

THE FACTORS OF RACE &  
NATION IN MARXIST THEORY

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## Introduction

# The Impotence of the Banal “Denialist” Position

### I Races, Nations or Classes?

The method of the Italian and international communist left has never had anything in common with the false dogmatic and sectarian extremism that seeks to abolish the forces that operate in the real process of history with empty verbal and literary denials.

In a recent article in our “Thread of Time” series (“Racial Pressure of the Peasantry, Class Pressure of the Peoples of Color”, *Il Programma Comunista*, no. 14, August 24, 1953), which contains a series of reflections on the national-colonial and agrarian questions—and therefore concerning the principal contemporary social questions in which important forces are involved, forces that are not limited to industrial capital and the wage-earning proletariat—it was demonstrated with documentary evidence that a perfectly orthodox and radical revolutionary Marxism acknowledges the current significance of these factors and the corresponding need for an adequate class and party policy to address them; and this was undertaken not exclusively with quotations from Marx, Engels and Lenin, but also with the founding documentation, from the years 1920-1926, of the left opposition in the International and the Communist Party of Italy which during that period was a member of the International.

Only in the fatuous insinuations of the adversaries of the left, who have in the meantime followed the path of opportunism and are today shockingly floundering in the repudiation of class-based Marxism and in counterrevolutionary politics, has the left been complicit in the absolutist and metaphysical error according to which the communist party must concern itself only with the duel between the pure forces

of modern capital and the wage workers, from which the proletarian revolution will arise, denying and ignoring the influence on the social struggle of any other class or any other factor. In our recent work involving the reconstruction of the basics of Marxist economics and of the Marxist revolutionary program we have fully proven that this pure “phase” does not actually exist in any country, not even in the most highly industrialized nations where the political rule of the bourgeoisie has been most deeply rooted, such as England, France and the United States; to the contrary, this “phase” cannot be verified anywhere, and its existence by no means constitutes a necessary precondition for the revolutionary victory of the proletariat.

It is therefore plain foolishness to say that, since Marxism is the theory of the modern class struggle between capitalists and workers, and since communism is the movement that leads the struggle of the proletariat, we have to deny any historical impact on the part of the social forces of other classes, the peasants, for example, and racial and national tendencies and movements, and that by correctly establishing the basis of our activity we shall consider such elements to be superfluous.

## 2

Historical materialism, presenting the course of prehistory in a new and original way, has not only considered, studied and evaluated the process of formation of families, groups, tribes, races and peoples up to the formation of nations and political states, but has precisely explained these phenomena in the context of their connection with and how they are conditioned by the development of the productive forces, and as manifestations and confirmations of the theory of economic determinism.

The family and the horde are forms that we undoubtedly also encounter among the animal species, and it is often said that even

the most highly evolved animal families and herds, while they may begin to display examples of collective organization for certain purposes of defense and self-preservation and even for the gathering and storage of food, still do not display productive activity, which distinguishes man, even the most primitive man. It would be more correct to say that what distinguishes the human species is not knowledge or thought or some particle of divine light, but the ability to produce not only objects of consumption but also objects devoted to subsequent acts of production, such as the first rudimentary tools for hunting, fishing, gathering fruit, and, later, for agricultural and craft labor. This primordial need to organize the production of tools is linked—and this characterizes the human species—with that of subjecting the reproductive process to some kind of discipline and rules, overcoming the accidental nature of the sexual relation with forms that much more complex than those presented by the animal world. It is especially in the classic work by Engels, to which we shall make abundant references, that the inseparable connection, if not the identity, of the development of the institutions of the family and of production is demonstrated.

Thus, in the Marxist view of the course of human history, before social classes even appeared—our whole theoretical battle is aimed at proving that these classes are not eternal; they had a beginning and they will also have an end—the only possible explanation is provided, on scientific and material bases, for the function of the clan, the tribe and the race and of their ordering under increasingly more complex forms due to the influence of the characteristics of the physical environment and to the growth of the productive forces and of the technology at the disposal of the collectivity.

The historical factor of nationalities and of the great struggles for and among them, displayed so variously throughout history, becomes decisive with the appearance of the bourgeois and capitalist social form by means of which this factor is extended over the entire earth, and Marx in his time devoted the greatest attention, no less than he devoted to the processes of social economy, to the struggles and wars of national consolidation.

With the doctrine and party of the proletariat already in existence since 1848, Marx not only provided the theoretical explanation for these struggles in accordance with economic determinism, but also strove to establish the limits and the conditions of time and place for supporting insurrections and wars for national independence.

By developing the great organized units of peoples and nations, and by superimposing state forms and hierarchies on them and their social dynamism that was differentiated by castes and classes, the racial and national factors played diverse roles in the various historical epochs; slavery, local chieftains, feudalism, capitalism. The importance of these factors varied from one form to another, as we shall see in the second part of our essay and as we have shown on so many occasions. In the modern epoch, in which the transition from the feudal form, from personal dependence and limited and local exchange, began and spread throughout the world, to the bourgeois form of economic servitude and the formation of the great unitary national markets, and then to the world market, the consolidation of nationality according to race, language, traditions and culture, and the demand that Lenin summarized in his formula, "one nation, one state" (while he explained that it was necessary to fight for this although he also said that it was a bourgeois formula and not a proletarian and socialist one), possess a fundamental force in the dynamic of history. What Lenin had verified with regard to the pre-1914 era in eastern Europe

was true for Marx after 1848 in all of western Europe (except England) and even in 1871, as everyone knows. And today it is true outside of Europe, in vast areas of the inhabited world, although the process is impelled and accelerated by the potential for economic exchange and all sorts of other factors on a world scale. As a result, the problem of what position must be taken with regard to the irresistible tendencies of the “backward” peoples to engage in struggles for national independence is of contemporary relevance.

#### 4 Opportunism and the National Question

The dialectical core of the issue does not reside in equating an alliance in the physical struggle for anti-feudal revolutionary goals between bourgeois states and the working class and its party with a repudiation of the doctrine and the politics of the class struggle, but in showing that under the historical conditions and in the geographical regions in which this alliance is necessary and unavoidable, the programmatic theoretical and political critique of the goals and ideologies for which the bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements fight should remain integral and should be pursued tirelessly.

In the third and final part of our essay we shall show how Marx, at the same time that he energetically defends, for example, the cause of Polish or Irish independence, never ceases not only to condemn, but to utterly demolish and bury in ridicule the idealist conceptions of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois authors concerning democratic justice and the freedom of the peoples. Whereas for us the national market and the centralized capitalist nation-state constitute stepping stones to the international economy that will supersede the state and the market, for the famous personalities that Marx ridicules—Mazzini, Garibaldi, Kossuth, Sobieski, etc.—the democratic consolidation into nation-states is an end-point that will terminate all social struggles, and they want the homogeneous nation-state because in such a state

the employers will not appear as enemies or as elements that are foreign to the exploited workers. At this historical moment the front lines are shifted, and the working class wages civil war against the state of its own “fatherland”. The advent of this moment was hastened and its conditions were being established by the process of the revolutions and bourgeois national wars of consolidation in Europe (and today in Asia and Africa as well): this is how to decipher this problem that, while changing, never ceases to offer variable directions.

## 5

Opportunism, betrayal, backsliding, and counterrevolutionary and philo-capitalist action on the part of today’s Stalinist false communists has a double impact on this terrain (no less than on the strictly economic and social terrain of so-called domestic politics). They contribute to the emergence of national democratic demands and values with excessive open political alliances, even in the highly advanced capitalist West where any plausible reason for engaging in such alliances was ruled out in 1871; but they also disseminated among the masses the sacred respect for the patriotic national and popular ideology identified with that of their bourgeois allies, and even court the support of the champions of these policies, who were ferociously denounced by Marx and Lenin in their time, while they pursue their mission of extirpating all class sentiment in the workers who have the misfortune of following them.

It would be stupid to offer as an extenuating circumstance for the infamy of the parties that today claim to represent the workers, and above all in Italy, under the false name of communists and socialists, the fact that they acknowledge as an admitted Marxist method, the participation in revolutionary national alliances on the part of the workers parties, on the condition that they should take place outside the 20th century and outside of the historical-geographical bound-

aries of Europe. When, in the conflict that recently erupted in the highly developed West (France, England, America, Italy, Germany, Austria), the Russian state and all the parties of the former Communist International then joined in the military alliance with all the bourgeois states, when there was no Napoleon III or Nicholas II or similar figures, first of all the lessons of Marx's Address on behalf of the First International to the Paris Commune of 1871 were directly contravened, in which Marx denounced and ruled out forever any alliance with "national armies" because "the national governments are one as against the proletariat", and secondly Lenin's theses on the war of 1914 and the founding of the Third International were also contravened, in which it was established that, once the stage of generalized imperialist wars had commenced, demands for democratic reform and national self-determination no longer had anything to do with the policies of states, condemning all social-nationalist traitors, from the Rhine to the Vistula.

A simple proposal to "reapply the terms" conceded to capitalism, transferring 1871 and 1917 to 1939 and 1953, with an incalculable subsequent extension, cannot proceed very far without completely undermining the entire Marxist method of reading history, at the crucial points in which its doctrinal force began to open up a breach in the armies defending the past: the European 1848, and the Russian 1905. Furthermore, such a proposal leads to the repudiation of all classical economic and social analysis, by claiming to assimilate the recent fascist totalitarianism with feudal remnants that still existed during that period (and even non-fascist, when Poland was divided between Germany and Russia!).

But the sentence of diametrical treason is also encountered in the second aspect: the total and integral cancellation of that critique of the "values" of bourgeois thought, which proclaim a classless world of popular independence, free nationalities, and independent and peaceful fatherlands. Marx and Lenin, however, when they were forced to

reach some kind of agreement with the authors of this putrid conceptual framework, drove the struggle to liberate the working class from the fetishes of the national fatherland and democracy proclaimed by the big names of bourgeois radicalism to the highest point of virulence, and were able to in fact break with them in the historical dynamic, and when the relation of forces permitted they crushed its movement. Their successors today have inherited the function of the priests of these fetishes and myths; now it is not a matter of a historical pact that they will break later than they had foreseen, but of the total submission to the demands of the capitalist bourgeoisie in order to obtain the optimum of the regime that would allow them privileges and power.

The thesis is interesting because it conforms to the demonstration, offered in “Dialogue with Stalin” and in other inquiries in the field of economic science, that Russia today is a state that has completed the capitalist revolution, and that in its social marketplace there is a place for the flags of nationality and fatherland, as well as the most unbounded militarism.

## 6

It is a very serious mistake not to see, and indeed to deny, the fact that in today’s world national and ethnic factors still have an impact and exercise enormous influence, and that careful study of the limits in time and space in which campaigns for national independence, linked with social revolutions against pre-capitalist forms (Asiatic, slave and feudal) still have the character of necessary preconditions for the transition to socialism—with the founding of nation-states of the modern type (in India, China, Egypt, Persia, etc., for example)—is still relevant.

Differentiating between these situations is difficult, on the one hand because of the factor of xenophobia determined by the ruth-

less capitalist colonialism, and on the other due to the widespread dissemination throughout the world of productive resources that causes commodities to reach the most distant markets; but on the world scale the burning question posed in 1920 in the area of the former Russian empire, that of offering political and armed support to the independence movements of the peoples of the East, is by no means closed.

For example, to say that the relation between industrial capital and the class of the wage workers is expressed in precisely the same way in Belgium and Thailand, and that the praxis of their respective struggles should be established without taking into account in either of the two cases the factors of race or nationality, does not mean you are an extremist, but it means in effect that you have understood nothing of Marxism.

It is not by draining Marxism of all its depth and scope as well as its harsh and uninviting complexity that one conquers the right to refute, and one day to crush, despicable renegades.

## Part I

# Reproduction of the Species and Productive Economy, Inseparable Aspects of the Material Foundation of the Historical Process

## I Labor and Sex

Historical materialism loses all its meaning wherever it consents to the introduction of the allegedly individual nature of the sexual urge as a factor that is alien to the domain of the social economy, which would generate derivations and constructions of an extra-economic order until it attains the most evanescent and spiritual levels.

A much greater mobilization of the scientific material would be necessary, always starting from the highest degree of mistrust towards the decadent and venal official science of the current period, if this polemic were to be aimed only at the self-proclaimed total adversaries of Marxism. As always, it is the currents that say that they accept some parts of Marxism, and then address essential collective and human problems claiming that they are beyond its purview, that concern us the most in their capacities as counterrevolutionary factors.

It is clear that idealists and fideists, having established their views upon the explanation of the natural hierarchy of values, tend to situate the problems of sex and love in a sphere and a level that is far above the economy, which is vulgarly understood as the satisfaction of the need to eat and related needs. If the element that elevates and distinguishes the species *homo sapiens* from the other animals really derives not from the physical effect of a long evolution in a complex environment of material factors, but descends from the penetration of a particle of an immaterial cosmic spirit, it is clear that in the reproduction of one being by another, of one thinking brain by another, we would need a more noble relation than that of the everyday filling of the stomach. If, even without depicting this personal spirit as immaterial, it is admitted that in the dynamic of human thought there is an evident virtue and a force that pre-exists or exists outside the bounds of matter, it is clear that the mechanism that substitutes the generated ego for the generative ego, with its own essential qualities, hypothetically pre-existent to any contact with physical nature and all

cognition, must be sought in a more arcane domain.

For the dialectical materialist it is unforgivable to assume that the economic structure, in whose forces and laws the explanation of the political history of humanity is sought, embraces only the production and consumption of the more or less wide range of goods that are necessary to keep the individual alive; and that the material relations between individuals are limited to this domain, and that the play of forces that unite these innumerable isolated molecules composes the norms, rules and laws of social reality; while a whole series of vital satisfactions are left out of this construction; and for many dilettantes these include the ones that extend from sex-appeal to aesthetic and intellectual pleasures. This interpretation of Marxism is terribly false, it is the worst kind of anti-Marxism that is currently popular, and besides relapsing into an implicit but inexorable bourgeois idealism, it also constitutes a return, with no less harmful consequences, to full-blown individualism, which is another essential trait of reactionary thought; and this makes both the biological as well as the psychological individual central categories and standards of reference.

The material factor does not “generate” the superstructural factor (juridical, political, philosophical) by means of a process that takes place within an individual, nor by way of a hereditary generative chain of individuals, leaving the “comedies” of the economic base and its cultural culmination to be taken care of later by a social process. The base is a system of palpable physical factors that embraces all individuals and determines their behavior, even at an individual level, a system that comes into existence when these individuals have formed a social species, and the superstructure is a derivative of these conditions of the base, determinable according to the study of these conditions and subject to calculations on that basis, without concerning ourselves with the thousands of particular behaviors and of their petty personal variations.

The error that we are addressing is therefore an error of princi-

ple, which, by leading the examination of the causes of historical processes towards ideal factors that are outside of physical nature, on the one hand, and on the other by the leading role it grants to the ridiculous Individual citizen, leaves dialectical materialism no field of operations, so that it is even rendered incapable of balancing the books at a bakery or a delicatessen.

## 2

The position that denies the validity of Marxism on the terrain of sex and reproduction along with all its rich derivations is ignorant of the opposition between the bourgeois and communist conceptions of the economy, and therefore turns its back on the powerful conquest achieved by Marx when he demolished the capitalist schools. For the latter the economy is the totality of relations that are based on the exchange between two individuals of objects that are mutually useful for their self-preservation, and they include labor power among these useful objects. From this they deduce that there never was and never will be an economy without exchange, commodities and property. For us, the economy includes the full range of activity engaged in by the species, by the human group, that influences its relations with the physical natural environment; economic determinism rules over not only the epoch of private property but over the entire history of the species.

All Marxists consider the following theses to be correct: private property is not eternal; there was a time of primitive communism when private property did not exist; and we are advancing towards the era of social communism; the family is not eternal, much less the monogamous family—it appeared very late and in a more advanced era will have to disappear; the state is not eternal—it appears in a quite advanced stage of “civilization” and will disappear along with the di-

vision of society into classes.

It is clear that none of these truths can be reconciled with a view of historical praxis that is based on the dynamic of individuals and on a concession, however minimal it may be, to their autonomy and initiative, their liberty, conscience, will and all other such trivialities. The truths enumerated above are only demonstrable after having accepted that the determining element is an exhaustive process of adaptation and organization of the human collectives in the face of the difficulties and obstacles of the time and place in which they live, resolving not the thousands of millions of problems of adaptation faced by the individuals, but that other perspective that tends towards a unitary viewpoint, that of the prolonged adaptation of the species as a whole to the demands imposed on it by external circumstances. This conclusion is unavoidable in view of the increase in the number of members of the species, the toppling of the barriers that separate them from each other, the dizzying multiplication of the available technical means, which can only be managed by way of collective institutions composed of innumerable individuals, etc.

For a primitive people one could very well suppose that sociology is about how to get food, from the very moment when it was no longer obtained by the powers of individual effort, as is the case with animals; but public sanitation, obstetrics, eugenics and, tomorrow, the annual birth quota, are also part of sociology.

### 3 Individual and Species

The individual self-preservation in which the mysterious principal motor force of events is always sought is nothing but a derivative and secondary manifestation of the self-preservation and development of the species, independently of the traditional benefits conferred by a natural or supernatural providence, the play of the instincts or of rea-

son; and this is all the more true for a social species and a society with some highly developed and complex aspects.

It might appear to be too obvious to point out that everything could very well be explained by individual self-preservation, as the basis and motor force of all other phenomena, if the individual were immortal. In order to be immortal he would have to be immutable, exempt from aging, but it is precisely the nature of the living organism and especially the animal organism, to undergo an unavoidable and uninterrupted transformation from within itself of every one of its cells, since it hosts within its body an impressive chain of movements, circulation and metabolism. It is absurd to postulate an organism that lives by continuously replacing the elements it has lost and remaining self-identical, as if it were a crystal that, immersed in a solution of its own chemically pure solid substance, diminishes or grows according to a cyclic variation of temperatures or external pressures. Some have even spoken of the life of the crystal (and today of the atom) since they can be born, grow, shrink, disappear and even duplicate and multiply.

This might seem too banal to mention, but it is useful to reflect on the fact that the fetishistic conviction held by many (even many who pass themselves off as Marxists) regarding the primacy of the factor of individual biology is nothing but an atavistic reflection of primeval and crude beliefs concerning the immortality of the personal soul. In no religion has the most vulgar bourgeois egoism, which displays a fierce contempt for the life of the species and for compassion for the species, been implanted more deeply than in those that claim that the soul is immortal, and in this fantastic form considers the fate of the subjective person to be more important than that of all the others.

It is unpleasant to meditate on the fact that the movement of our poor carcass is only transitory, and as a substitute for the afterlife intellectualoid illusions arise—and today, existentialist illusions—concerning the distinctive stigma that every subject possesses, or believes he possesses even when he sheepishly follows the fashionable trends,

and passively imitates all the other human puppets. It is at this point that the hymn of praise is intoned for the ineffable virtues of the emotions, of the will, of artistic exaltation, of cerebral ecstasis, which are only attained within the individual unit—precisely where the truth is the exact opposite.

Returning to the material way that events unfold right under our noses, it is obvious that any complete, healthy and adult individual, in the full possession of his faculties, can devote himself—we are referring to an economy of an elementary nature—to the production of what he needs to consume on a daily basis. The instability of this situation, individual by individual, would soon lead to its termination (and of the species if the latter were a senseless conglomeration of individuals connected with each other only by the principle of maximization of personal gain at the expense of the others) if it were to lack the flow of reproduction that characterizes an organic group, in which individuals who just look out for themselves are rare, and in which there are elderly persons who cannot work so hard, and very young children who need to be fed so they can produce in the future. Any economic cycle would be unthinkable, and we would not be able to devise any economic equations, without introducing into the calculation these essential magnitudes: age, abilities, health. We would thus have to elaborate the vulgar economic formula of a parthenogenic and unisexual humanity. This cannot be verified, however. So we have to introduce the sexual factor, since reproduction takes place by means of two heterogeneous genders, and the hiatus in productive activity necessitated by gestation and rearing have to be taken into account, too...

