1943, p.15) said: “The *Speeches* by Fichte have a general reach theoretical character when it builds, in a definite manner for Political Science, the concept of Nation as a valuable being, endowed with the living historical reality and with an inherent right “.

The argument can be summarized by saying that by the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th Centuries, there was the emergence of authors and ideas which, though heterogeneous in their philosophical ties, originated a political and cultural complex which, called proto-nationalism here, nurtured concrete projects of national building in the 19th Century in four great segments: 1. the liberal-bourgeois; 2. the democratic-bourgeois; 3. the counter-revolutionary; 4. the socialist. The first one of those segments was emblematically represented by the North American case; the second segment materialized itself in the French experience, during the period of the Jacobine Convention and in the first stage of the Revolution of 1848; the third segment encompassed the experience of the Bourbon Restoration of 1815 and the German unification under Prussian trusteeship; the fourth segment was represented by the experience of the Paris Commune, of 1871.

The cases mentioned here don't exhaust the universe of the concrete national building process in the 19th Century, which admitted hybrid forms and inconclusive experiences, such as the case of Italy, which deserves to be highlighted.

The Italian unification process took place between 1861 and 1870, and was particularly complex due to the variety and the discrepancy of the forces, interests and intervening ideas. In a situation similar to that of Germany, Italy was also marked by the lasting permanence of institutions that were typical of feudalism. If

in Germany the chimera of the restoration of the Sacred Roman-German Empire harassed and condemned the country to a long and dramatic bet on the past, in Italy that role of linking to the archaic was exercised by the equally long papal domination, which in a somewhat delirious sign, by the end of its power, challenged modernity with the encyclicals *Quanta cura*, of 1864, and *Syllabus*, of 1870, which were agonizing reactions by Pope Pius IX to the growing secularization.

From 1830 on, Italy witnessed the increase of the movement in favor of its national unification, in a process that confronted both the power of the Habsburgs and their Italian domains, the old German dynasty, which dominated Sicily, and the Pope and his territories and his protector, France. The Italian unification was characterized by the dispute between two perspectives: the liberal conservative perspective represented by Camillo B. Cavour (1810-1861) and the liberal-democratic one, synthesized in the figures of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882).

Analyzing the process of the *Risorgimento italiano*, Antonio Gramsci (1978, p.275-6) said that, during all the time, the Action Party, of Mazzini and Garibaldi, was guided by the moderate, from which resulted that, in the end, the unification met, above all, the interests of the great capital, of the large landed estate owners, of the bourgeois nobility to the detriment of the rural and the urban workers, in a process of income, wealth and capital concentration with a strong regional discount, meaning the extension of the inequalities between the North and the South of the country.

The four segments of the national building considered here have a theoretical and philosophical base which is equally complex. If the bourgeois liberalism adapted itself in the United States as its privileged territory, the victory of the perspective based in Locke, represented by the decisive action of Alexander Hamilton, who ran the North American economic policy, in its first few years, was not immediate. In fact, between 1776 and 1787, between the Independence and the Constitution, the North American republic underwent a dispute between the trend led by Jefferson and his idea of democracy, inspired in Rousseau, and the liberal republic, in Hobbes's and Locke's fashion, spread in the United States by the "federalists": A. Hamilton (1757-1804), James Madison (1751-1836) and John Jay (1745-1829).

Indeed, despite the actual victory of the federalists from the point of view of the formatting of the North American State, the liberal-democratic perspective remained an important political reference between 1820 and 1840, having influenced in a decisive manner the vision that Alexis Tocqueville (1805-1859) established of the United States. Besides, for such men as Henri David Thoreau (1817-1862), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892), the United States of halfway through the 19th Century could still appear as a social, open and pluralist democracy.