Only after having addressed all these issues can we say we have drawn up the conditional equations that totally describe the “base”, the economic “infrastructure” of society, from which we shall deduce (casting aside once and for all that puppet called the individual which cannot perpetuate or renew itself, and which is less and less capable of

doing so as he proceeds along this great road) the whole infinite range of the manifestations of the species which have only in this way been rendered possible, right up to the greatest phenomena of thought.

In a recently-published article, a journalist (Yourgrau, in Johannesburg), in his review of the theory of the general system of Bertalanffy, who sought to synthesize the principles of the two famous rival systems, vitalism and mechanism, while reluctantly admitting that materialism is gaining ground in biology, recalls the following paradox which is not easy to confute: one rabbit alone is not a rabbit, only two rabbits can be a rabbit. We see how the individual is expelled from his last stronghold, that of Onan. It is therefore absurd to address economics without dealing with the reproduction of the species, which is how it was approached in the classical texts. If we turn to the Preface of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* this is how Engels approaches one of the basic pillars of Marxism:

“According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other.”

From its theoretical foundations, the materialist interpretation of history organizes the data concerning the relative degree of development of technology and productive labor and the data regarding the “production of human beings” or the sphere of sexuality. The working class is the greatest productive force, according to Marx. And it is even more important to know how the class that works reproduces,

studying how it produces and reproduces the mass of commodities, wealth and capital. The classical dispossessed wage worker of antiquity was not officially defined in Rome as a worker, but as a proletarian. His characteristic function was not that of giving society and the ruling classes the labor of its own body, but that of generating, without controls or limits, in his rustic little apartment, the day laborers of tomorrow.

The modern petty bourgeois, in his vacuity, thinks that the latter function would be much more pleasant for him than the former function, which is much more bitter. But the petty bourgeois, who is just as revolting and as philistine as the big bourgeois, necessarily faces this function, too, with every kind of impotence.

#### 4

Likewise, the first communities prepared for productive labor with the rudimentary technology that was then available, and prepared to serve the purposes of mating and reproduction, education and the protection of the young. The two forms are in continuous connection and therefore the family in its diverse forms is also a relation of production and changes as the conditions of the environment and the available forces of production change.

In this essay we cannot recapitulate the entire story of the successive stages of savagery and barbarism that the human race has traversed, and which are characterized by their different ways of life and kinship structures, and we refer the reader to the brilliant work of Engels.

After living in the trees feeding on fruit, man first became acquainted with fishing and fire, and learned to navigate the coasts and rivers so that the various tribes came into contact with one another. Then came the hunt with the use of the first weapons, and in the

stage of barbarism, first the domestication of animals arose and then agriculture, which signaled the transition from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle. The sexual forms did not yet include monogamy or even polygamy; the latter was preceded by matriarchy, in which the mother exercised moral and social dominance, and the group family in which the men and the women of the same gens lived together in a fluid succession of pairing relationships as Morgan discovered in the American Indians who, even when they adopted the ways of the white man, even when they had adopted monogamy, called their paternal uncles “father”, and their aunt, “mother”. In these phratries, where no constituted authority ruled, there was no division of property or of the land, either.

One might consider that it is one of the traits of the higher animals to display an embryonic organization for tending to and defending their offspring, but this is due to instinct, and that it is only the rational animal, however, man, that provides himself with organizations with economic purposes, while instinct remains dominant in the sphere of the bonds of sex and family. If this were really true, then the existence of intelligence, which is commonly admitted to be a substitute for instinct and something that neutralizes instinct, would cause the whole field of inquiry to be divided into two. But all of this is metaphysics. A good definition of instinct appeared in a study by Thomas (La Trinitè-Victor, 1952) (if we quote a recent study by a specialist we do so only for the purpose of showing many people that the theories of Engels or Morgan, revolutionaries who were persecuted on the conceited terrain of bourgeois culture, were not “dated” or “superseded” by the latest scientific literature...): Instinct is the hereditary knowledge of a plan of life of the species. Over the course of evolution and of natural selection—which in the animal realm, we can admit that it derives from a clash of the individuals as such against the environment, but only in a physical, biological way—the obedience of the members of the same species to a common behavior is

determined, especially in the reproductive realm. This behavior accepted by all is automatic, “unconscious” and “irrational”. It is understandable that this mode of behavior is transmitted via heredity, along with the morphological and structural characteristics of the organism, and the mechanism of transmission should be enclosed (although there is much yet to be discovered by science) in the genes (not in the geniuses, my dear individualists!) and in other particles of the germinative and reproductive liquids and cells.

This mechanism, for which each individual serves as a vehicle, only provides the rudimentary normative minimum of a plan of life that is suitable for confronting environmental difficulties.

In social species collaboration in labor, no matter how primitive, obtained greater results, and transmitted many other customs and guidelines that would serve as rules. For the bourgeois and the idealist the difference lies in the rational and conscious element that determines the will to act, and this is when the free will of the fideist appears, and the personal freedom of the Enlightenment. Nor is this essential point exhausted by these variations. Our position is that we are not adding a new power to the individual, thought and spirit, which would mean reexamining all the data with respect to the physical mechanism from the perspective of this alleged vital principle. To the contrary, we add a new collective power derived completely from the needs of social production, which imposes more complex rules and orders, and just as it displaces instinct, as it applies to guiding individuals through the sphere of technology, so too does it displace instinct from the sexual sphere as well. It is not the individual that caused the species to develop and become ennobled, it is the life of the species that has developed the individual towards new dynamics and towards higher spheres.

What there is of the primordial and bestial, is in the individual. What is developed, complex and ordered, forming a plan of life that is not automatic but organized and organizable, derives from collec-

tive life and was first born outside the minds of individuals, in order to become part of them by difficult paths. In the meaning that we, too, can give, outside of all idealism, to the expressions of thought, knowledge, and science, involves products of social life: individuals, without any exceptions, are not the donors, but the recipients and in contemporary society they are also the parasites.

The fact that from the beginning, and ever since, economic and sexual regulation have been interconnected for the purpose of imposing order on the associated life of men, can be read between the lines of all the religious myths, which according to the Marxist evaluation are not gratuitous fantasies or inventions without content in which we must not believe, as the fashionable bourgeois free-thinkers proclaim, but rather the first expressions of collective knowledge in the process of its elaboration.

In the Book of Genesis (Chapter 2, Verses 19 and 20) God, before creating Eve and therefore before the expulsion from the terrestrial paradise (in which Adam and Eve had lived unaccompanied, even physically immortal, on the condition that they could easily gather all the nourishing fruits, but not those of science) creates all the species of animals from the earth, presenting them to Adam, who learned to call them by their names. The text gives the explanation for this incident: *Adae vero non inveniebatur adjutor similis ejus*. This means that Adam had no helper (cooperator) of his own species. He would be given Eve, but not to put her to work or to impregnate her. It seems to have been stipulated that it would be lawful for them to adapt the animals to their service. After they committed the grave error of beginning with the wise serpent, God altered the fate of humanity. It was only after they had been exiled from Eden that Eve would “know” her companion, bearing him children that she would give birth to in pain, and he would in turn have to earn his living by the sweat of his brow. Thus, even in the ancient but complex wisdom of the myth, production and reproduction are born simultaneously. If Adam do-

mesticated animals, it was with the help, now that he had *adjutores*, of workers of his own species, *similes ejus*. Very rapidly the Individual had become nothing, immutable, unmovable, deprived of the bitter bread and the great wisdom, a sacred monster and abortion consecrated to leisure, truly affected by the lack of labor, of love and of science, to which the alleged materialists of the present century still want to sacrifice stupid incense: in its place appears the species that thinks because it labors, among so many *adjutores*, neighbors and brothers.

## 5 Biological Heredity and Social Tradition

Ever since the first human societies, the behavior of the members of the groups had become uniform by way of shared practices and functions that, having become necessary due to the demands of production and even of sexual reproduction, took on the form of ceremonies, festivals and rites of a religious character. This first mechanism of collective life, of unwritten rules that were nonetheless neither imposed nor violated, was made possible not by inspirations or innate ideas of society or of morality that were appropriate for the animal called man, but by the determinist effect of the technical evolution of labor.

The history of the customs and usages of primitive peoples, before the times of written constitutions and coercive law, and the shock produced in the life of the savage tribes when they first came into contact with the white man, can only be explained by utilizing similar investigative criteria. The seasonal periodicity of the festivals related to plowing, sowing and harvesting is obvious. At first the time of love and fertility was also seasonal for the human species which, due to subsequent evolution, would become, unlike any other animal, constantly ready to mate. African writers who have assimilated the culture of the whites have described the festivals relating to sex. Each year the adolescents who have reached puberty have certain lig-

atures untied that had been attached to their sexual organs since they were born, and this bloody operation carried out by the priests is then followed, amidst the excitation produced by the noise and drinking, by a sexual orgy. Evidently, this type of technique arose to preserve the reproductive capacity of the race under difficult conditions that could lead to degeneration and sterility in the absence of any other controls, and perhaps there are even more nauseating things in the Kinsey report concerning sexual behavior in the capitalist era.

That the capacity for generation and production should be conjointly guaranteed is an old Marxist thesis, as is proven by a lovely quote from Engels about Charlemagne's attempt to improve agricultural production in the last years of his realm by the establishment of imperial estates (not kolkhozes). These were administered by monasteries, but failed, as was the case throughout the entire course of the Middle Ages: a unisexual and non-reproducing collective did not respond to the demands of continuous production. For example, the Order of Saint Benedict might appear to have ruled by means of a communist code, since it severely prohibited—imposing the obligation to work—any personal appropriation of the smallest product or good, as well as any consumption outside of the collective refectory. But this rule, due to its chastity and sterility, which rendered its members incapable of reproducing, remained outside of life and outside of history. A parallel study of the orders of monks and nuns in their first phase might perhaps be able to shed some light on the problem of the scarcity of production with respect to consumption in the Middle Ages, particularly of some of the surprising conceptions of Saint Francis and Clare of Assisi, who did not conceive of self-mortification to save their souls, but rather of social reform to help feed the starved flesh of the disinherited classes.

## 6

All the norms of productive technique in fishing, hunting, the manufacture of weapons, and agriculture, becoming increasingly more complex with the passage of time, coordinated by the activity of the capable adults, the elderly, young people, pregnant and nursing mothers, and couples joined together for reproductive purposes, are transmitted from generation to generation by a double road: organic and social. By the first road the hereditary elements transmit the attitudes and physical adaptations of the generative to the generated individual, and the personal secondary differences come into play; by the second road, which is becoming increasingly important, all the resources of the group are transmitted by way of an extra-physiological but no less material method, which is the same for everyone, and which resides in the “equipment” and “tools” of all types that the collectivity has managed to give itself.

In some of the articles in the “Thread of Time” series<sup>1</sup> it was shown that up until the discovery of more convenient modes of transmission like writing, monuments, and then the printing press, etc., man had to rely principally on the memory of individuals, elaborating it with collective common forms. From the first maternal admonition we proceed to the conversations about obligatory themes and the litanies of the elderly and collective recitations; song and music are the supports of memory and the first science appears in the form of verses rather than in the form of prose, with musical accompaniment. A large part of the modern wisdom of capitalist civilization would not be able to circulate except in the form of horrifying cacophonies!

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<sup>1</sup>A series of articles published first in *Battaglia Comunista* and later in *Il Programma Comunista* during the 1950s and 1960s. “Il Battilocchio nella storia”, no. 7, April 3-17, and “Superuomo ammosciati”, no. 8, April 17-30, 1953, on the function of the celebrity; “Fantasime carlailiane”, no. 9, May 7-21, 1953, on the same question as it is reflected in the field of art.

The course of development of all this impersonal and collective baggage that passes from some humans to others over the passage of time, cannot be explained except by approaching it systematically, but the law that governs it has already been outlined: this process increasingly does without the individual head as the organism is enriched, and everyone approaches a common level; the great man, who is almost always a legendary personality, becomes increasingly more useless, just it is more and more useless to wield a larger weapon than anyone else or to be able to multiply figures in your head more quickly than anyone else; it will not be long before a robot will be the most intelligent citizen of this incredibly stupid bourgeois world, and if some people are to be believed, the Dictator of great nations.

In any event the social force always prevails over the organic force, which is in any case the platform of the individual spirit.

Here we may refer to an interesting new synthesis: Wallon, *L'organique et le social chez l'homme*, Collège de France, 1953. Although he criticizes mechanistic materialism (that of the bourgeois epoch, and thus one that is operative on the scale of the individual), the author discusses examples of the systems of communication between men in society and quotes Marx, whose influence we may also discern from the language in this same part of the book. In his conclusion, however, he describes the failure of idealism and of its modern existentialist form with an apt formula: "Idealism was not content with circumscribing the real within the limits of the imaginary (in our minds). It has also circumscribed the image of what it considers to be real!" And after reviewing some recent examples, he draws the sensible conclusion: "Among the organic impressions and imaginary mental constructs, mutual actions and reactions never cease to be exhibited that show just how empty are the distinctions that the various philosophical systems have established between matter and thought, existence and intelligence, the body and the spirit." From the large number of such contributions one may deduce that the Marxist

method has offered science without an adjective (or with the adjective of ‘contraband-’) the opportunity to take advantage of its discoveries, and thus overcome its handicap, for one hundred years.

## 7 Natural Factors and Historical Development

Over the course of a long process the living conditions of the first gentile organizations, the communist phratries, continued to develop, and naturally they did not all develop at the same rate, which varied according to the physical conditions of their environments: the nature of the soil and geological phenomena, the geography and altitude, waterways, distance from the sea, the climatology of the various zones, flora, fauna, etc. Over the course of fluctuating cycles the nomadic lifestyles of the wandering hordes gave way to the occupation of a fixed homeland, and to a decreasing availability of unoccupied land as well as more frequent encounters and contacts between tribes of different kin-groups, but also more frequent conflicts, invasions and finally enslavement, one of the origins of the nascent division into classes of the ancient egalitarian societies.

In the first struggles between gentes, as Engels reminds us, because slavery and mixing blood were not allowed, victory meant the merciless annihilation of all the members of the defeated community. This was the effect of the requirement that not too many workers should be admitted into a limited terrain and of the prohibition against breaking sexual and generative discipline, factors that were inseparable from social development. Later relations were more complex and mixing of populations and instances of breeding outside the authorized groups became more frequent, and were more easily accomplished in the fertile temperate regions that hosted the first large, stable population centers. In this first phase humans did not yet want

to leave the prehistoric stage. Concerning the influence of geophysical factors in the broadest sense of the term, one may also refer to the comparison made by Engels regarding the great productive advance obtained with the domestication of animals, not only as a source of food but also as a force of labor. While Eurasia possesses almost all of the world's animal species susceptible to domestication, America had only one, the llama, a large, sheep-like species (all the other species were introduced after the European conquest). This is why the peoples of the Americas were "arrested" in terms of social development compared to the peoples of the old world. The fideists explain this by claiming that in the time of Columbus redemption had not yet reached this part of the planet, and that the light of the eternal spirit had not yet illuminated those heads. Evidently one reasons in another manner if one explains everything not by the absence of the supreme Being, but by the absence of a few quite ordinary animal species.

But this method of reasoning was accepted by the Christian colonists who attempted to exterminate the aboriginal Indians as if they were wild animals, replacing them with African negro slaves, thus unleashing an ethnic revolution whose consequences only time will tell.

## 8 Prehistory and Language

The passage from the racial to the national factor may in a very general manner be assimilated to the passage from prehistory to history. For a nation must encompass a whole in which the ethnic aspect is just one among many others and in very few cases is it the dominant one. Thus, before we enter the terrain of the historical scope of the national factor the problem of the other factors that constitute the totality of the racial factor must be addressed; and first of all, language. No other explanation can be provided for the origin of language and of dialects than the one that is derived from the material environment

and the productive organization. The language of a human group is one of its means of production.

Everything we said above, based on the strict connection between the bonds of blood in the first tribes and the beginning of social production with certain tools, and on the basis of the preponderance of the relation between the human group and the physical environment over the initiative and the orientation of the individual, is found in the central axis of historical materialism. Two texts separated by a half-century are there to confirm this. In the "Theses on Feuerbach" of 1845, Marx said: "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations." By social conditions, we Marxists mean blood, the physical environment, tools, and the organization of any particular group.

In a letter from 1894, which we have often employed to combat the prejudice about the function of the individual (the Great Man, the Guignol) in history, Engels responds to the following question: what role is played by the moment (see point three) of race and historical individuals in the materialist conception of history of Marx and Engels? As we recently recalled, Engels, thus pressed to assume a position on the plane of the individual and Napoleon, who was obviously in the back of the questioner's mind, in order to overthrow the whole question immediately, with respect to the question of race gave us no more than a single tap of the chisel: "But race is itself an economic factor."

The cretinous representatives of the bourgeois pseudo-culture can laugh when we go back in time to trace the immense line that leads from the beginnings to the final result, as the powerful and deeply entrenched Catholic school does in the renowned trajectory that leads from primitive chaos to the eternal blessedness of creation.

The first groups were based on a strictly pure kinship and are group-families. They are likewise work-groups, which is to say that their "economy" is a reaction on the part of all of them to the physical

environment in which each one of them has the same relation: there is no personal property, or social classes or political power or state.

Since we are not metaphysicians or mystics—and we are therefore not under any obligation to pour ashes over our heads and meditate on such stains that have besmirched the human species and which must be cleansed—we have no problem accepting the emergence and further development of a thousand forms of mixture of blood, division of labor, the separation of society into classes, the state and civil war. At the end of the cycle, however, with a generalized and untraceable ethnic amalgamation, with a productive technology that acts upon the environment with such power that it allows for the regulation of events on the planet, we see, with the end of all racial and social discrimination, the new communist economy; that is, the worldwide end of individual property, from which transitory cults had grown into monstrous fetishes: the person, the family, the fatherland.

From the very beginning, however, the economy of each people and its degree of productive technological development was just as much of a particular identifying characteristic as was that of the ethnic type.

The latest research into the mists of prehistory has led the science of human origins to acknowledge other starting points in the appearance of the animal man on the earth, and in the evolution of other species. One can no longer speak of a “genealogical tree” of all of humanity or of its branches. A study by Etienne Patte (Faculty of Sciences at Poitiers, 1953) effectively refutes the inadequacy of this traditional image. In the evolutionary tree all the forks between two genuses or species are themselves irrevocable: as a rule the two branches never reconnect. Human generation, on the other hand, is an inextricable net whose spaces are continually being reconnected with each other: if there had not been interbreeding between relatives every one of us would have 8 great-grandfathers in three gen-

erations, or every century, but in a thousand years each person would have more than a billion ancestors, and assuming an age for the species of six hundred thousand years, which seems likely, the number of ancestors for each of us would be an astronomical number with thousands of zeroes. It is therefore a net rather than a tree. And besides, in the ethnic statistics of the modern peoples the representatives of ethnically pure types comprise a minuscule percentage. Hence the felicitous definition of humanity as a “*sungameion*”, which is Greek for a complex that is totally mixed in every sense: the verb, *gaméo*, refers to the sexual act and the marriage rite. And one can refer to the somewhat simplistic rule: the cross between species is sterile, that between races is fertile.

We can understand the Pope’s position when, denying all racial differences, a very advanced point of view in the historical sense, he wants us to speak of races of animals but not of men. Despite the eagerness with which he follows the latest scientific discoveries and their often marvelous correspondence with dogma, he has not been able to abandon the biblical (the Bible is more Jewish than Catholic on the philosophical terrain) genealogical tree that descends from Adam.

Another author of a manifestly anti-materialist tendency, however, cannot resist rejecting the old separation of methods between anthropology and historiography, since the former must seek positive data, while the latter finds the data already available and prepared and above all arranged in a chronological series. No one doubts that Caesar lived before Napoleon; but it is a very big problem to know who came first, the Neanderthal or *proconsul africanus*...

The power of the materialist method, however, applied to the data supplied by research, easily establishes the synthesis between the two methods, although race was one of the most decisive economic factors in the prehistoric gens, and the nation, a much more complicated entity, in the contemporary world. Only in this manner can one properly situate the function of languages, at first common to a

narrowly defined consanguinary and cooperative group without any connections with external groups, or only with warlike connections, which are today shared by populations that inhabit vast territories.

At first those groups that had a common circle of reproduction and productive tools and capacity for all that was necessary for material life also had a common phonetic expression. One may say that the use of sounds for communication purposes between individuals first arose among the animal species. But the modulation of the sound that the vocal organs of any particular species of animal are capable of emitting (a purely physiological inheritance in the structure and in the functional possibilities of these organs) falls far short of the formation of a language with a certain set of vocables. The vocable does not arise to designate the person who speaks or the person to whom the speech is directed, a member of the opposite sex or a part of the body or light, clouds, land, water, food or danger. Language composed of vocables was born when labor based on tools was born, the production of objects of consumption by way of the associated labor of men.

## 9 Social Labor and Speech

All common human activity for productive purposes demands, for useful collaboration, a system of communication among the workers. Starting from the simple effort involved in raiding or self-defense, for which instinctive incitements such as pushing or animal cries suffice, at the moment when action is necessary at a certain time or place, or with a particular means (primitive tool, weapon, etc.), and through a very long series of failed attempts and corrections, speech arose. This procedure is opposed to that of the idealist illusion: an innovator imagines the new “technological” method in his brain without having ever seen it before, which he explains by telling the others of his kind, and directs them to implement it with his orders. The way we see this pro-

cess, it is not a series that proceeds from thought, then to speech, and only then to action, but precisely the reverse.

One more demonstration of the real natural process of language is found once again in a biblical myth, that of the Tower of Babel. Here we are already in the presence of an authentic state wielding immense power, with formidable armies that capture prisoners, and in possession of a huge captive labor force. This power engaged in vast construction projects, especially in its capital (the technological abilities of the Babylonians not only with regard to construction, but also hydraulic engineering and similar fields, is a matter of historical record), and according to the legend, the state sought to build a tower so high that its pinnacle would touch heaven: this is the standard myth of human presumption punished by the divinity, the same as the fire stolen by Prometheus, the flight of Daedalus, etc. The innumerable workers, overseers, and architects, are of distinct and scattered origins, they do not speak the same languages, they do not understand one another, the execution of their orders and plans is chaotic and contradictory and the building, once it reached a certain height, due to errors rooted in the linguistic confusion, collapsed into ruins, and the builders either died or else fled in terror from this divine punishment.

The complex meaning of this story is that one cannot build something if there is no common language: stones, hands, planks, hammers, and picks are no good if the tool, the instrument of production, lacks a word in the same language and with the same lexicography and formula, common to all and widely known. Among the savages of central Africa one finds the same legend: the tower was made of wood and was supposed to reach the moon. Now that we all speak “American”, it is child’s play to build skyscrapers, which are much more stupid than the wonderful towers of the barbarians and the savages.

There is thus no doubt about the Marxist definition of language, according to which it is one of the instruments of production. The

above-cited article by Wallon does no less than refer, when it examines the most important doctrines, to the one that we follow: “according to Marx language is linked to the human production of tools and of objects that are granted definite attributes”. And the author chooses two magisterial quotations, the first from Marx (*The German Ideology*): “[Men] begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence”; and the second from Engels (*The Dialectics of Nature*): “First labour, after it and then with it speech – these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man”. And Engels, when he wrote that, did not know the results that, contrary to their expectations, would later be published by writers from the pure idealist school (Saller, *What Is Anthropology?*, University of Munich). Today the human brain has a volume of 1,400 cubic centimeters (we know—this goes for geniuses as well as for dummies like us!). A very long time ago, in the time of *Sinanthropus-Pithecantropus* with his 1,000 cubic centimeters of brain, it would seem that this ancestor of ours already had the first notions of magic, as is attested by the nature of his burials, although he was frequently a cannibal; but besides using fire for some time, he had various tools: drinking bowls made from animal skulls, stone weapons, etc. But the discoveries made in South Africa have provided yet more surprises: about six hundred thousand years ago (the figure is from Wallon), a precocious ancestor of ours, with only 500 cubic centimeters of brain, already used fire, hunted and ate the cooked meat of animals, walked upright like us and—this is the sole rectification that needs to be made with regard to the data provided by Engels (1884)—it seems that he no longer lived in the trees like his close relative “australopithecus” but bravely defended himself from wild beasts on the ground.

It is odd that the writer from whom we take this information, disoriented by this data that serves to more firmly embed the materialist theory on its foundation, should take refuge from anthropology in

psychology, in order to express his regrets concerning the decline of the individual who had been elevated by a mysterious extra-organic breath; and that in the modern epoch of overpopulation and mechanicism the individual degenerates by becoming the masses, ceasing to be a man. But who is more human: our friendly pithecanthropus with 500 cubic centimeters or the scientist with his 1,400 cubic centimeters, who devotes himself to hunting butterflies under the Arch of Titus in order to erect the pious equation: official science + idealism = despair?

## 10 Economic Base and Superstructure

The concept of the “economic base” of a particular human society extends beyond the boundaries of the superficial interpretation that restricts it to the remuneration of labor and to commodity exchange. It embraces the entire domain of the forms of reproduction of the species, or family institutions, and while technical resources and available tools and material apparatus of every kind form an integral part of it, its content is not limited to a simple inventory of materials, but includes all available mechanisms for passing on from one generation to another all social “technological knowledge”. In this sense and as general networks of communication and transmission, after spoken language we must also include under the rubric of means of production, writing, song, music, the graphic arts, and the press, as they appear as means of transmission of the productive legacy. In the Marxist view, literature, poetry and science are also higher and more highly-differentiated forms of productive instruments and were born in response to the same requirement of the immediate life of society.

With regard to this issue questions of interpretation of historical materialism arose in the camp of the workers movement: what social phenomena really constitute the “productive base” or the economic

preconditions, which explain the ideological and political superstructures that are characteristic of any particular historical society?

Everyone knows that Marxism opposed to the concept of a long and gradual evolution of human society the concept of sudden turning points between one epoch and another, epochs characterized by different social forms and relations. With these turning points the productive base and the superstructures change. For the purpose of clarifying this concept we have often had resort to the classical texts, both to establish the various formulas and ideas in their correct context as well as to clarify just what it is that suddenly changes when the revolutionary crisis supervenes.

In the letters we quoted above in which Engels responded to the questions sent to him by young students of Marxism, Engels insists on reciprocal reactions between base and superstructure: the political state of a particular class is a perfect example of a superstructure but it in turn acts—by imposing tariffs, collecting taxes, etc.—on the economic base, as Engels recalls, among other things.

Later, during the time of Lenin, it was urgently necessary to clarify the process of the class revolution. The state, political power, is the superstructure that is most completely shattered in a way that we could call instantaneous, in order to give way to another analogous but opposed structure. The relations that govern the productive economy, however, are not changed so rapidly, even if their conflict with the highly developed productive forces was the primary motor force for the revolution. This is why wage labor, commerce, etc., did not disappear overnight. With respect to the other aspects of the superstructure, those that are most enduring and would survive the original economic base itself (that is, capitalism), are the traditional ideologies that had been disseminated, even among the victorious revolutionary working class, over the duration of the long preceding period of serfdom. Thus, for example, the legal superstructure, in its written and practically implemented form, would be rapidly changed

— while the other superstructure of religious beliefs would disappear very slowly.

We have on many occasions referred to Marx's lapidary Preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859. It would not be a bad idea to pause and consider this text before continuing with our examination of the question of language.

The productive material forces of society: they are, in particular phases of development, the labor power of human bodies, the tools and instruments that are used in its application, the fertility of the cultivated soil, the machines that add mechanical and physical energy to human labor power; all the methods applied to the land and to the materials of those manual and mechanical forces, procedures that a particular society understands and possesses.

Relations of production relative to a particular type of society are the "definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production." Relations of production include the freedom or the prohibition of occupying land to cultivate it, of using tools, machines, manufactured products, of having the products of labor to consume them, move them from place to place and to assign them to others. This in general. The particular relations of production are slavery, serfdom, wage labor, commerce, landed property, industrial enterprise. The relations of production, with an expression that reflects not the economic but the juridical aspect, can also be called property relations or also in other texts, forms of property; over the land, over the slave, over the product of the labor of the serf, over the commodities, over the workshops and machines, etc. This whole set of relations constitutes the base or economic structure of society.

The essential dynamic concept is the determinant clash between the forces of production, in their degree of evolution and development, and the relations of production or of property, the social rela-

tions (all equivalent formulas).

The superstructure, that is, what is derived from, what is superimposed on the base economic structure, for Marx is basically the juridical and political framework of any particular society: constitutions, laws, courts, military forces, the central government power. This superstructure nonetheless has a material and concrete aspect. But Marx makes the distinction between the reality in the transformation of the relations of production and in the relations of property and law, that is of power, and this transformation such as it is displayed in the “consciousness” of the time and in that of the victorious class. This is (to this very day) a derivation of a derivation; a superstructure of the superstructure, and forms the mutable terrain of common sense, of ideology, of philosophy, and, in a certain way (insofar as it is not transformed into a practical norm), of religion.

Modes of production (it is preferable not to apply to this concept the term, “forms”, which is used for the more restricted concept, forms of property)—*Produktionsweisen*—are “epochs marking progress in the economic development of society” that Marx summarizes broadly as of the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois types.

We must illustrate this with an example: the bourgeois revolution in France. Productive forces: agriculture and peasant serfs—the artisans and their workshops in the cities—the great manufacturing centers and factories, armories. Relations of production or forms of traditional property: glebe serfdom of the peasants and feudal authority over the land and those who cultivate it—the corporative bonds in the artisanal crafts. Juridical and political superstructure: power of the nobility and the church hierarchy, absolute monarchy. Ideological superstructure: authority of divine right, Catholicism, etc. Mode of production: feudalism.

The revolutionary transformation assumed the following form: immediately as the transfer of the power of the nobles and the church

into the hands of the bourgeoisie; the new juridical-political superstructure is elective parliamentary democracy. The relations that have been abolished are: glebe serfdom and the artisanal guilds; the new relations that appear are: industrial wage labor (with the survival of independent artisans and small-scale peasant property), and free domestic trade, even with regard to the sale of land.

The productive force of the most important factories is enormously developed with the absorption of the former peasant serfs and artisans. The force of industrial machinery also develops to the same degree. The ideological superstructure undergoes a process of gradual replacement that begins before the revolution, and which has not concluded yet: fideism and legitimism are being replaced by free thought, enlightened values and rationalism.

The new mode of production which is spreading throughout France and even beyond it, replacing feudalism, is capitalism: in it, political power is not of the “people”, as it appears in the “consciousness” that this “period of transformation” has with regard to itself, but of the class of the industrial capitalists and of the bourgeois landowners.

In order to distinguish the two “strata” of the superstructure one may adopt the terms of the superstructure of force (positive law, state) and the superstructure of consciousness (ideology, philosophy, religion, etc.).

Marx says that material force, or violence, is itself an economic agent. Engels, in the passages quoted above, and in his book on Feuerbach, says the same thing when he states that the state (which is force) acts on the economy and influences the economic base.

The state of a new class is therefore a powerful resource for the transformation of productive relations. After 1789 feudal relations in France were dismantled due to the advanced development of the modern productive forces that had been emerging for some time. Even the restoration of 1815, although it did once again hand over power to the landowning aristocracy by reestablishing the legitimist monarchy,

was unable to overthrow the relations of production, the forms of property, and neither stifled manufacturing industry nor did it restore the great estates of the nobles. The change in power and the transformation of the forms of production can proceed historically and for limited periods of time in opposite directions.

The burning issue in Russia, in October 1917? Political power, the superstructure of force that in February had passed from the feudal elements to the bourgeoisie, passed into the hands of the workers of the cities, supported in their struggle by the poor peasants. The juridical state superstructure acquired proletarian forms (dictatorship and dissolution of the democratic assembly). The ideological superstructures obtained a powerful impulse among broad layers of the population in favor of the ideological superstructure of the proletariat, despite the desperate resistance of the old ideological superstructures and that of the bourgeois or semi-bourgeois. The productive forces with an anti-feudal nature could proceed unopposed in liberated industry and agriculture. Could one say that the relations of production, in the years immediately following October, were transformed into socialist relations of production? Of course not, and such a transformation would in any case take more than a few months. Were they simply transformed into capitalist relations of production? It is not correct to say that all of them were transformed totally into capitalist relations of production because pre-capitalist forms survived for a long time, as everyone knows. But it would also be inadequate to say that they were moving in the direction of being transformed exclusively into capitalist relations.

Even disregarding the first measures of communism and anti-market policies implemented during the civil war (housing, bread, transport), and in view of the fact that power is an economic agent of the highest order, the transformation of the relations of production under a democratic bourgeois state is one thing and the same process under the proletarian political dictatorship is another.

The mode of production is defined by the totality of relations of production and political and juridical forms. If the entire Russian cycle up until today has led to the full-fledged capitalist mode of production and that today in Russia socialist relations of production do not exist, this is related to the fact that after 1917, after October, the proletarian revolution in the West did not take place, the importance of which did not just lie in its capacity to bolster the soviet political power so that the Russian proletariat would not lose it, which is what happened later, but above all to supply to the Russian economy productive forces that were available in excess in the West, and in this manner assure the transition to socialism of the Russian relations of production.

The relations of production are not immediately transformed at the moment of the political revolution.

Once it was established that the further development of the productive forces in Russia was the other condition, just as important as the consolidation of political power (Lenin), a formulation of the following kind is incorrect: the only historical task of Bolshevik power after October was to pursue the transition from feudal to bourgeois social relations. Until the end of the revolutionary wave that followed the first world war, which lasted until about 1923, the task of the power that had arisen in October consisted in working for the transformation of the feudal social modes and relations into proletarian ones. This work was carried out by the only means possible at the time and therefore it followed the royal road: only later was it possible to formulate the claim that we are confronted by a state that is not socialist, nor does it demonstrate a tendency in that direction. The relations of production after October are actually part capitalist and part pre-capitalist and to a quantitatively minimal extent are post-capitalist; the historical form or, more precisely, the historical mode of production, cannot be defined as capitalist, but as potentially proletarian and socialist. This is what matters!

In this way one escapes from the impasse of the formula: bourgeois economic base, proletarian and socialist superstructures. And this is accomplished precisely by not denying the second term, which prevailed for at least six years after the conquest of the dictatorship.

## II Stalin and Linguistics

<sup>2</sup> The Stalinist theory that language is not a superstructure with respect to the economic base constitutes a false way of posing the problem that we need to solve, since the result that Stalin seeks to obtain lies elsewhere: at every step of the transition from one historical mode of production to the next we always find a change, both in the superstructure as well as the base or economic structure, a change in the power of the classes and of the position of the classes in society. But the national language does not follow the avatars of either the base or the superstructures since it does not belong to a class but to all the people in a particular country. Therefore, in order to save language and linguistics from the effects of the social revolution, we have to lead them (gradually, together with the national culture and the cult of the fatherland) along the banks of the turbulent river of history, outside of the terrain of the productive base as well as that of its political and ideological derivations.

According to Stalin (*Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*), over the last few years in Russia, “the old, capitalist base has been eliminated in Russia and a new, socialist base has been built. Correspond-

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<sup>2</sup>The essay on Stalin and linguistics—which is discussed in part in the article, “Church and Faith, Individual and Reason, Class and Theory”, *Battaglia Comunista*, no. 17, 1950—was preceded by the following note: “The digression is not inappropriate in this arrangement of the material utilized in the report, since it involves the analysis of the doctrine expounded by Stalin with regard to linguistics, all of which is based on the distinctions, employed in a hardly consistent manner, between base and superstructure”.

ingly, the superstructure on the capitalist base has been eliminated and a new superstructure created corresponding to the socialist base... But in spite of this the Russian language has remained basically what it was before the October Revolution”.

The merit of these gentlemen (it is all the same whether this was written by Stalin, or whether it was written by Secretary X or by Department Y) is the fact that they have demonstrated a profound understanding of the art of simple, clear presentation, accessible to all, as has so often been said for the last hundred years in bourgeois cultural propaganda, and above all presented in a brazenly concrete manner. But this presentation that seems so direct and accessible is nothing but a con job, it is a complete relapse into the most vapid sort of bourgeois thinking.

The entire process is supposed to have taken place “correspondingly”. How simple! Not only must we respond by pointing out that this process has not taken place, but also that even if it did, it would not have happened like that. In this formula that might have been drafted by a municipal clerk there is not a trace of dialectical materialism. The base influences the structure and has an active character? And in what sense does the derivative superstructure react in turn so that it is not totally malleable and passive? And with what cycles and in what order and at what historical velocity does the transformation and the process of substitution take place? Bah, these are Byzantine discourses! Enough of this moving the lever to the right and then to the left: Elimination! Creation! By God, out with the creator, out with the eliminator! This kind of materialism does not function without a demiurge, everything is converted into something that is conscious and voluntary, and there is no longer anything that is necessary and determined.

In any case, this argument can be shifted onto real ground: the economic base and the superstructure, by way of complex vicissitudes, had passed from being feudal under the Czar to being fully capitalist

at the time of Stalin's death. Since the Russian language is basically the same, the language is not a part of the superstructure nor does it form part of the base.

It would appear that this entire polemic is directed against a school of linguistics that suddenly fell under suspicion, and that the leading figure of this school is the Soviet university professor, N. Y. Marr, with whose works we are not acquainted. Marr had said that language forms part of the superstructure. Listening to his accuser, we think that Marr is a good Marxist. His accuser says of him: "At one time, N. Y. Marr, seeing that his formula—'language is a superstructure on the base'—encountered objections, decided to 'reshape' it and announced that 'language is an instrument of production.' Was N. Y. Marr right in including language in the category of instruments of production? No, he certainly was not." (Stalin, *op. cit.*).

And why was he mistaken? According to Stalin there is a certain analogy between language and the instruments of production, because the latter can also have a certain indifference with respect to classes. What Stalin means is that, for example, both the plow and the hoe can be used in the feudal, the bourgeois, and the socialist society. The difference, however, for which Marr was condemned (and Marx and Engels: labor, the production of tools in combination with language) is this: the instruments of production produce material goods, but language does not!

But the instruments of production do not produce material goods, either! The goods are produced by the man who uses the instruments of production! These instruments are employed by men in production. When a child first grabs the hoe by the blade, the father shouts at him: hold it by the handle. This cry, which is later transformed into a regular form of "instruction", is, like the hoe, employed in production.

Stalin's dull-witted conclusion reveals that the error is his: if language, as Stalin claims, were to produce material goods, then charla-

tans would be the richest people on earth! Yet is this not precisely the case? The worker works with his arms, the engineer with language: who earns more? It seems to us that we once recounted the story of that provincial landowner who, sitting in the shade and smoking his pipe, was constantly shouting, 'swing that pick!' to the day-laborer he had hired, who was sweating and silently working. The landowner knew that even a brief let-up in the pace of the work would reduce his profits.

Dialectically, it seems to us that Marr had not mended his ways despite the spotlight that was directed on him: dialectically, because we are not familiar with him or his books. We have also said, for example, that poetry, from its very beginnings as a choral song for the transmission of memories, with a magical-mystical-technological character, the first means of transmitting the social patrimony, has the character of a means of production. That is why we included poetry among the superstructures of a particular epoch. The same is true of language. Language in general, and its organization into verses, are instruments of production. But a particular poem, a particular school of poetry, relative to a country or a century, because they are differentiated from the preceding and following poems and schools, form part of the ideological and artistic superstructure of a particular economic form, of a particular mode of production. Engels: the upper stage of barbarism "Begins with the smelting of iron ore, and passes into civilization with the invention of alphabetic writing and its use for literary records... We find the upper stage of barbarism at its highest in the Homeric poems, particularly in the *Iliad*." Using this model we can also seek out other works and show that *The Divine Comedy* was the swan song of feudalism and that the tragedies of Shakespeare were the prologues to capitalism.

For the last Pontifex Maximus of Marxism the distinctive means of production of an epoch is forged iron but not alphabetic writing, because the latter does not produce material goods! But the human

use of alphabetic writing was indispensable, among other things, for the capability to produce the specialty steels of modern metallurgy.

The same thing is true of language. It is a means of production in every epoch, but individual expression by means of language is part of the superstructure, as was the case with Dante Alighieri who did not write his poem in the Latin of the classics or the Church, but in the vulgar Italian, or as was the case of the language reform that marked the definitive abandonment of the old Saxon tongue and its replacement by modern literary German.