In his book *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (1962) said that the power and the establishment of the democracy in that country, which he got to know

in the 1830's, resulted from three factors which characterized its political and social institutions: its localism, its individualism and its privatism. Tocqueville's argument was that the power of the North American democracy in the 19th Century rested on the fact that the State had to be able to acknowledge its citizens as holders of rights, which it had to provide. The denial of that image of integration, due to the presence of slavery in the South of the country, was overcome by the Civil War (1861-1865), which also resulted in the extension of the access to land for a huge flow of migrants which went to the United States from 1880 on.

The fact that that image of the United States as being a social, open and pluralist democracy, has been, since the 19th Century, a myth with clear political and ideological purposes, didn't reduce its effectiveness, above all when it was confronted with other segments of the national building, such as the democratic-bourgeois and the counter-revolutionary ones.

The democratic-popular nation, the nation that resulted from the broad social mobilization, inspired fear and panic either in its Jacobine version or in its events of 1848.

The reactionary thought believed that the French Revolution was the evil to be fought since it was the matrix of all others. According to the Frenchmen L. G. de Bonald (1754-1840) and Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), as well as to the Irish Edmund Burke (1729-1797), it was necessary to attack the French Revolution either because of its political implications – the calling of the popular participation, the end of the privilege etc. – or because of its philosophical implications. According to Touchard (1972, p.374): “The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* roused in a special manner Burke's vehement sarcasms. Before it, he invoked the particular, the single, what was wonderful about the natural differences of the place, of time, of the habits, of the experiences and of people”.

As a reaction to what in the French Revolution called upon the “universal fraternity”, the counter-revolutionary thought was a significant support of the conservative nationalism either of the French trends of the 19th Century or of the conservative German trends which, inspired by the historicist thought, eventually established the political and cultural principles of the German unification.

It's certain that the French nationalism of the 19th Century wasn't only reaction and conservatism, that Michelet (1798-1874) can't be forgotten and that he's the best representative of the democratic and popular national perspective. But it's within the scope of the message that goes from conservatism, from traditionalism to the anti-democratic, racist and xenophobic reaction that the ideas of nation and the French nationalism move more strongly, either in the context of the Revolution of 1848 or as a reaction to the defeat in the war against Prussia in 1870, or as a reaction to the Paris Commune, in 1871, or as a reaction to the crisis of the Third Republic, in the end of the 19th Century, of which the Dreyfus case was emblematic.

It's about the reiteration of a conservative tradition that began with François-René Chateaubriand (1768-1848) and Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854), had its intermediate period with François P. G. Guizot (1787-1874), Pierre G. F. Le Play (1806-1882), Ernest Renan (1823-1892) and Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), and ended with the authors who were born in the second half of the 19th Century: Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) and Charles Maurras (1868-1952). From the catholic and aristocratizing traditionalism of Chateaubriand and Lamennais, to the scientific and patriotic conservatism of Renan-Taine-Le Play, to the monarchist, militarist and anti-semitic nationalism of Barrès-Maurras-Péguy. In all those versions, the basic unit of thought was the use of the idea of nation as an instrument to fight against democracy, the popular movement and socialism.

It's also under the sign of the counter-revolution that one must include the movement that resulted in the unification of Germany, in 1871.

It must be warned once again that, when the conservative centrality of the political and ideological movement which led to the unification of Germany is mentioned, we are not ignoring the existence of theoretical trends and concrete political movements, such as the ones expressed in the Revolution of 1848-1849, which demanded the development of a democratic Germany. The great romantic poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) and the group called "leftist Hegelians", of which both Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895) participated were emblematic of that trend.

Authors and theoretical trends have already been mentioned here, such as the romanticism of Herder, the idealism of Fichte, which provided elements for the building of the idea of nation in Germany. Now let's talk about historicism. The so-called German Historic School, either in the field of Law with Friedrich Savigny (1779-1861), Gustav Hugo (1764-1844) and Karl F. Eichhorn (1781-1854); or in the field of History, with Barthold Niebuhr (1776-1831), Leopold Ranke (1795-1886), Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), Heinrich Sybel (1817-1895), Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903) and Heinrich Treitschke (1834-1896); or in the field of Economy, com Hugo Hildebrand (1812-1878), Karl Roscher (1817-1894), Karl Knies (1821-1898), Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917), Werner Sombart (1863-1941) and Max Weber (1864-1920), was the ideological support of the building of Germany, either in its pioneer Prussian matrix or in its consequences.