The same goes for the plow and the hoe. While it is true that any particular instrument of production can be found that spans two great social epochs separated by a class revolution, it is also true that the entire set of tools of any particular society “defines” it and “compels” it—due to the open conflict between the relations of production—to assume the new, rival form. In barbarism we find the potter’s wheel and in capitalism the modern turntable with a reliable precision motor. And now and then a tool disappears in order to be converted, as in the classic case of the spinning wheel mentioned by Engels, into a museum piece.

Likewise with the plow and the hoe. The society of industrial capitalism cannot eliminate the small-scale, inefficient farming that requires the backbone of pithecanthropus, that was once so proudly erect, to be twisted and bent. But a communist organization with a complete industrial base will undoubtedly only engage in mechanized farming. And in this manner the language of the capitalists will be destroyed, and one will no longer hear those common formulas employed by the Stalinists who try to make us believe that they are marching forward together with that all-too-contradictory hodgepodge: morality, liberty, justice, popular rights, progressive, democratic, constitutional, constructive, productive, humanitarian, etc., which precisely comprise the apparatus thanks to which the most wealth ends up in the pockets of the loudmouths: a function that is identical

with that of certain other, material, tools: the foreman's whistle, the policeman's handcuffs.

## 12 The Idealist Theory of National Language

To deny that human language in general has an origin and a function as a productive instrument, and that the superstructures of class societies include (even among those that are not immediately but gradually replaced) the local and contingent spoken and written language, is equivalent to a complete regression to idealist doctrines, and amounts to politically embracing the bourgeois postulate of the transition to a common language on the part of the literate people of diverse dialects and the erudite persons of an entire politically united country, a real linguistic revolution that heralded the advent of the capitalist epoch.

Since, according to the text that we are examining, language is not a superstructure of the economic base, nor is it a productive instrument, we have to ask: exactly how is it defined?

Let's see: "Language is a medium, an instrument with the help of which people communicate with one another, exchange thoughts and understand each other. Being directly connected with thinking, language registers and fixes in words, and in words combined into sentences, the results of the process of thinking and achievements of man's cognitive activity, and thus makes possible the exchange of thoughts in human society" (Stalin, *op. cit.*). This is therefore supposed to be the Marxist solution of the problem. We do not see how any orthodox traditional ideologist could object to this definition. It is clear that according to this definition humanity prospers by means of a labor of research elaborated in thought and formulated in ideas, passing from this individual phase to a collective one involving its application by way of the use of language, which allows the discoverer to pass on the results of his discovery to other men. And so the materialist devel-

opment with which we are concerned here (in conformance with the usual quotations from our basic texts) is completely discarded: from action to the word, from the word to the idea, this being understood not as a process that is carried out by an individual, but by society; or more correctly: from social labor to language, from language to science, to collective thought. The function of thought in the individual is derivative and passive. Stalin's definition is thus pure idealism. The presumed exchange of thoughts is the projection of bourgeois commodity exchange into the realm of fantasy.

It is very strange that the accusation of idealism falls upon the disgraced Marr, who, by upholding the thesis of changes in language, apparently reached the point where he could predict a decline in the function of language, which would then give way to other forms. Marr is accused of having thus hypothesized that thought could be transmitted without language, and therefore of having become mired in the swamp of idealism. But in this swamp those who presume they are floating high above Marr are the most pitiful. Marr's thesis is depicted as in contradiction with this passage from Karl Marx: Language is "the immediate reality of thought... Ideas do not exist divorced from language."

But is it not the case that this clear statement of the materialist thesis is totally denied by Stalin's definition mentioned above, according to which language is reduced to a means for the exchange of thoughts and ideas?

We shall reconstruct Marr's bold theory in our own way (we may do so thanks to the possession of a theory of the party that transcends generations and borders). Language is — and this is where Stalin stops — an instrument by means of which men communicate with each other. Does communication among men have nothing to do with production? This is what bourgeois economic theory maintains, according to which it appears that each person produces for himself and that he only encounters the other persons by way of the market, to

see if he can cheat them. The correct Marxist expression would not be “language is a medium, an instrument with the help of which people communicate with one another, exchange thoughts and understand each other”, but “language is a medium, an instrument with the help of which people communicate with one another and help each other produce”. We therefore recognize that it is correct to consider language as a means of production. And as for that metaphysical “exchange thoughts and understand each other”, six hundred thousand years have passed and it would appear we have all gone to the same school and we still do not understand it!

Language is thus a technological means of communication. It is the first such means. But is it the only one? Certainly not. Over the course of social evolution an increasingly more diverse series of such means has appeared, and Marr’s speculation that other means might someday largely replace the spoken language is not so far-fetched. Marr is by no means saying that thought as an immaterial expression on the part of an individual subject will be transmitted to the other subjects without taking the natural form of language. Marr is evidently suggesting, with the formula that has been translated as a “process of thinking”, that it will develop in forms that will be beyond language, not with reference to the metaphysical individual invention, but to the legacy of technological knowledge typical of a highly developed society. There is nothing eschatological or magical about this.

Let’s take a look at a very simple example. The helmsman on a galley issued his orders “out loud”. Just like the pilot of the sailing vessel and the skippers on the first steamships. “Full Steam Ahead ... Full power ... Back to half power ...” The ships became much bigger and the captain shouted as loud as he could to issue orders to the boiler room, but this soon proved to be unsatisfactory, and after a period when voicepipes (a truly primitive invention) were used, a mechanical telephone with a crank was introduced, and later an electrical telephone, which connected the signaling quarters with the engineer. Fi-

nally, the instrument panel of a great airliner is full of displays and readouts that transmit all kinds of information from all parts of the plane. The spoken word is indeed being replaced, but by means that are just as material as it is, although obviously not as natural, just as modern tools are less natural than a cut-off piece of a branch used as a club.

We need not enumerate all the stages in this very long series. The spoken word, the written word, the press, the infinity of algorithms, of symbolic mathematics, which have now become international; which is what happens in all the fields of technology and general services which are regulated by conventions of open access for the transmission of precise information concerning meteorology, electronics, astronomy, etc. All electronic applications, radar and other such technologies, all types of signal receivers, are so many more new means of connection among men, which have been rendered necessary due to the complex systems of life and production, and which already in a hundred different ways bypass the word, grammar and syntax, whose immanence and eternity is defended by Stalin, who subjected Marr to such a formidable onslaught.

Is it possible that the capitalist system will cease to consider that the mode of conjugating the verb “to have”, or the verb “to value”, or of declining the possessive adjective and declaring that the personal pronoun must be the basis of any utterance, is eternal? Someday the use of the words “Your Honor” and “Your Lordship”, just like the old “Thou”, will make people laugh, just like the humble servant and the good business deals made by the travelling salesmen.

## 13 References and Distortions

In all Marxist analyses the thesis that the demand for a national language is a historical characteristic of all the anti-feudal revolutions is

of fundamental importance, since this national language was necessary to unite and establish communication between all the compartments of the emerging national market, in order to facilitate the transfer from one part of the national territory to another of the proletarians that had been liberated from glebe serfdom, and in order to fight against the influence of traditional religious, scholastic, and cultural forms that relied in part on the use of Latin as a common language of the learned, and in part on the diversity of local dialects.

To justify his novel theory of extra-classist language—a theory that is truly novel in the Marxist sense—Stalin strives to overcome the contradiction, evidently invoked from various angles, with texts from Lafargue, Marx, Engels, and even . . . Stalin. The good example offered by Lafargue is dismissed in summary fashion. In an article entitled, “The French Language Before and After the Revolution”, Lafargue discussed an unforeseen linguistic revolution that took place in France between 1789 and 1794. That is too short a period of time, Stalin says, and if a very small number of words disappeared from the language, they were replaced by new ones. But the words that disappeared were precisely those words that were most closely related to the relations of social life. Some were proscribed by laws passed by the Convention. There is a well-known counterrevolutionary anecdote:

“What is your name, citizen?”

“Marquise de Saint Roiné.”

“*Il n’y a plus de marquis!*” (There are no more Marquis!)

“De Saint Roiné!”

“*Il n’y a plus de ‘de!’*” (There are no more noble prefixes for names!)

“Saint Roiné!”

“*Il n’y a plus de Saints!*”

“Roiné!”

“*Il n’y a plus de rois!*” (There are no more kings!)

*“Je suis né!”* (I was born!)

Stalin was right: the verb form “né” has not changed.

In a text entitled “Saint Max”, which we confess we have not read, Karl Marx said that the bourgeoisie have their own language, which “itself is a product of the bourgeoisie” and that this language is permeated with the style of commercialism and of buying and selling. In fact, the merchants of Amberg, during the depths of the Middle Ages, were able to understand the merchants of Florence, and this is one of the “glories” of the Italian language, the mother language of capital. Just as in music you see the words “andante”, “allegro”, “pianissimo”, etc. everywhere, so too in every European marketplace one heard the words “firma”, “sconto”, “tratta”, “riporto” and everywhere the pestilential jargon of commercial correspondence was assimilated, “in response to your request...”. So what answer does Stalin provide for this indisputable quotation? He invites us to read another passage from the same text by Marx:

“... in every modern developed language, partly as a result of the historical development of the language from pre-existing material, as in the Romance and Germanic languages, partly owing to the crossing and mixing of nations, as in the English language, and partly as a result of the concentration of the dialects within a single nation brought about by economic and political concentration, the spontaneously evolved speech has been turned into a national language.”

So? The linguistic superstructure is still subject to the same process as the state superstructure and the economic base. But just as the concentration of capital, the unification of national exchange, and political concentration in the capitalist state are not instantly realized in their final form, since they are historical results linked to bour-

geois rule and its cycle, the transition from local dialects to a unitary language constitutes a phenomenon that also proceeds in accordance with all these factors. The market, the state and power are national insofar as they are bourgeois. Language becomes national insofar as it is the language of the bourgeoisie. Engels, who is always cited by Stalin, says, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*: the English “working-class has gradually become a race wholly apart from the English bourgeoisie.... The workers speak other dialects, have other thoughts and ideals, other customs and moral principles, a different religion and other politics than those of the bourgeoisie.”

The patch applied here is also threadbare: Engels does not admit, by saying this, that there are class languages, since he is talking about dialects, and dialect is a derivative of the national language. But have we not established that the national language is a synthesis of dialects (or the result of a struggle among dialects) and that this is a class process, linked to the victory of a particular class, the bourgeoisie?

Lenin must therefore be forgiven for having recognized the existence of two cultures in capitalism, one bourgeois and the other proletarian, and that the campaign in favor of a national culture in capitalism is a nationalist campaign. Emasculating Lafargue, that valiant fellow, might be easy, but to then go on and do the same to Marx, Engels and Lenin is a difficult task. The answer to all of this is that language is one thing and culture is another. But which comes first? For the idealist who acknowledges abstract thought, culture is before and above language, but for the materialist, for whom the word comes before the idea, culture can only be formed on the basis of language. The position of Marx and Lenin is therefore as follows: the bourgeoisie will never admit that its culture is a class culture, since it claims that it is the national culture of a particular people, and thus the overvaluation of the national language serves as a major obstacle that stands in the way of the formation of a proletarian and revolutionary class culture, or rather, theory.

The best part is where Stalin, in the manner of Filippo Argenti, engages in self-criticism. At the 16th Congress of the party he said that in the era of world socialism all the national languages would be combined into one. This formula seems to be very radical, and it is not easy to reconcile it with the other one offered some time later concerning the struggle between two languages that ends with the victory of one of them which absorbs the other without the latter leaving a trace. The author then attempts to exculpate himself by saying that his detractors had not understood the fact that it was a matter of two very different historical epochs: the struggle and the merging of languages takes place in the midst of the capitalist epoch, while the formation of the international language will take place in the fully socialist epoch. "To demand that these formulas should not be at variance with each other, that they should not exclude each other, is just as absurd as it would be to demand that the epoch of the domination of capitalism should not be at variance with the epoch of the domination of socialism, that socialism and capitalism should not exclude each other." This jewel leaves us stupefied. Have not all the propaganda efforts on the part of the Stalinists been devoted to maintaining that the rule of socialism in Russia not only does not exclude the existence of capitalism in the West, but in addition that the two forms can peacefully coexist?

Only one legitimate conclusion can be drawn from this whole shameful display. Russian power can coexist with the capitalist nations of the West because it, too, is a national power, with its national language that is fiercely defended in all its integrity, far removed from the future international language, just as its "culture" is far removed from the revolutionary theory of the world proletariat.

The same author, however, is forced at a certain point to recognize that the national formation of languages strictly reflects that of the national states and national markets. "Later, with the appearance of capitalism, the elimination of feudal division and the formation of

national markets, nationalities developed into nations, and the languages of nationalities into national languages.” This is well said. But then he stumbles and says that, “History shows that national languages are not class, but common languages, common to all the members of each nation and constituting the single language of that nation” (Stalin, *op. cit.*). History dictated this lesson when it relapsed into capitalism. Just as in Italy, where the nobles, the priests and the educated elites spoke Latin, and the people spoke Tuscan, in England the nobles spoke French and the people spoke English, so too in Russia the revolutionary struggle led to the following result: the aristocrats spoke French, the socialists spoke German and the peasants spoke what we shall not deign to call Russian, but rather a dozen languages and a hundred dialects. Had the movement continued in accordance with Lenin’s revolutionary designs it would soon have had a language of its own: everyone would have spoken a garbled version of “international French”. But Joseph Stalin did not understand any of this French, either: only Georgian and Russian. He was the man of the new situation, a situation in which one language drags ten others along with it and in order to do so employs the weapon of literary tradition; the new situation was that of an authentic ruthless nationalism, which, like all the others, followed the law of concentration with regard to language by declaring it to be an intangible cultural patrimony.

It is unusual—or perhaps not so unusual if this movement does not refuse to exploit the sympathies and the support of the foreign proletariat for Marxist traditions—that the text claims to support that decisive passage from Lenin: “Language is the most important means of human intercourse. Unity of language and its unimpeded development form one of the most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commercial intercourse appropriate to modern capitalism, for a free and broad grouping of the population in all its separate classes.” It is therefore quite clear that the postulate of national language is not immanent but historical: it is linked—usefully—to the

appearance of developed capitalism.

It is clear, however, that everything changes and is turned upside down when capitalism falls, and with it commercial society and the division of society into classes. The national languages will perish along with these social institutions. The revolution that fights against them is alien to and an enemy of the demand for a national language, once capitalism has been defeated.

## 14 Personal and Economic Dependence

It constitutes a radical departure from historical materialism to limit it to the epochs during which directly commercial relations between possessors of not only products but also of productive instruments, including land, prevailed. For the theory is also applicable to the preceding epochs before the appearance of the distinction between private possessors due to the establishment of the foundations of the first hierarchies in the family and gender relations. This error, that consists in leaving to non-determinist explanations all that relates to generative and family phenomena, is altogether consonant with the restoration of the linguistic element of the class dynamic; it always involves toleration of the fact that decisive sectors of social life should be withdrawn from the domain of the laws of dialectical materialism.

In a text expressly intended to criticize the Marxist interpretation of history, and claiming that the latter is reduced (as unfortunately occurs with some unwary and inexperienced followers of the communist movement) to deducing the developments of the political history from the conflict between classes that participate in different ways in economic wealth and its distribution, it is taken for granted that there was a time when there was already a complete organization of the state type and the social contest was not between classes of rich patrician landowners, impoverished plebian peasants and artisans, and slaves,

because it was based on the authority of the father of the family.

The author of this text (DeVinscher, *Property and Family Power in Ancient Rome*, Brussels, 1952) distinguishes two stages in the history of juridical systems: one, the most recent, responsible for the well-known civil law that the modern bourgeoisie has embraced as its own, providing for the free disposal of any object and “fee simple ownership”, whether in real property in land or property in other goods, which we may call the “capitalist” stage, and another, much older stage in which the civil administration and its legal codes were very different, in that they largely prohibited instances of transfer and sale except in cases where they were strictly regulated on the basis of the family order, which was patriarchal. This was supposed to be a “feudal” stage, if we contrast this feudalism and capitalism in the ancient world with respect to the characteristic feature that they contained a social class that was lacking in the Medieval and Modern eras, that of the slaves. The latter were excluded from legal rights because they were considered to be things, rather than persons subject to law: within the circle of free men, the citizens, a constitution based on the family and on personal dependence preceded the later one that was based on the free alienation of goods, in which the seller and the buyer engaged with their mutual consent.

The author attempts to refute the “priority that historical materialism has clearly granted to the notions of patrimonial right in the development of institutions”. This would be true if the base to which historical materialism refers were the pure economic phenomenon of property, to patrimony in the modern sense, and if, moreover, this base did not embrace the entire life of the species and group and all the discipline of its relations that had arisen from environmental difficulties, and above all the discipline of generation and family organization.

As everyone knows and as we shall see in Part 2, in the ancient communities or phratries there was neither private property nor in-

stitutions of class power. Labor and production had already appeared and this is the material base, which is much more extensive than the one that is narrowly understood as juridical and economic in Marxist terminology: we shall demonstrate that this base is bound up with the “production of the producers”, that is, the generation of the members of the tribe that is carried out with strict adherence to absolute racial purity.

In this pure gens there is no other dependence or authority than that exercised by the healthy and vigorous adult member of the tribe over the young members who are trained and prepared for a simple and serene life in society. The first authority arose in connection with the first limitations imposed on sexual promiscuity, and this authority was the matriarchy, in which the mother is the leader of the community: but during this era there was not yet any division of the land or anything else. The basis of such a division was created by the patriarchy, which was at first polygamous and later monogamous: the male leader of the family is a real administrative and military leader who regulates the activity of the children and also of the prisoners and that of the conquered peoples who became slaves. We are on the threshold of the formation of a class state.

Once this point is reached it is possible to understand in broad outlines the old Roman legal status, which lasted a millennium (Justinian definitively erased its last traces), the *mancipium*. People and things were in the power of the *pater familias*: the wife or wives, the children, who are free, the slaves and their offspring, the cattle, the land and all the tools and provisions produced on it. All of these things were at first only alienable by way of a rare and difficult procedure called *emancipatio*, or if acquirable without payment, which form of conveyance was called *mancipatio*. This is the source of the famous distinction between *res mancipii*, inalienable things, and *res nec mancipii*, things that can be sold at will, which form part of the normal *patrimonium*, things that are susceptible to increase or decrease.

Thus, in the second stage, when there was no longer anything that was *res mancipii*, and everything was an article of unrestricted commerce (between parties who are not slaves), economic value came to prevail and it became obvious to everyone that struggles for political power were based on the interests of opposed social classes, according to the distribution of land and wealth; in the first stage, economic value and patrimonial right as a license for free acquisition were replaced by the personal *imperium* of the leader of the family, whose prevailing form of organization recognized the three categories of *mancipium*, *manus*, and *patria potestas*, which were the pivots of the society of that epoch.

For the Marxist it is obviously an elementary error to assert that in the first stage of relations economic determinism does not apply. The mistake is based on the tautology that in the commercial order everything proceeds between “equals” and that personal dependence disappears to give way to the exchange between equivalents, in accordance with the famous law of value. But Marxism precisely proves that the unlimited and “Justinianian” commercial exchange of products and instruments led to a new and heavy yoke of personal dependence for the members of the exploited and working classes.

Thus, many people opt to take the easy way out whenever the question arises of a social relation that pertains to the family, since in their view such a relation is supposed to be explained not by way of the productive economy but by so-called “emotional” factors, therefore completely falling prey to idealism. The system of relations based on generation and the family also arises in correspondence with the quest for a better way of life for the group in its physical environment and for its necessary productive labor, and this correspondence is found within the laws of materialism just as when it addresses the later stage of the separate exchanges between individual possessors of products.

But there can be no doubt that the Marxism that is unable to see this succumbs to the idealist resurrection, by admitting if even for

only one second that in addition to the factors of economic interest that are crystallized in the possession of private patrimony and in the exchange of private goods (including among these exchangeable goods human labor power), there are also other factors that are foreign to the materialist dynamic, such as sex, family affection, love; and above all by falling victim to the insipid banality that these factors at certain moments supersede and radically transform the factor of the economic base by their superior forces.

Instead, it is only on the basis of the cornerstone of the efforts to assure the immediate life of the species, which inseparably combine the production of food and reproduction, subordinating if necessary individual self-preservation to that of the species, that the vast and exhaustive edifice of historical materialism is founded, which embraces all the manifestations of human activity including the latest, most complex and grandiose ones.

We shall conclude this part with Engels (*The Origin of the Family*) again, in order to show the customary fidelity of our school, and its repugnance towards any kind of novelty. It is always the development of the productive instruments that is found at the basis of the transition from the patriarchal *imperium* to free private property. In the higher stage of barbarism, the social division of labor between artisans and farmers, and the difference between city and country, had already appeared. . . . War and slavery had already existed for quite some time:

“The distinction of rich and poor appears beside that of freemen and slaves—with the new division of labor, a new cleavage of society into classes. The inequalities of property among the individual heads of families break up the old communal household communities wherever they had still managed to survive, and with them the common cultivation of the soil by and for these communities. The cultivated land is allotted for use to single fam-

ilies, at first temporarily, later permanently. The transition to full private property is gradually accomplished, parallel with the transition of the pairing marriage into monogamy. The single family is becoming the economic unit of society.”

Once again, the dialectic teaches how the individual family, that presumed fundamental social value so highly praised by fideists and enlightened bourgeoisie, which is linked to society based on private property, is also a transitory institution, and denies that it has any basis outside of its material determination—a basis that the fideists and bourgeoisie, on the other hand, assert must be sought in sex or love—and that the individual family will be destroyed after the victory of communism, now that its dynamic has already been studied and condemned by materialist theory.

## Part II

# The Marxist Interpretation of the Political Struggle and of the Impact of the National Factor in the Historic Modes of Production

## I From Race to Nation

The transition from the ethnic group or “people” to the “nation” takes place in relation to the appearance of the political state, with its fundamental characteristics such as the exclusive territory and the organization of an armed force—and therefore after the end of primitive communism and the formation of social classes.

Setting aside all literary movements and all idealist influences, we refer to the category of race as a biological fact, and the category of nation as a geographical fact. However, the nation as a historically defined reality is one thing, and nationality is another, and by nationality we mean a group that derives from two factors, the racial and the political.

Race is a biological fact, since, in order to classify a particular animal according to its race, we do not ask ourselves where it was born, but who were its parents, and if both parents (something that is very rare in today’s world) were of the same ethnic type, the individuals in question having been born to such parents would belong to that type, and are classified precisely as a race. Those lovely pigs, which have spread everywhere now, with a reddish color, known as Yorkshires, so named after the county in England where they were originally bred and rigorously selected, which—the Pope is right about this—can only be accomplished with beasts but not with humans, at least when the latter, including both sexes, are not confined as was the case with some types of slaves. The same is true of Breton cows, Danish dogs, Siamese cats, and so on; the geographic name only expresses a fact related to the location where these varieties were originally bred.

Similar things happen to people, too, and today, in the United States of America (apart from the blacks, since in some states of the union “miscegenation” is still outlawed) one may also behold a *Primo Carnera*, whose father and mother were Friulians, but who is an American citizen, and many *Gennaro Espositos* of Neapolitan blood, but

extremely proud of having obtained “*a carta e’ citatino*” [citizenship papers].

The classification of men as members of a nation is carried out according to a purely geographical, rather than biological or ethnic, criterion, and depends on the place where they were born, generally speaking, except in those rare and complicated cases of people born onboard ships at sea and other similar instances.

But everywhere the difficult conundrum arises of nations that include more nationalities, that is, not just more races—which are gradually becoming biologically indistinguishable as pure types—but more groups that are distinguished by language and also by customs, habits, culture, etc.

If we can still define as a “people” the nomadic horde formed by the merger of tribes of a similar race that traversed whole continents in search of lands to provide for their needs, and often invaded the territories of other peoples who were geographically stable in order to pillage them or to settle in them, obviously, until this last event takes place, we have no right to apply to this horde the term “nation”, which refers to a place of birth, which is unknown and a matter of indifference to those who form part of a human mass that, with its belongings and its wagons that constitute its main form of housing, forgets the topography of its itinerary.

The concept of a fixed abode for a human group implies that of the confines within which it limits its zone of residence and labor, and the mainstream historian often says that it implies protection within these confines against other groups, and therefore the established organization of guards and armies, a hierarchy, a power center. To the contrary, however, the origin of hierarchies, of power, of the state, is traceable to the increasing density of the human population, ultimately leading to territorial disputes, and this trend proceeds in relation to the internal processes of social groups, during the course of their development from the first forms of the clan and the tribe, from

the moment when the cultivation of the soil and agricultural production have reached the point of technological development where farming is consistently practiced in seasonal cycles on the same fields.

## 2 The Emergence of the State

The premise of the origin of the state is the formation of social classes, and the latter is determined in all peoples with the division of the arable land among individuals and families and with the parallel phases of the division of social labor and functions, from which is derived a distinct position of the diverse elements with respect to general productive activity, defining distinct hierarchies with functions such as the primitive artisanate, military action, magic-religion (which is the first form of technical science and of the school), a position that is in turn separated from the immediate life of the gens and the primitive family.

Here we must not attempt to recapitulate the Marxist theory of the state in its entirety, but the latter is of the greatest interest for us with regard to the task of establishing the identity of the structures of the historical collectivities defined as the nation, structures which are much more complex than the banal view according to which each individual, taken in isolation, is united by way of a direct bond with the land in which he was born, the nation being the totality of personal molecules that are similar to one another—a concept that is not at all scientific and which is identified with the class ideology of the modern ruling bourgeoisie.

The theory of the state that does not define the latter as an organ of the people, of the nation or of society, but as an organ of the class power of a particular class, fundamental in Marx, was integrally restored by Lenin in the face of the systematic theoretical and political deterioration to which it had been subjected by the socialists of

the Second International, and Lenin precisely based his restoration on the systematic explanation of the origin of state forms contained in the classic work by Engels on the origin of the family and of property, which has served as our guide to pre-history. During that era the ethnic element entered into play in a still pure and so to speak virgin condition, within the primitive community, in order to work, fraternally and congenially in the ancient and noble—in the concrete sense of the term—tribe and gens, an epoch that is spoken of by the myths of all peoples with their fabulous tales of a golden age of the first men who did not know crime or bloodshed.

From this brilliant work by Engels we shall once again grasp the thread that must lead us to the explanation of national struggles, and to the materialist conclusion that they do not comprise an immanent factor, but a historical product that exhibits certain beginnings and cycles, and which will conclude and disappear in the conditions that are now fully elaborated in the modern world; this view of ours is completely original and can by no means be identified with the refusal to consider, in the framework of our doctrine and especially in our action, which is inseparable from our doctrine (our doctrine, that is, the doctrine that accords with our worldwide and century-old movement, and not with one or many individual subjects), the extremely important process of nationality, and much less with the monumental historical blunder of declaring it to be something that has already been liquidated in its relations with the proletarian class struggle, in the contemporary international political structure.

The process, with respect to ancient Greece, and therefore to the highest historical form of the era of classical Mediterranean antiquity that ended with the fall of the Roman Empire, is synthesized by Engels as follows:

“Thus in the Greek constitution of the heroic age we see the old gentile order as still a living force. But we also see

the beginnings of its disintegration: father-right, with transmission of the property to the children, by which accumulation of wealth within the family was favored and the family itself became a power as against the gens [compare this with the other quotation from the text that appears at the end of Part I]; reaction of the inequality of wealth on the constitution by the formation of the first rudiments of hereditary nobility and monarchy; slavery, at first only of prisoners of war, but already preparing the way for the enslavement of fellow-members of the tribe and even of the gens; the old wars between tribe and tribe already degenerating into systematic pillage by land and sea for the acquisition of cattle, slaves and treasure, and becoming a regular source of wealth; in short, riches praised and respected as the highest good and the old gentile order misused to justify the violent seizure of riches...”<sup>3</sup>

The passage continues:

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<sup>3</sup>Bordiga’s note: We once again note that this adjective, “gentile”, must be understood to mean “belonging to the gens”, and is not to be confused with the less ancient concept of the aristocracy as a class: in the gens, which did not know classes, everyone is of the same blood and therefore equal; we shall not adopt the term democracy, which is spurious and contingent, nor that of pancracy, because although the first part of the word denotes “all”, the second part denotes “power”, something that was unknown at the time: nor was it a pan-anarchy, because anarchy indicates a struggle by the individual against the state, and therefore between two transitory forms, and it is often the case that the latter form causes the wheel of history to roll forward. In the gens there was a simple communist order, but one that was limited to a racially pure group, an order that was therefore ethno-communist, while “our” communism, to which our historic program is oriented, is no longer ethnic or national, but is the communism of the species, made possible thanks to the cycles of property, power and the productive and commercial expansion that history has traversed...

“Only one thing was wanting: an institution which not only secured the newly acquired riches of individuals against the communistic traditions of the gentile order, which not only sanctified the private property formerly so little valued, and declared this sanctification to be the highest purpose of all human society; but an institution which set the seal of general social recognition on each new method of acquiring property and thus amassing wealth at continually increasing speed; an institution which perpetuated, not only this growing cleavage of society into classes, but also the right of the possessing class to exploit the non-possessing, and the rule of the former over the latter.

“And this institution came. The state was invented.”

And it was also Engels who defined the territorial criterion:

“In contrast to the old gentile organization, the state is distinguished firstly by the grouping of its members on a territorial basis. The old gentile bodies, formed and held together by ties of blood, had, as we have seen, become inadequate largely because they presupposed that the gentile members were bound to one particular locality, whereas this had long ago ceased to be the case. The territory was still there, but the people had become mobile. The territorial division was therefore taken as the starting point and the system introduced by which citizens exercised their public rights and duties where they took up residence, without regard to gens or tribe.”

### 3 States Without Nationality

In the ancient Asiatic-Oriental empires that had been politically consolidated prior to the Hellenistic empires, we observe complete forms of state power in relation to the concentration of enormous wealth in land and goods in the hands of nobles, satraps and sometimes theocrats, and the subjection of enormous masses of prisoners, slaves, serfs and pariahs of the land, but one cannot yet speak of a national form even though the characteristics of the state form are present: political territory and armed forces.

The obvious objection that may be made with reference to the Jewish People allows us an opportunity to contribute a useful clarification of the last passage from Engels quoted above.

It might seem that confusion could arise between the territory that in a less distant epoch defines the fully developed state form, and the bond of the members of the gens to a particular territory, a bond that was later broken even though the inviolable bond of blood itself survived.

A territory belonged to the gens, but not in the modern political sense, nor in a strictly productive economic sense, either. Engels meant to say that the gens is distinguished from the other gentes, besides by its name, by its territory of origin, not by the different successive territories of residence and common labor. The bond of the Iroquois Indian with his land of origin has been broken for centuries, not only from the moment when white civilization rounded up the few survivors in stupid reservations, but from the time when the various lineages had engaged in terrible warfare with one another, destroying each other but being very careful not to mix, even at the cost of traveling thousands of kilometers through immense forests (many of which were later reduced to deserts by capitalist technology, bourgeois philanthropy having used them to test atomic weapons).

The Jewish people were the first to possess a written history, but

by the time it was written it was a history of class division, featuring landowners and dispossessed persons, rich people and servants, clearly having surpassed the stage of primitive communism, whose only memory is Eden, because already in the second generation we have Cain, the founder and inventor of class struggle. The Hebrews then had an organized state, very carefully organized, with precise hierarchies and strict constitutions. This people did not, however, become a nation, any more than their barbarian enemies the Assyrians, the Medes or the Egyptians did. And this in spite of the enormous difference between the racial purity of the Hebrews and the indifference of the satraps and Pharaohs with respect to the swarms of servants, slaves and sometimes functionaries and military commanders of other ethnic origins or colors who surrounded their thrones, and their harems of white, black and yellow women, all the fruit of military raids or the subjugation of free primitive tribes or of other states that previously existed in the heart of Asia or Africa.

The Hebrews, divided into twelve tribes, were not assimilated by other peoples, not even after they were defeated in war. The tribes and gentile organizations, now traditionally transformed into monogamous patriarchal families, did not lose the link of pure blood, the name of their countries of origin or their tedious genealogical traditions (note that despite the strict adherence to paternal descent, the Israelites fully tolerated conjugal unions with women of other races), not even after the great deportations, as in the legendary Babylonian and Egyptian captivities. The mythical bond with the promised land is a pre-national form, because even when the ethnic community that has been preserved in such a pure form returns to the country of its origin, to its ethnological cradle, it cannot politically organize in that country with any historical stability and the territory continues to be invaded by armies coming from other distant powers. The wars of the Bible are tribal struggles rather than wars of national liberation or of imperial conquest, and the territory remained the scene of his-

toric clashes between peoples who aspired to hegemony in this strategic area of the ancient and modern world.

Nor were the Greeks of the Trojan War a nation, but rather a federation of small states that were territorially adjacent and contained ethnically diverse communities, in view of the different origins of Ionians and Dorians and the convergence on the Hellenic peninsula of very ancient migrations coming from all points of the compass. Even productive forms, state constitutions, customs, languages, and cultural traditions varied widely among the small allied military monarchies: so, too, in the historic wars against the Persians, Greek unity was only temporary, and subsequently gave way to bloody wars for predominance over the Peloponnese and all of Greece.

## 4 The Hellenic Nation and Culture

National factors are nonetheless evident in ancient Greece in the social organization of Athens, Sparta and other cities, and even more clearly in the Macedonian state that not only unified as a country but rapidly became the center of one of the first imperial conquests in the ancient world. The literature and the ideology of this first nationalism would not only be translated in the Roman world, but would also supply the script for the national intoxication of the modern bourgeoisie.

The Lacedaemonian state, just like the Athenian state (or the Theban state), was not just a complete state in the political sense with a precisely defined territory and its own juridical institutions, and with a central power from which civil and military hierarchies emanated, but attained the national form insofar as the social fabric—although preserving the division between rich and poor classes with respect to agricultural and artisanal production and the already highly developed domestic and foreign trade, and assuring the political power of

the economically powerful strata—allowed for a legal and administrative framework that applied the same formal norms to all citizens, and among these norms was the equal participation in the votes of the popular deliberative and elective assemblies. This juridical superstructure substantially performed a function that is analogous to that which Marxism denounced in the bourgeois parliamentary democracies, but between these two historical modes of social organization there is a basic difference: today anyone can be a citizen, and it is recognized that the same law is valid for all; among the Greek city-states, the citizenry, which alone comprised the real nation, excluded the class of slaves, who were extremely numerous during certain periods, and were deprived by law of any political and civil rights.

Despite such features, and despite the class conflict between aristocrats and plebeians, between rich patricians and merchants on the one hand and simple workers on the other, who lived on charity, this social form was accompanied by several major advances both with regard to labor and technology and therefore in the applied sciences, and in pure science: in relation to participation in the productive processes on foundations of equality and liberty, despite class exploitation, language occupied a position of the first rank, and literature and art reached very high levels, establishing the national tradition that was utilized for the benefit of the leaders of society and the state to bind all the citizens to the fate of the nation, forcing them to serve in the military, and to make any other sacrifice or contribution in case of danger to the national entity and its essential structures.

Literature, historiography and poetry fully reflect the assertion of these values, making patriotism the main motor force of all social functions, exalting by every means the fraternity of all the citizens of the state, condemning the inevitable and frequent civil wars and intestine struggles, customarily presented as conspiracies against those who hold power, promoted by other groups or persons who wanted it for themselves, but which were actually nothing but the expressions

of the conflicts of class interests and the discontent of the popular masses of the citizens who had been nourished on many illusions but were tormented by the low standard of living even during the periods of the greatest splendor of the “polis”.

National solidarity is not, however, a pure illusion and mirage created by the privileged and the powerful, because in a determinate historical phase it is the real effect determined by economic interests and by the requirements of the material forces of production. The transition from primitive, localized farming in Greece—which despite its favorable climate is largely arid and rocky, and which could only feed a small, slightly developed population—to the most intense commercial navigation from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, which brought products from distant countries and disseminated those fabricated by the Greek artisans who practiced an increasingly more varied assortment of crafts that represented an authentic ancient type of industry, and which in particular allowed the inhabitants of the ports to undergo a major transformation in their ways of life, this transition, as we were saying, could not have taken place under a closed and despotic state form, like the great empires of the continent, but only under a democratic and open form, which not only supplied citizens and helots, but skilled craftsmen for building the numerous merchant ships, and the workers of the city, the armories and the administrative labor oversight bodies, which were necessary—although on a much-reduced scale compared to now—for this first form of capitalism that achieved such unforgettable splendor.

Whenever new forms of labor appear and become established—forms of labor which are, as always, subjected to exploitation, but which are no longer bound by localized immobility and the fossilization of age-old technologies of labor—they cause, during their ascendant phase, in the superstructure, a vast development of science, art and architecture, reflecting new ideological horizons opened up to societies that had previously been bound to closed and traditional doctrines. Dur-

ing the waning of feudalism the phenomenon of the Renaissance appeared, understood as a European event: many people think that the golden age of the Greek period is culturally unsurpassable, but this is nothing but literature. We may nonetheless point out that the “bridge” of “national humanity” that spans economic inequalities, by excluding the slaves, who were considered as semi-animals and not as human beings, was much more solid than the one that would be introduced in its historical edition fifteen or twenty centuries later, and which claims to have overcome the social abyss that divides the owners of capital from the disinherited proletariat.

Engels reminds us that at the high point of the splendor of Athens, the city contained only ninety thousand free citizens as opposed to three hundred sixty five thousand slaves—who not only worked the land but also supplied the workers for those industries we mentioned above—and fifty thousand “freedmen” (ex-slaves) and foreigners who did not enjoy the rights of citizenship.

It is quite plausible that this social structure provided the way of life of these ninety thousand elect with a qualitatively more advanced degree of “civilization” than the one that is granted to the modern “free” peoples of contemporary capitalism, despite the greater resources of the latter.

This does not, however, constitute a reason to participate in the ecstatic admiration expressed for the Greek preeminence in thought and in art, and not only because these great achievements were constructed on the blood and labor of a group of slaves that numbered more than twenty times the number of free men: the free citizens, before the time of Solon, were so intensively exploited by a landowning plutocracy that the terms of a mortgage could lead to the enslavement of a free citizen who was declared to be an insolvent debtor, so that the free citizenry, because it did not want to sink to the level of the scorned slave (the pride of the free Athenians reached such a degree that rather than become thugs they consented to allow the formation

of a state police corps staffed by well-compensated slaves, in which a slave would be authorized to manumit free men), ultimately became an authentic Lumpenproletariat, a stratum of the depths of poverty, whose revolts against the oligarchs dissolved the glorious republic.

Engels made some comments that nicely encapsulate the Marxist position with respect to apologetics for the great historical civilizations. The Iroquois Indians were incapable of developing those forms that had been attained by the original Greek gens, which was totally in conformance with the gens studied in modern America by Morgan (similar forms are described today in the newspapers by explorers of the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean, an expedition carried out by Italians under the authority of the new Indian regime, among primitive groups that were until recently isolated from the rest of humanity). The Iroquois lacked a series of material conditions of production relating to geography and climate that were available to the Mediterranean peoples... Within the restricted circle of their real economy, however, the Iroquois communists “did control their own production”, which they determined and distributed in accordance with human need.

With the impulse that took Greek production towards its glorious differentiation, as represented by the Parthenon, the Venus of Phidias or the paintings of Zeuxis, as well as the Platonic abstractions that modern thought has yet to discard, the products of man that were beginning to be transformed into commodities circulated through monetized markets. Whether he was a free man or a slave according to the canons of the codes of Lycurgus or Solon, man began to be the slave of productive relations and to be dominated by his own product. The tremendous revolution that will free him from these chains, whose most formidable links were forged during the “golden” ages of history, is still nowhere in sight.

“The Iroquois were still very far from controlling na-

ture, but within the limits imposed on them by natural forces they did control their own production (...) That was the immense advantage of barbarian production, which was lost with the coming of civilization; to reconquer it, but on the basis of the gigantic control of nature now achieved by man (...) will be the task of the next generations.”