Mainly the historians were followers of the "small Germany", of the Germany under Prussian domination and which excluded Austria from the German unification. Advocates of the Prussian tradition and future supporters of the Bismarckian policy, those historians who emerged between 1840 and 1848 were, in fact, "historians of the new German Empire, even though their works, except for Treitschke, were prior to the formation of this Empire" (Guilland, 1899, p.2-3).

Also adversaries of the Enlightenment's universalizing rationalism, the German historians appealed to a conception of history which, refusing the abstractions, the generalizations, emphasized and valued the irreducible

character of the regional configurations, which were unique in every aspect. That theoretical and methodological stance, characteristic of the German Historic School, in fact, constituted the modern historiography, the so-called scientific historiography, either because of the great development it brought to the methodology of the historical research or because of the actual extension of the historiographical field, which became global since then.

Alongside history, geography also played an important role in the building of the German nation, with the creation of geopolitics, from the work of Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) on.

Having occurred simultaneously, the Italian and the German unification processes were significantly different from one another. In the Germany case it wasn't a movement that sought liberty from the foreign domination, but one that built a political power, according to Benedetto Croce (1950, p.262). The formation of the National State based on a militarist strategy led by Prussia and the wars of 1862, against Denmark, of 1866, against Austria, and 1870, against France.

The German historicists made politics:

While Droysen, Heinrich von Sybel or Mommsen were on the side of liberalism, even after the bitter disappointment for the failure in 1848, others such as Treitschke, did nothing more than continue the work of turning the state sacred, identified as the "the people united by law and considered as a great independent power" which has the right to "make its will prevail by means of the arms against the foreign will". The purpose of the nation-states was war: "War is not only a practical need: it's also a theoretical need, a requirement of logic. The concept of state implies that of war, since the essence of the state is the power. The state is the people organized in sovereign power". (Treitschke apud Fontana, 2004, p.229)

Among the German historicists in the field of economy, let's still recall Adam Müller (1779-1829) and Friedrich List (1789-1846) who, specially the latter, brought to the economic thought the specifically national datum in direct opposition to what was practiced by the classical economic thought, which abstracted the national singularities of the economic processes centering itself in the building of the abstract general laws that were believed to be able to reproduce the economic reality in a conceptual manner.

The book by List, *National System of the Political Economy*, of 1841, more than outlining the generic working of the economy, was a political undertaking with direct incidence in the process both of the German unification and of its industrial development through advocating the thesis of the "protection of the emerging industry". The irony of that situation is that List learned the protectionist principles that he advocated for the German industrial development in the United States, based on the success of the policies developed by Alexander Hamilton.

Not all the German historicists must be considered Bismarckists. Some historicists criticized him and didn't support certain aspects of his politics, such

as Mommsen and Max Weber. But it's undeniable that historicism, as a trend, provided an important contribution for the building of the theoretical and ideological substrate of the Wilhelmine empire and his militarist expansionism, stating an identity, tragic in its consequences, between the Hohenzollern empire and the nation, which was swallowed by a whirlpool of xenophobia and aggressiveness from which not even most of the German left escaped. It's as a requiem to those tragic illusions that *The Decline of the West*, by Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), published in 1918, must be read.

The Spanish intellectuals subject to the traumatic experience of the defeat of Spain, in 1898, in the war against the United States, also placed themselves under the sign of disenchantment and tragedy. That generation that took on the name of the unlucky year of the Spanish defeat, "1898", also made an original voice echo in the debate about the nation and nationalism. In fact, the Spanish intellectuals of the "generation of 1898" extended and updated the already very old bewilderment which abased itself on the Spanish awareness, stunned and bitter since an exuberant and stubborn crisis installed itself in the powerful empire at the time, already by the end of the 16th Century.

The topic of the decadence and the search for the Spanish "regeneration" occupied many generations of Spanish thinkers, from Cervantes (1547-1616) to Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). The answer by Cervantes was extraordinarily lucid. According to Cervantes, the Spanish decadence, expressed in the mistaken ambiguous peregrination of the Mancha nobleman, results from his attachment to a past which was dead and irrecoverable for good. According to Ortega y Gasset (1948), Spain would suffer a constitutive "invertebration", a fragmentation which would hinder the consequent and orderly action. According to Ortega y Gasset (1948), Spain's situation was tragic, since it was a country which would only have as single institution... the Inquisition.

By the end of the 19th Century, the idea of nation in Europe was to a great extent shut away by the conservative thought: both in Spain and in France and Germany. The nation as the weapon par excellence, which the right handled to hit either the democratic claims or socialism.

It's within that framework that the stance by Marx and Engels about the national issue must be discussed.

The idea of nation and Marxism

The idea that Marx and Engels were internationalists, who advocated the world revolution, who ascribed to socialism a global character is widespread and correct. People often add to that idea another one, according to which Marx and Engels, being internationalists, were contrary to the national struggles, to the national issue, considered as bourgeois issues which, apart from that, in many cases, delayed the struggle of the proletariat for its full emancipation, which would also be the one that would mean the emancipation of humanity as a whole from its actual "minority".

If the first term of that issue is indisputable, Marx and Engels were, indeed internationalists, the second part of the statement, the one that establishes an opposition that can't be cancelled between the internationalist struggle and the national one, from the strictly socialist point of view, deserves some repairs, as well as the assumption, which seems implicit, about the monolithic nature of the position of Marx and Engels, which didn't change throughout time, without nuances or re-qualifications.

In that specific case, as far as the consideration of the national issues were concerned, Marx's position wasn't always the same. Many authors, such as José Aricó, Teodor Shanin, and René Galissot, among others, identify the existence of phases in Marx's thought about the national issue. *Roughly speaking*, it could be said that Marx's position about the national issue had two great stages: the first one was marked by the internationalist perspective, which totally supported the national issue, and which ended in the beginning of the 1870's, and a second stage, from the beginning of the 1870's on, which extended until the end of Marx's life, in 1883, in which the national issue took on importance. There Marx's growing interest for the Russian reality and, by extension, for the reality of other countries of the periphery of capitalism stood out, without that meaning an abandonment of the internationalist perspective.

Until 1869, the German social-democrats and with Marx's guarantee, refused to include the national issue in the program of the party, "stating that it was a merely bourgeois issue", reiterating the thesis expressed in the *Communist Manifesto* that "the workers have no homeland" (Galissot, 1984, p.173).

Anyway, even that workers' internationalism, from which Marx and Engels never moved away, was never so strict as to ignore the singularities and the importance of national struggles such as in the cases of Ireland and Poland. About that, it should be recalled that the International Association of the Workers, the so-called I International, founded in 1864, had among the immediate motivating elements of its creation the consequences of the repression to the independence movement of Poland, of 1863.

Engels highlighted the uniqueness of the Irish and Polish cases within the scope of the workers' internationalism on a letter to Kautsky, dated February 7th, 1882. According to Engels (apud Haupt & Weill, 1980, p.50): "Two nations in Europe have not only the right but the obligation to be national before they become international: the Irish and the Polish. Once they manage to become national, they will also be better international".

The change of Marx and Engels concerning the Irish issue had an enormous theoretical and political importance, marking, indeed, a new stage in the thought of both authors. According to José Aricó (1982, p.54-5):

in the same way that in a first stage of their reflections Marx and Engels thought that the independence of Ireland should be a result of the revolution in England,

from 1867 on they started to extract important political conclusions from the fact that they acknowledged that the British workers' movement resulted from the colonial plundering of the Irish people established by Great Britain. Since then, according to Marx and Engels, the national emancipation of Ireland would be the first condition for the social emancipation of the British proletariat.