Here one beholds the heart of Marxism, and here one sees why the Marxist smiles when he sees some naive individual ecstatically admiring one stage or another of human evolution, attributing the highest honors in every domain to the work of sublime investigators, philosophers, artists and poets, without regard to class and party interests, as contemporary stupidity repeatedly says. We do not want to crown “civilization”, but to knock it off its foundations.

## 5 The Roman Nation and Force

The factor of nationality reached its highest expression in ancient Rome during the era of the Republic, further developing the model offered by Greece for culture in the positive field of organization and law. On the basis of the Roman nation the empire was erected, which tended to be a single state organized throughout the entire known human world of the time, but was unable to resist the pressure imposed by the rapidly multiplying populations in distant and unknown lands that had themselves entered into the great cycle of productive development, which from the small gens had led the Mediterranean peoples to an immense empire, and which was in turn subject to pressure from the urgent material requirement of the vital spread of the species.

The national process in Italy was unlike the one that took place in Greece insofar as in Italy there were no little cities that were capitals of

little states, with their own customs and a high degree of productive development that was largely shared equally by all of them, that were fighting for hegemony over the peninsula. In Italy, after the disappearance of the preceding civilizations which, although they had achieved advanced types of production and had indisputably developed certain state powers, cannot however be considered to be nations in the proper sense of the word, Rome became the exclusive center of a state organization with certain well defined juridical, political and military forms that rapidly absorbed the other communities and incorporated an ever-expanding territory, rapidly extending beyond the borders of Latium and reaching the Mediterranean and the Po. While the important productive forces of a zone of that enormous size were coordinated with those of Roman society, the social and state organization of Rome and its administrative and judicial systems were applied everywhere and in an increasingly uniform manner.

Although not as rapidly as in Greece, the agricultural productive base was integrated, with a complex division of labor, with artisanal production, commerce, maritime trade and manufacture: very soon, however, the military conquest of lands beyond the Ionian and Adriatic Seas made it possible for the cultural and technical organization that were features of Greek life and that of other peoples to be rapidly absorbed.

The social system was substantially the same, with the contribution of slave labor always playing a leading role. But the spread of mercantilism, more slow but more profound, caused the scale of differences to be more marked even within the society of free men: at the base of the social organization and of the laws themselves was the census that classified the Roman citizens according to their wealth.

The Roman citizen was obliged to perform military service, while weapons were absolutely forbidden to the slave and the freedman, right up to the last years of the empire. The legionary army is the real national army that Greece never possessed; Alexander the Great did

not have such an army, either, despite his impetuous advance to India, where death finally halted the youthful commander, but this was actually the outermost limits allowed by the overwhelming superiority of the western state form with respect to the ones that existed among the various principalities of Asia. This so often assayed worldwide organization rapidly collapsed by being divided into smaller states, not because there was not another Alexander, but because state centralism was still in its infancy.

The Roman organization, besides being a state organization, was also a national one, both due to the direct participation of the citizenry in war and to the establishment in every occupied zone of a stable network of roads and fortifications, as well as the agricultural colonization that took place at the same time, with the granting of land to soldiers, and the immediate establishment of the Roman productive, economic and legal forms. Roman expansion was not just a raid aimed at seizing the putative treasures supposedly possessed by legendary peoples, but the systematic dissemination of a particular mode of production that was constantly spreading, crushing all armed resistance, but accepting the productive collaboration of the subject peoples.

It is no easy matter, however, to establish Rome's national boundaries, which varied with the passage of time, much less to attribute to it an ethnographic profile, since everyone knows that from the racial point of view prehistoric Italy, just like historic Italy, was never unified, nor could it ever have materially had any unity since it has been a crossroads from the north and the south, the east and the west, for a long succession of human groups since time immemorial. Even if we were to admit that the primitive Latins (after they abandoned Troy) constituted a single race, by the time they came to Latium their neighbors the Volscians, Samnites, Sabines, not to speak of the mysterious Etruscans, the Ligurians, etc., had been differentiated as separate peoples for a very long time.

The *civis romanus* with its laws and its proverbial national pride rapidly spread from the *Urbe* throughout all of Latium, organizing the Italic peoples by municipalities, to which, under the centralist state form, no autonomy could be conceded, preferring instead, a few centuries later, to call every free man who lived in them a Roman citizen, with all the inherent rights and duties.

The national reality is here brought to its most potent expression in the ancient world, accompanied by the greatest historical stability known up to the present time. Very far removed, therefore, from the ethnic community of blood, the members of this great community, the free citizens, divided into social classes extending from the great patrician latifundist with villas in every corner of the empire to the poor peasant and proletarian of the *Urbe* who survived hard times thanks to the distribution of grain by the state, were able to coexist due to a general economic system of production and exchange of goods and products, governed by the same inflexible legal code that the armed force of the state caused to be respected without exceptions throughout its immense territory.

The history of social struggles and civil wars within the *Urbe* is classic, but the disorders did not reduce the solidarity and the homogeneity of the magnificent edifice constructed for the purpose of administering all the productive resources of the most distant countries, filling these countries with enduring public works devoted to productive functions of every type: roads, aqueducts, baths, markets, forums, theaters, etc.

## 6 The Decline of Nationality

The decline and fall of the Roman Empire closed the period of ancient history when nationality and organization into national states were decisive factors in the development of the evolution of the pro-

ductive forces.

National solidarity, which did not prevent periods of violent class struggles between free men of different social and economic status, had a clear economic base until, due to the masses of slaves, the development of the system of production that was common to the citizens of the nation provided a constant supply of new resources that raised the general standards of living, such as the replacement of simple pastoral lifestyles with fixed agriculture, the application of irrigated horticulture to large-scale systems, and the replacement of primitive seminomadic lifestyles by the division of the land and its subjection to buying and selling just like slaves and cattle. The agrarian and subsequently urban economy of the Romans originally emerged from the primitive collective economy of the local gentile institutions, which was replaced because it could not feed a population that was rapidly expanding, largely as a result, among other factors, of the good climate. Engels provides a brief but comprehensive explanation of these origins, showing that the laws of the ancient Romans were derived from their primitive gentile constitutions, and refuting the old theories Mommsen and other historians (see the final chapter of the preceding section where he refutes a recent author who denied that historical materialism is applicable to that period).

If the system of Roman law governing the sale of land and commerce in movable goods represented the “necessary” superstructure of a new productive economy with a greater output than primitive tribal communism, and if this fact explains its appearance, the economic facts that will explain the political and historical events of its decline are different. Because of the increase in wealth obtained by trading over an immense expanse and by exploiting slave labor, an extremely deep class divide emerged on the “national front”, which had previously been so solidly united. The small farmers who had fought for the fatherland and assiduously colonized conquered lands were expropriated and dispossessed in ever increasing numbers, and the

slaves who formed part of the wealth of the landowners (at a higher level than the flocks and herds) replaced them on their fertile fields, plunging them into ruin. The coexistence of free men and slaves was viable with a low-to-medium density of population, assuring the slaves of their material life and reproduction, and assuring the free men of the wide range of satisfactions offered by such flourishing eras; due to the reduction in the amount of colonizable land beyond the borders of Italy, however, and as a result of the new emigrant and demographically expanding peoples in motion on the other side of the borders, and with an increasing number of people who aspired to own their own parcel of land, an unavoidable crisis ensued in conjunction with a regression in the methods of cultivation. The latter degenerated to the point where neither animals nor slaves could be kept alive, and as disorganization spread it was the owners themselves who freed their slaves, who then went on to swell the masses of poor free men who were without work or land.

This magnificent construction relaxed its bonds between regions and could no longer intervene in local crises of subsistence. While shortages were exacerbated by the demographic factor, human groups were reduced to impoverished local economic circuits, narrow circuits that were no longer those of the ancient gentile constitutions, and whose situation could not be modified due to the profound changes that had taken place and the new relations between productive instruments, products and needs. . . . The nation that had become an empire had to be divided into tiny units, which no longer had the powerful connective fabric of the law, of the magistracy, of the armed forces, that emanated from a single center, and lost the common Latin language, the culture, the proud tradition. . . . The great, “natural”, fundamental national and patriotic reality, which would be linked with the famous “human essence” was, to the great discomfiture of the idealists, preparing to allow itself to undergo a total historical eclipse that would last a thousand years.

“In earlier chapters we were standing at the cradle of ancient Greek and Roman civilization. Now we stand at its grave. Rome had driven the leveling plane of its world rule over all the countries of the Mediterranean basin, and that for centuries. Except when Greek offered resistance, all natural languages had been forced to yield to a debased Latin; there were no more national differences (...) all had become Romans. Roman administration and Roman law had everywhere broken up the old kinship groups, and with them the last vestige of local and national independence (...) The elements of new nations were present everywhere (...) But the strength was not there to fuse these elements into new nations...”

The barbarians were coming, with the freshness of their gentile structure, but they were not yet mature enough to create a state formation by founding real nations. The shadow of the feudal Middle Ages had appeared: and as Engels said, this too was a necessity inherent to the development of the productive forces.

## 7 The Social Structures of the German Barbarians

The peoples who brought an end to the Roman Empire with their waves of invasions also originally possessed a gentile and matriarchal organization, and a communist system of cultivation of the land. When they first came into contact with Rome, they were between the middle and the higher stage of barbarism, and were beginning to make the transition from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle. Their military organization was beginning to give way to the formation of a class of military chiefs who elected the king and who were accumulating

vast wealth, seizing the land from the free peasants, who were previously all members of the gens and the tribe, and thus free and of equal status. The state also began to emerge among these peoples, and the foundations were gradually laid that would lead many centuries later to the modern rebirth of the nation.

The information available concerning the German peoples located throughout Europe north of the Danube and east of the Rhine depicted them as having a system of agricultural production governed in common by families, gentes and marks, followed by a type of occupation of the land characterized by its periodic redistribution with the lands that were not totally held in common being set aside as fallow land for later cultivation. During this period, crafts and industry were completely primitive: there was no commerce and no money circulated, except for Roman coins in the border zones of the empire, along with a certain quantity of imported manufactured goods.

All of these peoples were nomadic during the time of Marius, who repelled the hordes of Cimbrians and Teutons from the Italian peninsula, which they were attempting to occupy by crossing the Po; many of them were still nomadic during the time of Caesar, who observed them on the left bank of the Rhine, and they are only described as sedentary in the time of Tacitus, one hundred fifty years later. They had evidently undergone a complicated process related above all to their rapid population growth, but we lack primary historical documentation for this period: at the time of the fall of the Empire there were six million of them, according to Engels, in an area that is now home to about one hundred fifty million people.

The class distinctions between the military chiefs who possessed land and power and the mass of peasant-soldiers (since there were no slaves and therefore the only people who did not bear arms or were exempt from the obligations of warfare were those who worked the land) led to the formation of authentic states, as they occupied a fixed territory and chose a stable king or emperor, even for life but not yet

hereditary in the context of a dynasty. Once this point was reached the gentile order had already been overthrown, since the tradition of the popular assembly of the community is completely altered in favor of the assembly of chiefs or noble electors, which constituted the foundation of an openly class-based power.

This process was undoubtedly accelerated by the conquest of the territories of the declining Roman Empire, in which the invading peoples settled. Rather than its reorganization, their revolutionary task was the destruction of the corrupt Roman Empire; as Engels said, they liberated the subjects of Rome from their parasitic state, whose socio-economic foundations collapsed, and the invaders obtained in exchange at least two-thirds of the imperial territory.

The new organization of agricultural production in these lands, in view of the relatively small numbers of the occupying forces and their tradition of communist labor, left vast tracts unassigned, not only of forests and pastures, but also cultivated lands, and the German forms of law either prevailed over the Roman forms, or the two forms existed side by side. This made possible a fixed territorial administration of these nomadic peoples, and Germanic states arose that for four or five centuries ruled the old Roman provinces and Italy itself. The most important of these states was that of the Franks, which served as a defensive rampart against the occupation of Europe by the Moors, despite yielding some territory to pressure from the Normans, and thus enabled populations to remain in the territories they occupied, forming a complex ethnic mixture of Germans, Romans and, in the kingdom of the Franks, the indigenous Celts. These Germanic states were not nations, however, due to this recent crowding together of heterogeneous ethnic types, traditions, languages and institutions: but they were states because they finally had stable borders and a unified military force.

“And, further, however unproductive these four centuries

appear [the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th centuries A.D.], one great product they did leave: the modern nationalities, the new forms and structures through which west European humanity was to make coming history [the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries]. The Germans had, in fact, given Europe new life, and therefore the break-up of the states in the Germanic period ended, not in subjugation by the Norsemen and Saracens, but in the further development of the system of benefices and protection into feudalism...”

Before we conclude this part of our text with the description of the features of the medieval constitution, in which the “national” factor is substantially excluded, we want to point out that in the classic Marxist doctrine not only is the organization of the ancient barbarian and nomadic gentile constitutions into states considered to be a historically positive development, which benefited the peoples of the Mediterranean peninsulas for more than one thousand years, but so is the development of the national character of these states, their development in the direction of nationality, that is, towards a community that is circumscribed not just by certain racial characteristics, but also by the language and traditions and customs of all the inhabitants of an extensive and stable geographic territory. While the historical idealist sees in nationality a general fact that is always and everywhere present wherever there is civil life, the Marxists attribute it to particular cycles. We have recounted the history of the first historical cycle, and it was that of the great national democracies “superimposed” on the masses of slaves, but with free men divided into social classes. We shall discuss the second cycle in Part 3, that of the democracies of free men, now without human slaves. In this second historical cycle the reality of the nation accompanies a new class division: that of capitalism. The nation and its material influence are perfected in capitalism and bour-

geois democracy, but not before, since the formation of nation states will be indispensable so that the passage to modern capitalism in the various geographic areas may be accomplished.

## 8 Feudal Society as Non-national Organization

The economic relations that define the feudal order explain how the feudal type of production led to the origin of a specific corresponding historical form of the political state, but one lacking a national character.

To explain how the encounter between two such heterogeneous types of production—the agrarian community of the barbarian peoples and the regime of private landed property of the Romans—led to the feudal system that is in turn based on agrarian production, and to emphasize the Marxist conclusion that the states of classical antiquity, above all in their best periods, had a national character, which would be lacking in the medieval order, it is necessary to recall the most noteworthy characteristics of their respective relations of property and production.

In the barbarian order, until slavery appeared, the farmer was a free member of the community, but the land was not subdivided in individual parcels nor was any part of it set aside for individual consumption, nor were agricultural products regulated, harvested and consumed in accordance with individual control.

In the classical order of antiquity, the agricultural worker was essentially the slave, and slavery prevailed not just in agriculture but also in the already highly developed and differentiated sector that produced manufactured goods, which is why it is correct to state that the Greco-Roman world had an authentic industrialism and in a certain sense a real capitalism: capital, instead of being constituted by the

land and the instruments of production was formed above all by living men, while today, for example, in an enterprise the land, the machines and the draft animals are capital. This ancient capitalism did not have generalized wage labor as a corresponding term, since it was rare for a free man to work for a wage.

Because the slaves, however, who constituted the fundamental labor force of society (perhaps at first they were the common property of all the free men), were goods that could be owned, their distribution was unequal and this resulted in the division of the category of free men into two classes: citizens who owned slaves, and citizens without slaves, without property in men. It seems that even the wise Socrates himself aspired, in his impoverished status as a philosopher, to buy at least one slave boy.

The citizen without slaves was therefore incapable of living on the labor of others, and so he had to work. He did not work like a slave, of course, but like a free man, that is, without taking orders from a master. And for this reason he had to participate in the regime of landed private property. The free worker is a landowning peasant who disposes of his piece of land according to his wishes, obtaining products with the labor of his own two arms. Other free men who were not rich and who did not own slaves engaged in free craft labor or the liberal professions (which were not conceded, at least as an intellectual activity, to slaves).

When this cycle is complete all the arable land is reduced to an allodial good. The allod is private property in the land, with full rights to sell it or to buy other land. This means that the new land that was conquered by Rome was immediately divided among the victorious (Roman) soldiers who became colonists. For allodial rights to be freely exercised, however, it is necessary for circulating money to exist with which various products can be purchased, including the slaves normally associated with the possession of land.

The few goods that were not distributed in the ancient regime by

way of parcelized individual ownership and remained in the hands of the state or of local administrative entities comprised, as opposed to allodial goods, the public domain. The fact that the private *allodium* predominated over the public domain required the existence of a circulating medium, and therefore of a general market to which all the free citizens of the entire territory could have access: this condition was completely fulfilled in Greece and Rome. The type of production of classical antiquity therefore presented, for the first time, unlike the system of production under barbarism with its restricted circles of labor-consumption, a domestic national market (and also the beginnings of an international market). The territorial state is a national state not only when its power reaches the whole territory by way of armed force (as was also true of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and later of the Salian Franks and the Burgundians, etc.), but also when the trade in the products of its labor and of goods extends throughout its entire territory and between the most distant points of that territory. In the juridical superstructure this is expressed by the exercise of the same rights on the part of the citizenry in all parts of the state. Only then is the state a nation. In the framework of historical materialism, a nation is therefore an organized community in a territory in which a unified domestic market has been formed. Corresponding to this historical result is a parallel degree of community of blood, and even more of language (you cannot do business without speaking!), of habits and customs...

The classical economic environment gave birth to the phenomenon of accumulation, as also takes place in modern capitalism: we then find those who have many slaves and those who have none, those who have a lot of land and those who hardly have enough to till with their bare hands. This concentration led to destructive results and transformed slave labor into an economically counterproductive factor as the land was relentlessly being divided into smaller and smaller parcels. In this context and with these relations in mind Pliny wrote

that “*latifundia Italiam perdidere*” [“the latifundia are the ruination of Italy”], and in the superstructure of morality the enslavement of man became an infamy... Contemporary compilers of agrarian laws actually went so far, with regard to aspects of technological and social development, to identify slavery with the odium of capitalist exploitation of agricultural labor. But let us return to our examination of Medieval agricultural labor.

With the collapse of the Roman agrarian economy that had become technologically retrograde and unproductive, the general fabric of commerce by which movable wealth circulated throughout the entire empire also collapsed, and the range of all types of needs of the population that could be satisfied also contracted. The barbarians, however, arrived with a tradition of not being such big consumers, and for them, after the brief hiatus of the dissipation of the loot they obtained in the cities, which went into decline at this time, the real wealth that they had conquered was the land. But they were too late, since the social division of labor was already too highly advanced for all the land seized from the Roman landowners and latifundists to be worked in common, or managed as part of the public domain of the new powers. What emerged was a mixed type of allodial and public domain lands. Part of the land was appropriated for the common use of the communities (civic customs that have survived to this day), and another part was definitively divided in an allodial form, which was completely precarious in the period when new waves of conquerors were constantly arriving, and another part was shared out by way of periodic redistributions (even today this institution of re-allotment of the land has survived in cadastral legislation, in Austria, for example).

The free peasants who took possession of the much desired and fertile Mediterranean lands would rapidly obtain greater yields than the gangs of slaves. And in this context the productive forces of so many previously unused arms and of the rich terrain scorned by the wealthy Romans underwent a powerful resurgence. Because of the

collapse of the Roman administrative network with its communications and means of transport, however, trade collapsed as well, regressing into a type of local production characterized by the direct local consumption of the product.

This economy without commerce characterized the Middle Ages, whose states possessed legal systems and territorial armies, but did not have united territorial markets: as a result, they were not nations.

If the members of the old gentile institutions had already lost their social equality during the course of the migrations and conquests, they would soon also lose, together with the semi-common and semi-allodial control of the occupied lands, their liberty and their autonomy as well. The process entailing the concentration of territorial property into the hands of military chiefs, functionaries, favorites of the king's court, and religious bodies had commenced.

The slaves of antiquity were replaced by a new class of serfs, who did all the manual labor themselves, above all, the robbery and extortion of the free laborers. Farming land that was divided into many parcels presupposed a stable order, which in the Roman state was guaranteed by its judges and its soldiers, but which now was lacking not only because new armed peoples frequently came to the fertile lands, but also because struggles broke out between the lords and chieftains of a single ineffectively centralized power.