The issue of the place of the national issue in the work of Marx and Engels has fostered many qualified interventions, such as that by Roman Rosdolsky. Writing about the subject, Rosdolsky raised the hypothesis that, mainly Engels, in that case, has paid an excessive price to Hegel's ideas about the "people with no history" (Haupt & Weill, 1980, p.17).

It's impossible to follow Rosdolsky in that case. In fact, both Marx and Engels shared, at least for some time, a vision of the global historical development that resulted to a great extent from Hegel's theses about the universalization process of history, which implied establishing binding laws of development, in which the most advanced country foreshadows the path of the backward countries. It was based on that vision that Marx wrote, in the foreword of the first German edition of *The Capital*, in 1867, "*De te fabula Narratur*", to characterize his certainty that England was only the first to make a path that all capitalist countries would make from then on.

The precise understanding of that issue implies acknowledging important differences in the levels of conceptual abstraction of Marx's work, which is at the same time a criticism of the political economy, a philosophy and an invitation to action, that is, a practical and political proposal.

In that sense, for the just classification of the national issue in the set of Marx's work, one should try to establish initially the broader conceptual framework, resultant from the criticism of the political economy in which the national issue must be included.

It is advocated here that Marx's position on the issue must be considered according to the theoretical classification in which Book I of *The Capital* is included. That book deals with the capital in general, that is, with the capital taken as an ideal average, as a fully established reality. Under those conditions, the necessary way to expose the capitalist dynamics would have to take as a matter liable of exemplification the most developed form, which the capital had reached until then: the British capitalism.

Books II and III of *The Capital* would mean, from the point of view of the material that they would contain and of the level of complexity with which the problems would be approached, proximities with the concrete world of the capital; in Book II by the consideration of the interference of space and time in the reproduction processes of the capital, and in Book III by the actual admission of the interaction among different capitals, structured in a different manner and in permanent competition with one another. (Rosdolsky, 1972).

If that's the case, including in the possible exhibition in Book I of *The Capital*, the scope of capital in general, the debate on the national issue, on the

concrete interactions among the nations, on the political and cultural singularities of the nations would be perfectly inadequate and improper.

If England was the platform from where Marx elaborated the empirical material of Book I of *The Capital*, Teodor Shanin says that, for Book III, he wanted to use Russia as the empirical universe of the exhibition of the capital taken in its full complexity. One must see a strong intentionality in that choice. To choose Russia as the empirical matter of the exhibition of the capital taken in its complex entirety is to explicit the several dimensions and interactions, be them of a political, economic, social and cultural nature that configure it.

Taken as complex of complexes, as set of sets, as complex entirety, *The Capital*, in what was designed to be Book III, would be fully prepared to receive and to consider, in an adequate manner, the national issue.

Another issue, not least important, has to do with the particular way that Marx and Engels considered, in their activities as journalists and politicians, the issues that concerned the nations, the national struggles. In that case, it must be said that here we must also distinguish two phases in the treatment of the national issue by Marx and Engels: a first phase until 1872, and a second one after that date.

In the first phase, the general tone of the debates on the national issues is that of the expectation of an acceleration of the crises and of the urgency of the revolution which, starting from the central countries, would spread to the whole world. In that first phase, the perspective of the two friends was one of confidence in the immediate role that the workers of the central countries, understood as England, would play in the path towards the global socialist revolution.

As the years went by, with the defeats and the crises of the workers' movement, with the settling and the co-optation of sectors of the working class, of many central countries, Marx and Engels acknowledged and valued the revolutionary potential of peripheral countries, overcoming what for some time was a limitation that resulted from excessive attachment to a still incomplete theoretical scheme.