The free peasant needed security more than freedom, since security was the basic element of the Roman juridical order, which was now rehabilitated and held up as a model. By surrendering his freedom he found security, or at least a better chance of cultivating the land for himself and not for other predatory elements, who deprived him of his tools and equipment along with his entire harvest.

This form was known as commendation (and not recommendation as some texts call it), which is basically nothing but an agreement between the peasant farmer and the armed and warlike lord. The feudal lord guaranteed stability in the territory where the labor was per-

formed, and the peasant handed over to him part of his crop or else part of his labor time. But the security of not being expelled from the land he farmed was transformed into the obligation not to leave it. He was no longer a slave, who could be sold, but he was not a free peasant, either: he was the serf of the glebe.

## 9 The Bases of the Modern Revolution

The defense waged by Engels on behalf of this form as opposed to latifundist slavery is completely Marxist. The new form allows, for example in the France of the semi-savage Celts, an enormous development of productivity and an enormous increase in the stable population, so that the periodic famines (the consequence of the abolition of trade between regions and provinces) and the Crusades (an attempt to reopen the trade routes of antiquity) did not reduce this population two centuries later.

Thus, the revolution that accompanied the fall of the Roman Empire at the hands of the barbarian migrations served the further development of the social productive forces.

The destruction of general commerce and of the markets that once embraced the furthest reaches of nation and empire condemned the newly-fertilized and colonized Europe to a very long period of molecular economic life, its populations dispersed and reduced to tiny islands, a Europe that still was the home of stable peoples who gradually became culturally and technologically more advanced, an advance that corresponded with the organization of the countries that were consistently occupied by humans, although the class that at that time formed the vast majority of the population, the class of the serfs bound to the glebe, was excluded from any social advancement.

As Fourier had so felicitously intuited, however, while the slaves of antiquity had not engaged in any real victorious liberation strug-

gles, for the European peoples the basis of a distant but formidable revolutionary uprising against the ruling classes and institutions of the feudal epoch had been prepared.

While the modern urban proletariat was making its appearance in history, the national demand was the main cause of this immense revolution, and was conducive to the liberation of the modern citizen from the chains of his servitude by situating him at the level of the ancient citizen. If the modern bourgeois revolution literally uses and abuses the echo of the Greco-Roman glories — “*qui nous délivrera des Grecs et des Romains?*” — it is nevertheless true that it was a revolutionary ferment with a gigantic force.

The national revolution and its demand are not ours, nor do they mean the conquest of an irrevocable and eternal benefit for man. But Marxism observes it with interest, and even with admiration and passion, and when it arose in history, in decisive moments and locations, it participated in this struggle on its side.

It is necessary to study the degree of development of the cycles, identifying the crucial places and moments. If one thousand years have transpired between the development of the primitive Mediterranean peoples and those of continental Europe, the termination of the modern national cycle in the West could be said to have been accomplished, but from the revolutionary point of view, the cycle of the peoples of other races remains open and will continue to remain open for a long period, with its own different cycles and continents. And this is above all why it is so important to shed light, in a Marxist and revolutionary sense, upon the role of the national factor.

## Part III

# The Movement of the Modern Proletariat and the Struggles for the Creation and Self-Determination of Nations

## I Feudal Obstacles to the Emergence of Modern Nations

The organization of feudal society and its state posed an obstacle to the bourgeois drive towards the formation of the modern unitary nation due to its decentralized nature in a horizontal and vertical sense. While each one of the recognized “orders” possessed its own rights and to a certain extent was forbidden to intermarry with other orders and thus constituted quasi-nations, the feudal domains, for their part, because they were characterized by a closed economy with respect to the force of human labor power, caused the groups of serf workers to form small unfree nations.

Picking up where we left off at the end of Part 2 of this study on the history of the classical nation and its fate after the fall of the Roman Empire, the barbarian invasions and the formation of the medieval states, it would not be a bad idea to enumerate those aspects of feudalism that militated against the historical reemergence of the nation. The nation, then, is a geographic circuit within which economic traffic is free, the positive law is common for all, and to a great extent there is an identity of race and language. In the classical sense, the nation excluded the masses of slaves and included within these relations only the free citizens; in the modern, bourgeois sense, the nation includes all those who were born in it.

If, prior to the first great Greco-Roman historic stage, we found states that were not nations, and if we once again find such states after this stage and before the bourgeois stage, we never find a nation without a state. Our entire materialist analysis of the national phenomenon is therefore based at every step on the Marxist theory of the state, and the latter is the difference between the bourgeoisie and us. The formation of nations is a real physical fact like any other, but once the nation is united as a state, it always appears divided into social classes, and the state is not an expression — as the bourgeoisie say

— of the whole nation as an aggregate of persons, or even of municipalities or districts, but is the expression and the organ of the interests of the economically ruling class.

At this point we have confirmed the truth of two theses: national unity is a historical necessity and is also the precondition, along with the unitary domestic market, the abolition of the estates, and positive law that is the same for all subjects of the state, for the future advent of communism; and the centralized state not only does not exclude the class struggle but causes the class struggle against it to rise to its highest pitch, just as it accentuates the international nature of this struggle in the arena of the socially developed world.

The economy of feudal society was predominantly agrarian. The members of the aristocratic order divided the possession of all the land not only with regard to its topographic boundaries, but above all to establish their personal domination over groups of the peasant population. Due to their privileges the nobles formed, in a certain sense, a “nation”: they did not intermarry with serfs, artisans or bourgeoisie, and they possessed their own laws and judges belonging to their own order. Their hereditary possession of the land in its pure form was not alienable, and was ruled by a title or investiture granted by the higher feudal hierarchy and ultimately, within certain limits, by the king. The bearing of arms was the privilege of this order just like the prerogatives of command; when it was necessary to mobilize large armed contingents, the latter were composed of mercenaries and were often recruited from other countries.

The class of serfs did not form a nation, not only because it did not have any central representation or expression, but also because it was reproduced in closed circles that were kept separate from each other; it was legally subservient to the lord and the legal codes varied according to the zones or the opinions of the lords. The physical boundary for the serf was not the state frontier nor was he under the jurisdiction of the central state power, since both frontiers and power

were encompassed by the fief of his immediate lord.

Now we must speak of the ecclesiastical order, which at various stages was very closely aligned with the power of the aristocratic order. But the ecclesiastical order was not a nation and did not define a nation, because it was incapable of genealogical continuity due to the celibacy of the priests as well as the fact that its boundaries were extra-national. The Catholic Church, as its name indicates, is international, or, more precisely, in its organizational and doctrinal features it is international and interracial. This particular superstructure was the product of an economy based on closed units. The serf was the only element that provided labor power, and he consumed part of it in the form of a fraction of the products of the land: local needs were limited in such a way that they were supplied by locally manufactured products, with a completely embryonic division of labor, and the first artisans were barely tolerated (those very famous artisans who, while the peasants inhabited their lands in isolation, were concentrated in the “burg” at the foot of the lord’s castle, and who were later to become the terrible, destructive and revolutionary bourgeoisie). The lord and his small crew of henchmen consumed the quota brought by the peasants to the castle, or which was produced by the *corvée* labor of the peasants on the lord’s own estate. It is clear that, since a small, privileged minority exercised control over a large quantity of products, their needs gradually increased and therefore so did their demand for manufactured articles, even if the little princesses still ate with their hands and changed their shirts only on special occasions.

This was the origin of the material conflict, the starting point of that whole immense struggle that would invoke the high-sounding words, Fatherland, Liberty, Reason, Criticism, and Idealism against the feudal obstacles to the free circulation of persons and things, and the demand for domestic freedom of trade throughout the entire state, and then for universal freedom of trade, that would allow the lord to enjoy his wealth, but would also whet the appetites of the merchants

who would one day proceed to buy with money the sacred and so avidly sought feudal lands: those who deluded themselves that they were gaining a fatherland, would instead obtain within the confines of the state a single currency, a stock exchange, and a unified system of tax collection, conditions that would make possible the eruption of capitalist productive forces.

## 2 Feudal Localism and Universal Church

In medieval society the productive and economic base was not national but sub-national, with respect to sites of labor and locations of markets. The linguistic, cultural, scholastic, and ideological superstructure was not national because it was concentrated around the Roman Christian Church, with a universal dogma, ritual and organization. But the power of the Church did not extend so far as to overcome feudal particularism, since the Church strictly supported the interests and enactments of the landowning nobility.

The classical nations had already attained the unity of personal and commercial law within their political frontiers, because agrarian production, which was also fundamental at that time, made it possible to amass commodities and money thanks to the labor of the slaves, and also thanks to the overwhelming inequality that existed, which was not only permitted but tolerated by Roman law, with regard to the number of slaves that were possessed by free citizens, as was also the case with the allodial possession of the land.

After the suppression, clarified in the light of determinism, of this slave type of production, the road to the general flow of manufactured commodities would be opened up by another means—the bourgeoisie—and their production would be carried out in tandem with the development of agriculture, only to enormously—and irrationally—surpass it in the capitalist epoch.

But with Rome the classical nation had become more than just a nation; it was a territorial political universe with an organized power that extended throughout the entire non-barbarian world.

The ineluctable crisis of this mode of production, which had led to fantastic levels of accumulation favored by state centralism and its dictatorship over the provinces, and by the concentrated ownership of land and slaves in the hands of a few super-powerful rich people, had facilitated for the invading barbarians the task of reducing this immense unitary organization into fragments.

In the Middle Ages this universalism was attained under a very different form, in the powerful organization of the Christian Church of Rome. We shall not pause here to examine in detail the great historical process, which can be grasped in the light of the same social tendencies, relating to the Eastern Empire that survived for centuries after the fall of the Western Empire, and which, although it was capable of diverting the Germanic attack from the northwest was incapable of repeating this achievement with regard to the Asians from the southeast, leading, by way of essentially analogous paths, to the fragmentation of a unity that had long been merely symbolic.

In Western Europe the need to develop general commercial exchange in opposition to the feudal parcelization of the land took the form of a demand to reconstruct centralism, which had given the classical Roman world a degree of power, wealth and wisdom that seemed beyond the reach of the feudal states. But the response to this demand could not be that of the "Guelphs", who opposed the German Empire of the time and its bellicose ruling class with the international influence of the Church, even though this was attempted in the midst of the imperial conflict with the class forces of the first citadels of the new bourgeois class: the Italian cities, ruled by master craftsmen, artisans, bankers and merchants, who had already made inroads throughout all of Europe.

The Church in fact constituted in all the states that arose from

the dismemberment of the Empire—after the first centuries of resistance—a common superstructure that served the power of the feudal lords and their monarchs. Precisely because they were not national societies, the functions this superstructure performed transcended the limits of their political borders. National languages spoken by the “people”, or “the common folk”, did not yet exist. The language of the priests in all parts of feudal Europe was Latin, while the masses of the serfs spoke dialects that were incomprehensible to people living ten or twenty kilometers away, so that one could not travel to find work or money, but only to fight, and this is why they rarely needed a common tongue. Latin, however, was not just the language of religious ritual, which was of little importance, but was the only existing cultural vehicle, practically the only language that could be read and written everywhere.

Latin, and only Latin, was taught to the members of the noble order, and this means that education, assimilated by the Church, remained an inter-state structure, even though members of other classes were admitted, and besides the “young lords” and the future priests and friars, a few children of the bourgeoisie of the cities were also allowed to attend school, but the dispersed peasants (and this situation has not yet been totally overcome today, in some unfortunate provinces of nations as noble as ... Italy and Yugoslavia!) were absolutely excluded.

It was through this unitary sieve that all high culture passed—the same topics and texts were discussed in Bologna, Salamanca, Paris and London—but so did the practical culture itself and, ultimately, this is where the entire bureaucratic, civil, judicial and military element came from: any class that possessed a culture, possessed some kind of “national culture” in only the vaguest sense, and only after the year one thousand did “national literatures” emerge.

The bourgeoisie themselves adapted to everything and paid their tribute to this social nexus, which is a superstructure of the dominant

type of production, but at the same time it is an inevitable means of labor, and while the banker did business with Amberg or Rotterdam from Florence, he did so by way of a commercial correspondence in Latin, even though this Latin summarily butchered the resurrected Caesar and Cicero; no less than the Latin used in the Mass.

The entire Catholic ideological structure, however, despite the scale of this edifice that went far beyond the differences of blood, race and language that separated men, is historically bound to the defense and preservation of the feudal type of servitude. This collaboration began from below with the collaboration of the priest and the local lord, who shared the tithes and taxes from the exploited peasantry, whose status as subjects was strictly connected with their bond to the soil and to the fief where they were born. On the other hand, monastic communities and the major religious orders, although not without a struggle with the lords, possessed vast tracts of land under the form of a productive relation that was completely identical with the feudal form, both of which shared the requirement that this possession of land, bodies and souls was inalienably bound to the title, aristocratic on the one hand and ecclesiastical-hierarchical on the other, to the land.

### 3 Universalism and Political Centralism

Although in Italy the first struggles of the bourgeoisie, organized in small city-republics but still incapable of creating an inter-regional economy, were supported by the Papacy and the Guelphs, Dante anticipated the modern bourgeois forms by invoking the monarchy as the first historically possible form of centralized state, although he did not expressly formulate a true national policy due to his Ghibelline universalism that postulated a single European power.

When Dante wrote his treatise *De Monarchia*, he adopted the

Ghibelline position, despite the fact that his family supported the Guelphs. In the theory of history expressed by Dante the demand for a united central power is fundamental, and the sterile battles between municipal families and feudal lords is rejected. The new demand for universalism rested on the formidable tradition of the Roman Empire, rejecting and combating the universalism of the Catholic Rome; this is why Dante condemned the political power and policies of the papacy and invoked the German Emperor as the great monarch who would unify all of Europe in one centralized state: Germany and Italy, and then France and the other countries.

Should we include Dante's political doctrine in the Medieval period because it does not contain the essential bourgeois demand of separate nationalities, or to the contrary do we perceive it as an anticipation of the modern bourgeois era? We must obviously choose the latter viewpoint. The institution of the absolute monarchy arose, in the midst of the Middle Ages, as the only form of centralized state that could effectively engage in the struggle against the federalism of the feudal lords and their pretensions to local self-government. At the side of these centrifugal forces one also finds the obscurantism of the clergy and of Rome; meanwhile, the great royal courts—a brilliant example of which, that of Frederick II of Swabia in Palermo, is lauded by Dante—cleared the way for the new productive forces and for commerce, and therefore the support of the arts and the exchange of ideas outside the scholastic dictatorship. The Swabian king was not exactly a national king, but the accounts of his atheism, culture and interest in art are not entirely legendary, and it is certainly true that he was the founder of the first industries and manufacturing enterprises, precursors of the social forms that were alien to the retrograde ignorance of the aristocracy, which was expert only in the use of arms. The first form that capitalism mobilized against the old regime of landowners was the central monarchy with its court in a great capital city, where artisans, artists and men of knowledge opened up new horizons for

material life.

The Latin treatise *De Monarchia* is one of the first ideological manifestations of this modern demand and is in this sense revolutionary, anti-feudal and anti-Guelph: the anti-clericalism of the future would make extensive use of the invectives of this great poem directed against the papacy. And if the straightforward national demand is not explicit in Dante, and if he foresees an Italy that is politically united, despite the feudal lords, but only as a province of the transalpine Empire, this is because in Italy the modern bourgeoisie was born early, but with a municipal and local character, which did not diminish the importance of this first manifestation of the living forces of the future, but it was socially subjugated, due to reasons inherent to the change in the geographic routes of the nascent system of commercial exchange, before the vision of a powerful united capitalist state within national boundaries could be conceived. This did not detract from the fact that it was in this country that Dante himself chose to write literature in the vulgar Italian language, paving the way for the decisive dissemination of the Tuscan dialect in competition with the one hundred dialects that extended from those of Lombard origin to those influenced by the Saracens.

## 4 The Revolutionary Demands of the National Bourgeoisie

According to the Marxist interpretation of history each period of transition from one mode of production to another witnesses on the one hand the mobilization of the ruling class to defend its economic privileges by means of the employment of the apparatus of power and the influence of its traditional ideologies, and on the other the struggle of the revolutionary class against these institutional and ideological interests. This revolutionary class, in a more or less well-defined and

comprehensive manner, engages in a propaganda campaign featuring new ideologies within the old society, new ideologies that contain the consciousness of its own conquests and of the future social mode of production. The modern bourgeoisie developed particularly interesting and suggestive systems, which constituted veritable weapons of struggle, in the different European nations, and all these systems revolved around the great demand for national unity and independence. The beginning of the modern age and the end of the medieval era is situated by the history textbooks either in 1492 or 1305. The first date is that of the discovery of America, and is significant in the history of the bourgeoisie—a truly epic saga of bourgeois history is offered by Marxism, from the incomparable synthesis of the *Manifesto* to the other classical descriptions—as the date that marks the opening up of the transoceanic routes, the formation of the fabric of the world market, and of the awakening of extremely powerful forces of attraction that, in the form of demand for manufactured commodities, drove the advanced white race to the war of overproduction. And in parallel with this powerful development, the center of the vigorous growth of industry shifted, and it shifted precisely from north-central Italy to the heart of extra-Mediterranean, Atlantic Europe.

1305, on the other hand, is the date when Dante wrote the *Comedy*, and at that time in Italy the demands of the anti-feudal and anti-ecclesiastical revolution had already made much headway, although in a very limited geographic area. Because Roman traditions had originated within the peninsula, and however much the contributions of new barbarian blood may have had an impact, the organizational forms of the Germanic peoples encountered major resistance in Italy and the feudal regime never really attained a high degree of development there.

Because of the advantages of its location amidst navigable seas, Italian trade and exchange rapidly recovered by establishing the division of labor on new foundations. Although the municipal system

had collapsed with the rise of petty local lords and hereditary autocratic monarchies, agrarian serfdom did not, however, become predominant, and a large part of the population continued to be composed of independent peasants and artisans and small- and medium-scale merchants. For these same reasons, the bourgeoisie did not emerge as a national class during this period, a transition that would only take place several centuries later on a larger scale. Because of the setback it suffered in Italy, the capitalist revolution was postponed for a long time, but in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries it was victorious in England and France, and subsequently in Central Europe.

In this way the appearance of a new mode of production, limited to a restricted circle, would fail and therefore have to wait for several more generations to reemerge. Its historical recovery, however, would take place within a much more extensive circuit. This is why we must not lose sight of the fact that the communist revolution, crushed in 1871 in France, had to wait until 1917 to attempt to conquer not just France but all of Europe; and now that it has been defeated and deprived of all significance, as occurred to the limited bourgeois revolution of the Italian cities, it will be able to reemerge after a long period, on a world scale, and not just in the zones occupied and controlled by the white race.

In the period between the 12th and the 15th centuries, it might appear that the demands for the equality of citizens before the law, political liberty, parliamentary democracy and a republic were illusions that had been dissipated by history, but their force only increased due to an important historical advance on a European scale that seems quite obvious to us today. Actually, it is only in appearance that the demands of the modern proletariat for the violent overthrow of the democratic capitalist state, the dictatorship of the working class and the destruction of the economy based on money and wage labor, have been dormant and forgotten.

Throughout this entire period the bourgeois classes and groups,

wielding greater influence due to the changes in the productive forces and techniques and the rise of mercantile exchange, never ceased to proclaim at every opportunity the new demands by fighting for them, until they succeeded in a totalitarian manner in smashing the feudal order and imposing their own power.

The artisan and the merchant refused to consider themselves as subject serfs of a petty local lord: both took flight, although this was at first very dangerous, and from one district to another they travelled across the state territory, their labor and their business being in demand, although it was very easy for the nobles to ambush them and take everything they had accumulated, as considerable masses of wealth had formed in the hands of individuals who were not members of the traditional orders and hierarchies. These pioneers of a new way of life demanded the right to be citizens of the state rather than the subjects of a noble: in its first form they aspired to be subjects of the king, as absolute ruler. The monarch and the dynasty were the first expressions of a central power that embraced all the people and the whole nation. The link between the state and the subject, the fundamental pillar of bourgeois law, was therefore beginning to be directly established without mediation by way of the fragmentary feudal hierarchies.