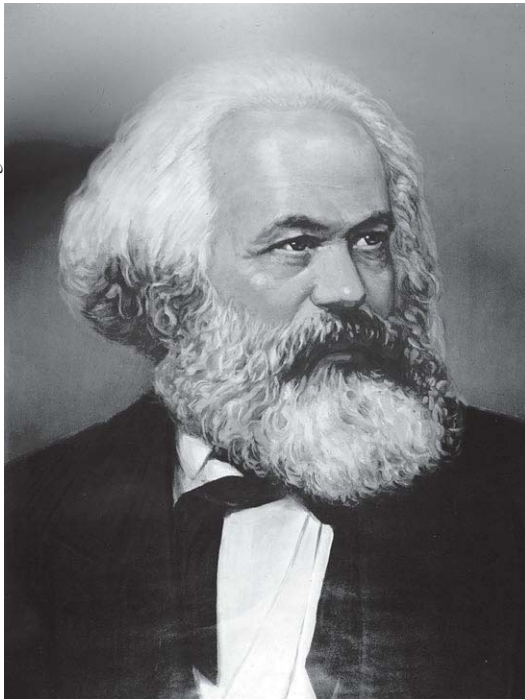
That inflexion in the thought of Marx and Engels concerning the national issue resulted, in a decisive manner, from the growth of the I International and of the Paris Commune. The analysis of the virtues and the limits of the Commune forced a re-evaluation of set of the strategies and of the tactics, of the forces and of the instruments, of the ideas of the socialist movement. The Commune showed both the present character of the revolution and that the revolution didn't need to be born in the center of capitalism. According to Marx (1975, p.210): "The struggle of the working class against the capitalist class entered a new phase with the combat that took place in Paris. Regardless of the immediate path that the things take, a new starting point of a universal historical importance was conquered".

I see no purpose in distinguishing the positions of Marx and Engels concerning the national issue, and even less do I consider legitimate to ascribe

only to Engels the blemish of being *Eurocentrist*. In fact, that classification, Eurocentrism, is inaccurate since it emphasizes what the position of Marx and Engels, at least for some time, wanted, explicitly, to deny. Both for the theoretical work and for the political action of the two friends, what mattered, initially, was to deny the national singularities of capitalism by means of showing and denouncing the hypertrophy of their generic determinations, the capital as value that values itself, everywhere and at all times, as a blind and impersonal force, based on the exploitation of the work force, in the private appropriation of social labor in the form of surplus value; the capital as expansive and destructive force, which produces unemployment, misery, and environmental destruction.

Before being “Eurocentrists”, Marx and Engels, perhaps, could be accused of “logocentrists”, because, in fact, it was the apprehension of the *logic* of functioning of the capital that enabled them to undertake both the criticism of the political economy and to claim the socialist revolution.

Photo: Agence France Presse



Karl Marx.

From 1872 on, Marx devoted himself to Russia, studied its language, followed its political life, contacted its leftist intellectuals and politicians. According to him, it's from there, from Russia, that would come the decisive elements of a new revolutionary wave. The first translation of *The Capital* was made into Russian.

Marx said that the Paris Commune opened a new revolutionary period, and that really happened. A revolutionary period which, placing the working class as subject, overflowed the European borders as much as the capital had done. Marx and Engels had foreseen the internationalization of the capital in the *Communist*

Manifesto, of 1848, and, in fact, that was taking place. Launched in the world, the capital modernized and submitted whatever it touched. Once the capital was internationalized, the class struggle, the contradictions, the conflicts, the political and cultural sharing were also internationalized.

There are many signs of that modern internationalization of symbols and practices, of programs and aspirations and they have specific incidence in the periphery of capitalism: the invention of the word modernism was the work of a Nicaraguan writer, Rubén Darío (1876-1916), in 1890; the most actually innovative and disruptive forms of the artistic forefront of the beginning of the 20th Century came from the periphery, from Russia, Spain, Italy, with Picasso (1881-1973), Miró (1893-1983), Chagall (1887-1985), Kandinsky (1866-1944), Malevitch (1878-1935), with the Constructivists, with the Futurists, with the Dadaists; the great social revolutions of the beginning of the 20th Century took place in the periphery: the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Revolutions in the symbolic realm, promises of happiness and of emancipation which, starting in the periphery of capitalism, also claimed the nation.

It was Hegel (apud Febvre, 1998, p.167) who said: “You, the French, are lucky. You are a nation”. That sentence, within the context of the Hegelian philosophy, has two aspects that must be emphasized: it’s that the existence of the nation is an *assumption* for the building of the State, of the State that, according to Hegel, is the fulfillment of freedom. And in what sense, still within the scope of the Hegelian philosophy, would the nation enter in the concept of building of freedom? According to Hegel, the *nation*, the set of the singularities who define a people, that identify and organize it, had to find out-build, beyond those singularities, what not only it but all the other nations have in common, and which qualify them to live as equals in their singularities, as human communities founded in an ethical manner, that is, founded in the idea that the freedom of someone presupposes the freedom of all others, in all levels and dimensions.

In an accurate formula, Professor Leyla Perrone-Moisés (2007, p.36) praised the goal of the nation, which is stating its universal value. The analysis made by Professor Perrone-Moisés also detected a paradox in the affirmation of the nation. It’s that the nation, by developing in opposition to “another” oppressive one, eventually “reinforces localism and provincialism, even though the greatest goal is to prove the universal value of that singularity”.

In that case, demanding the nation would be at the same time confronting with *another*, adverse and oppressive. The acknowledgement of that oppressive *other* has legitimated the national cohesion and the nationalist struggle. However, even that nationalism would have problematic elements and backward contents. Let’s see what Isaac Deutscher (1997, p.62-3) says:

Even the nationalism of the exploited and oppressed must be seen with critical eyes, since its development includes different phases. In a phase the progressive aspirations prevail; in another, reactionary trends emerge. When independence is

obtained, nationalism tends to completely abandon its revolutionary aspect and to transform itself in a backward ideology [...] Even in its revolutionary phase, all nationalism tend towards the irrationality, a tendency towards the exclusivism, the presence and racism.

It were considerations even more cutting than that one that led great names of Marxism, from the beginning of the 20th Century, to reject nationalism in a radical manner. That's more sensitive as it's recalled that that period, the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th, was characterized by a nationalist scale exacerbatingly rightist, virtually proto-fascist.

The most emphatic and authorized voice to express herself against nationalism was Rosa Luxemburg (1870-1919) for her coalescence to militarism and to imperialism. In the opposite side, in the Marxist field, was Otto Bauer (1881-1838) who demanded the nation for the socialist field:

The socialist society will fulfill Fichte's desire: to make each one a participant of the national culture [...] Socialism finds its sense in the access of the entire people to the community of the national culture, in the conquering of the full self-determination of the nation, in the national spiritual differentiation. (Bauer apud Gallissot, 1984, p.202)

An assessment of the consequences of the national issue since then, acknowledging what's positive and legitimate about the anti-colonial nationalist movements, can't avoid acknowledging as well certain harmful consequences of nationalism, that continue to express themselves.

That the question has been placed in the past according to an absolute disjunctive, either nationalism or internationalism, is a historical information explainable by the circumstances that surrounded that debate. For us, for our time, it must be said that both at that time and now the strictly Marxist answer to the question, because strictly dialectic and strictly committed to the full emancipation of humanity, claims the full affinity between internationalism and nationalism, in the sense that the "nation is a common desire to live [...] it's the desire to create a certain future. It's an ideal to be fulfilled" (Febvre, 1998, p.230). The ideal of creating a free, equal and happy humankind.

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ABSTRACT - The article traces the emergence and development of the concept of nation: from its first formulators (such as Rousseau, Herder, and Fichte) to its developments in the nineteenth century. It also highlights some concrete processes of formation of nations, particularly the cases of the United States, Italy and Germany. The article also discusses the reception of the national question by Marx and Engels.

KEYWORDS - Nation, Nationalism, Marxism.

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