If we want to see this process operating in the domain of the economic base, we need only recall the picturesque historical incident that could be entitled, "The King of England Does Not Pay". The House of Bardi, the great bourgeois bankers of Florence, advanced to the King of England a colossal sum in gold florins for military expenses: but the King, having lost the war in question, paid back neither the interest nor the principal on the loan: the bank failed and the Florentine economy suffered a terrible blow. The old banker died frustrated, not having been able to find a jurisdiction before which he could bring charges against the deadbeat. In the bourgeois system he could even have done so before an English judge, and he would have

been paid.

If we want to depict the juridical aspect of this process, we may refer to the play written by Lope de Vega, *El mejor alcalde, el Rey* [*The Best Mayor, the King*], in which the king plays the role of the hero, but the main demand is always bourgeois. In a provincial town a certain Don Rodrigo abducted a youth. The boy's father, after Don Rodrigo laughed in his face, went to Madrid and petitioned the king; the latter, in disguise, returned with him to the town, unarmed, with a small bodyguard; he assumed the position of judge and severely condemned the local lord, ordering him to release the boy and pay indemnities. The concept that every citizen could obtain justice from the king against the abuses of provincial power, expressed the bourgeois demand for centralism.

Some years later the Miller of Sanssouci became famous for his confrontation with King Frederick of Prussia, who wanted to expropriate the miller's land to expand his pleasure park. The miller left his interview with the king saying, "There are judges in Berlin!". The judge would condemn the king in the name of the king, and this would appear to be a masterpiece of the bourgeois concept of the law: but only a few years later the bourgeois itself, due to revolutionary exigencies, would show more resolution and would condemn the king to decapitation.

To the extent that in the old states ruled by the landowning nobility, as in the classical cases of France and England, the importance of commerce and manufacture grew in relation to the agrarian economy, and to the extent that large banking firms, the state debt, the protectionist system, and a centralized and unitary system of tax collection were emerging, the bourgeoisie demanded more privileges from royal power, that is, the central administration. Within the ideological superstructure, by culturally and politically demanding these new postulates, all these unitary systems are described and extolled as the expression not of a dynasty that ruled by divine right, recognized and

invested by the religious power, but of all the people, of the totality of the citizenry, in a word, of the nation. Patriotism, that ideal that was eclipsed after its exaltation in classical antiquity, became the motto of the new civil demands and very soon inflamed (since it arose from the demands of the merchants and manufacturers) the intellectuals, writers and philosophers, who adorned the eruption of the new productive forces with a marvelous architecture of supreme principles and literary decorations.

## 5 The Iridescent Superstructures of the Capitalist Revolution

Just as the preconditions for the revolutionary struggle of the modern proletariat were established by the full development of the capitalist mode of production, the doctrine and program of the international communist revolution are established once the critique of bourgeois ideologies is fully developed, ideologies which assumed diverse national characteristics precisely because every bourgeois revolution is national and possesses its characteristics of constructing in its own particular way what Marx defines as the way an era “thinks about” itself.

In Italy, as we have already pointed out, the economic content of the bourgeois form emerged precociously, but proved insufficient to assume control of society: its political content, although of great historical importance, was limited to the control of small, free city-republics, and their artisans, merchants or commercial navigation. These forms were incapable of historically engaging in the constitution of a national power. If, however, on the one hand, this first bourgeois society would be reabsorbed by European feudal society despite its military victories against the German emperor, on the other hand its effects on the ideological and above all artistic “superstructure” were to

leave their mark on later centuries. The rehabilitation of the political forms of the Roman world and the free classical institutions created by the citizens of the first republics, would be even more distinctly reflected in the organization of states and nations, in the flourishing of the new technology and of the great splendor of renaissance art, which drew upon and emulated the classical models. At the same time the literature and science that challenged the conformist domination of the Catholic and scholastic culture acquired the same impulse, by returning to and reinterpreting the study of the classic texts that provided material that was very relevant due to the social demands of the epoch. This immense movement is therefore the product of a particular development of conflict and of transition from one mode of production to another, the flash after the explosion of a new society within the old one, but which was still incapable of breaking the last chains, and only shook them with a historic earthquake; that is all, even if it could be explained and elaborated in a better way, without, however, having to resort to strange bedroom congresses of battle-tested spermatozoids that gave rise to architects, painters, sculptors, poets, musicians, thinkers, scientists, philosophers, etc., all of the first magnitude.

And there were artists, poets and ideologists, with their memorable and famous works, who never ceased to praise, even when they found themselves in situations of political and social servitude, the concept of the Italian fatherland and nationality, concepts that are incessantly and insistently repeated by their modern-day imitators, who are usually not at their level.

In Germany—and this has been addressed many times in the invectives of Marx and Engels—where one must speak of a series of miscarriages of the birth of the Nation, another great phenomenon took place: the Reformation, which spread to one degree or another throughout all of Europe.

The social struggle of the new strata against the old rule of the

feudal princes, who were supported by the Church, was incapable of being crystallized in lasting political results, but it was not just limited in this first stage to the critique of artistic or philosophical schools, either, since it unfolded within the Church and was situated on the terrain of religious dogma. A process of fragmentation of the unified Church into diverse national churches which escaped from the rule of Rome then took place, not only modifying the articles of the mystic doctrine to one extent or another, but above all breaking the bonds with the ecclesiastical hierarchy and replacing it with the new national hierarchies. While a national language is one of the aspects by means of which the bourgeois nation state appears in history, another no less important aspect is religion. What happened in Germany was most impressive with regard to religion and the national church. It was the agitation of the new classes that lay behind the Reformation: bourgeoisie and master craftsmen of the German cities, as much as the peasant serfs of the countryside, looked to Luther as the person who would lead their struggle against the princes, the bastions of the feudal and aristocratic landed structure, but Luther not only rejected Múnzer who commanded the defeated but glorious insurrection of the peasants against the minor princes, but did not want to lead the peasants against the great principalities, either.

While the limits and the bonds of medieval society were broken in Italy only in literature and in Germany only in religion, as expressions of immature or crushed revolutions, in the first pure historical case of a bourgeois revolution, that of England, the social economy was shaken to its deepest structural foundations. There, for climatological and geographical reasons, agricultural production never could have fed a dense population, and manufacturing and industrial production, unknown until that point in any country, underwent explosive growth. Tenant farmers accumulated large sums of money while an increasing number of peasants were expelled from the land and proletarianized: in this way the capitalist conditions of production

were much more intensely imposed than elsewhere and the manufacturing bourgeoisie acquired great importance. The nobility and royalty were defeated in battle and, despite the brief period of the revolutionary republic and the death of Cromwell, the bourgeoisie quickly seized power by means of a new revolution, under a form that still persists: parliamentary monarchy. There can be no question that the geographical conditions, as much as the productive conditions, contributed to confer upon the United Kingdom the character of a single nation in contrast to the others, as the sea was its only geographical boundary. But as Engels pointed out in his *Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891* (in which Engels proposed, for a Germany that was still divided into many small federated states, the demand, “one and indivisible republic”), in the two British Isles one finds at least three nationalities, with subdivisions along both linguistic as well as racial and religious lines. With the passage of time the Irish, of Celtic race, Catholic and formerly speakers of Gaelic, which is now almost extinct, will become substantially differentiated; and the Scottish people still conceive of themselves as very different from the English, taking into account different influences and social traditions, as is also the case in Wales, and the effects of a series of invasions and migrations: Romans, Saxons and finally Normans. The British Isles therefore feature a mixture of races, traditions, dialects and languages, some of them literary, religions and churches; but it was there that the first formation of that historic reality called the unified nation state took place, which corresponds to the establishment of the capitalist social mode.

In France the structure of the national state was being constructed by way of the civil war between the classes. Its geographical boundaries are precisely defined, except for the historical oscillation of the frontier on the Rhine, by seas and mountain chains. A rapid process led to the formation of a single language and a literature that was closely connected with that language and which absorbed the first lit-

erary manifestations of the Middle Ages by erasing their differences: this same process gradually also affected the ethnological diversity of France, which was quite significant. We must not forget that this nation typically took its name from the Franks, a Germanic people originally from the east that crushed or subjugated the indigenous Bretons and Celts. We therefore have two peoples of a non-Latin origin, but this did not prevent their language from being formed from the Latin root. The need for national unity was thus not territorial but social, and the bourgeoisie were soon able to obtain recognition as the Third Estate with representation in the Estates General which possessed a consultative function for the real power. When this proved insufficient, the struggle became directly political. There was no industrialism in France that was comparable to the British industries, and the economic schools of thought in the two countries were expressions of this fact: the English adopted the theory and apologetics of productive capitalism, while the French began with the agrarian Physiocratic school, and then proceeded to adopt the mercantilist doctrine that did not see value as emerging from productive labor but from trade in products.

Politically, there were no hesitations: the French bourgeoisie constructed their doctrine of the state by aspiring directly for power: sovereignty was not derived from inheritance or from divine right but from the consultation of the opinion of the citizens; dogma collapsed and reason was victorious, the orders and guilds were destroyed, and electoral democracy, parliament and a republic would be established. The other national form typical of the power of the bourgeoisie had been forged in the crucible of history.

In the transition from the feudal to the modern mode of production, a fundamental economic basis is the clash of the productive forces with the old relations, and the political, juridical and ideological superstructures emanate from this palingenesis of the economic base.

This cannot be reduced to a simple pharmaceutical prescription, however. The bourgeoisie had not carried out a world revolution but only the first round of the succession of national revolutions, and we have not yet seen the last of them.

From this brief summary of the fundamental study of the geographic “zones” and “historical periods” that we are undertaking with regard to the bourgeois revolution, in order to better understand the proletarian revolution — disregarding its national particularities, and embedding it within the spatio-temporal limits of its rich dynamic — we may emphasize the following chronological series: Italy — art; Germany — religion; England — economic science; France — politics. This is the integral superstructure of the capitalist productive base.

The feats of the bourgeoisie in history are evidently economic, political, artistic and religious at the same time. But the richness of its rise cannot be better summarized than with the words of the *Manifesto*:

“Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility, an armed and self-governing association in the medieval commune: here independent urban republic (as in Italy and Germany); there taxable “third estate” of the monarchy (as in France); afterwards, in the period of manufacturing proper, serving either the semi-feudal or the absolute monarchy as a counterpoise against the nobility, and, in fact, cornerstone of the great monarchies in general, the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of

the whole bourgeoisie.

“The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

“... The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all time with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries.”

## 6 The Proletariat Makes Its Appearance on the Historical Stage

With capitalist manufacture and industry the new social class of wage laborers was created. There is a historical convergence between the formation of this class in large masses and the greatest efforts on the part of the bourgeoisie to assume political power and constitute itself as a nation. The proletarian masses, after a first phase of chaotic reaction against machinery in a feudal-medieval sense, found their road alongside the revolutionary bourgeoisie, and it was on a national scale that the proletariat achieved class unity, but not yet class autonomy.

The history of the modern epoch was largely characterized by this struggle against a nobility that had too much autonomy and a church that was too universal, in order to found, after the victory and the integral rise to power of the bourgeoisie, the modern nations. If the class content, and the content of subversion of the old mode of production, is—according to Marxism—the same for every national bourgeoisie, it is just as evident according to our doctrine that the bourgeois revolutions, as national revolutions, possess, each and every one of them, an originality and a form of their own that possess a greater significance than an exclusive consideration of their local historical

and geographical peculiarities would lead one to expect. And this serves, in accordance with the forced march of capitalist development, to explain why the nations founded in this manner stand together in the struggle against the old regime for class reasons, but fight tirelessly against each other as nations and as states.

With the new ruling class, the bourgeois Third Estate, there also appeared, in the first decades of the 18th century and even before, as the new and fundamental social element: the working class. The struggles for the conquest of power against feudalism and its clerical allies, and the struggle for the constitution of national units, was fully underway: the workers of the cities and the countryside participated fully in them, even when they had authentic class organizations and political parties of their own that anticipated the program of the overthrow of bourgeois rule.

As the real socialist and communist movement emerged, not only was it aware of the enormous complexity of this process as it constructed its theoretical critique, but it also established the conditions, epochs and places in which the proletarians must totally support bourgeois revolutionary movements and insurrections and national wars.

It would not be a bad idea in order to make this more clear, and to rapidly dispel the surprise of those who seem to be hearing these things for the first time, to refer once again to the *Manifesto*:

“The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie.”

And here Marx recalls the first, “reactionary” form of struggle: burning down factories, the destruction of machines and of foreign products, calls for a return to the medieval status of the artisans, something that had already been left behind.

This first stage suffices in itself to destroy the anti-historic position of those who simplify matters by saying: there are two classes,

the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; everything is summed up by the fight of the latter against the former. But let us continue with our passage from the *Manifesto*.

“At this stage, the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie, which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so. At this stage, therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies, the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeois. Thus, the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie.”

Again, let us continue with this passage on the incessant struggles of the bourgeoisie and among the different national bourgeoisie. It continues as follows:

“In all these battles, it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education<sup>4</sup>, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.”

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<sup>4</sup>Bordiga's note: We would translate this as “training”

The living conditions of the modern proletariat, “modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character”

This passage, which precedes the other famous passage from the second chapter, the one that, quoted out of context, is so pleasing to the opportunism of every era (and now the most foolish of them all, the kind that takes the government of Tito as a model), corresponds to the precise historical thesis that we have followed in this reexamination and elaboration of the national question. The bourgeoisie everywhere possesses a national character and its program consists in giving society a national character. Its struggle is national and in order to conduct it the bourgeoisie must unite, transmitting this unity to the proletariat itself while it uses the proletariat as an ally: the bourgeoisie initiates its political struggle by constituting itself within every modern state as a national revolutionary class. The proletariat does not have a national, but an international, character.

This does not imply the following theory: the proletariat does not participate in national struggles, only in the international struggle. The bourgeoisie has the national position in its revolutionary program; its victory destroys the non-national character of medieval society. The proletariat does not have the national position in its program, a program that it will put into practice with its revolution and its conquest of political power, and instead champions the position of internationalism. The expression, national bourgeoisie, possesses a specifically Marxist meaning, and during a particular historical stage it is a revolutionary demand. The expression, nation in general, possesses an idealist and anti-Marxist meaning. The expression, proletarian nation, possesses no meaning at all, neither in an idealist sense nor in the Marxist sense.

This provides the correct framework for understanding everything that relates to both the theory of history as well as the content of the program of the revolutionary class that engages in historical struggle.

## 7 The Proletarian Struggle and the National Sphere

Old and new polemical deviations have confused the programmatic internationalist position of the communist proletariat with the formally national nature of some of the first stages of its struggle. Historically, the proletariat cannot become a class and cannot create a class political party except within the national sphere, and even the struggle for power is waged in a national form insofar as it is oriented towards overthrowing the state of its own bourgeoisie. It is also possible that for a certain period of time after the proletarian conquest of power the proletariat might restrict its activity to the national sphere. But this does not obviate the essential historical opposition between the bourgeoisie, which aspires to constitute bourgeois nations, presenting them as nations “in general”, and the proletariat which rejects the nation “in general” and patriotic solidarity, since its duty is to construct an international society, even though it understands that up to a certain point in time the demand for national unity is useful, but always within the bourgeois camp.

With regard to the transitional stages from the bourgeois struggle for power to that of the proletariat, we shall turn to this other passage:

“Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.”

This passage, along with others, suffers in all existing translations from a certain erroneous gradualism in the use of terms: political organization, political force, political supremacy, political power, and finally dictatorship. The above passage follows, in the series of responses to bourgeois objections in the chapter, “Proletarians and Communists”, this other no less famous passage: “The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality.

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.”<sup>5</sup> After this radical affirmation of principle the text cannot continue by saying: the workers have no nationality. It is a fact that the workers are French, Italian, German, etc. Not only because of race and language (we know that all such things make you laugh), but by their physical location in the different territories where the national bourgeois state governs, which is a very influential factor in the development of its class struggle, as well as in the international struggle. This is crystal clear.

To separate a few sentences of Marx from this context in order to make him say that the workers have as a program, after the defeat of the bourgeoisie, the founding of separate proletarian nations as an essential aspect of their revolution, is not only an illusion, but amounts to imposing on the proletariat, with its high degree of current development, the programs of the bourgeoisie, in order to keep it under the rule of the latter.

This becomes even more clear if we refer to the logical and historical succession, before it is declared that the proletariat does not have a national character, in the preceding chapter, “Bourgeoisie and Proletarians”.

We mentioned the description of the first stage of the struggle of the proletariat, which assumed the form of a struggle against industrial machinery; and then that of the next stage in which the proletariat united for the first time with the bourgeoisie in struggle: therefore a national alliance of the workers was formed, for a bourgeois goal.

Then the clash between the workers and the bourgeoisie in iso-

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<sup>5</sup>This passage and those that follow are taken from the *Manifesto*. In the English edition of 1888, where it speaks of the education of the proletariat, it specifies: political and general education, while where it says that the proletariat will attain the level of a national class it says: “the leading class of the nation”. The German word *Bildung* means, in a more general sense, training.

lated enterprises and localities is described. A major step forward is taken when the local struggles coalesce “into one national struggle between classes”.

Here Marx is not referring to a stupid isolation of the proletarian nation, but to the contrary, to the radical supersession of the localist, autonomist federalism represented by the Proudhonian reactionaries and subsequently by other similar schools that were always combated by Marxism. A conflict that takes place only in the vicinity of Rocca-cannuccia or Turin is not a class struggle. Once the bourgeoisie has been victorious in its demand for national unity, our class struggle arises for the first time after national boundaries have been physically established. Now we see the other essential words: “But every class struggle is a political struggle.” This is the thesis thrown in the faces of the federalists, and economic thinkers of all types: “But every class struggle is a political struggle.” And when there were no longer any petty independent powers of the nobility but only the power of the bourgeoisie that was manifested through its centralized national state, we encountered a political struggle from the very moment when the action of the proletarians is centralized within the boundaries of a nation. This is why, when in Europe and France the proletarians only fought as an assault force of the bourgeoisie, in England, with its high degree of industrial development, they already confronted the employers and the British state as a class.

We therefore do not find ourselves within the domain of the programmatic content of the proletarian struggle, but in a description on the one hand of its successive stages in time, and on the other of its stages in space, that is, of the perimeter within which the classes wage their struggles (the word stage<sup>6</sup> at first served to measure distance rather than time). Now the bourgeoisie in its long struggle had regrouped the small feudal power centers into a single national stage of struggle, and was forced to fight on it.

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<sup>6</sup>Latin: *stadium*, from the Greek *stadion*; a measure of distance

Next we see it set forth explicitly: “Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.”

Therefore, the stages, or the successive phases in time can be classified with complete certainty as follows:

- The struggle of the worker against his employer in a primitive and local form.
- The national political struggle of the bourgeoisie and its victory, with the participation of the workers united on a national scale.
- Local and enterprise-based struggles of the workers against the bourgeoisie.
- The united struggle of the proletariat of a particular national state against the ruling bourgeoisie. This amounts to the constitution of the proletariat as a national class, and the organization of the proletariat as a class political party.
- Destruction of bourgeois rule.
- Conquest of political power by the proletariat.

On this basis, in a contingent and formal and constitutional-juridical aspect, the proletariat, just as it constitutes itself as a class state (dictatorship), must also constitute itself as a national state, but all of this with a transitory character.

Nevertheless, the proletariat, which does not possess a national character, does not create this state as if it were a historically defining characteristic of its class (as was the case with the bourgeoisie). The character and the program of the proletariat and of its revolution are

still totally international, and the proletariat which must now “settle matters with its own bourgeoisie” does not confront the nations where this has not yet taken place, but confronts the foreign bourgeoisie by joining in a unitary struggle together with the proletarians of the other nations.

To conclude: the proletarian movement in particular historical stages fights for the formation of nations, or favors the constitution of nations of the bourgeoisie. In this stage and the subsequent one in which one no longer speaks of alliances, the national postulate is defined as a bourgeois postulate.

## 8 The Proletarian Strategy in Europe in 1848

The *Manifesto*, and we are not speaking here of a doctrinal exposition or a description of the historical process, but of a strategic political orientation of the already created communist party, in the zone of influence of the countries subject to the reactionary Holy Alliance, calls for support of the insurrections of the bourgeois parties that were fighting against feudal absolutism and the oppression of nationalities, and that, if the bourgeoisie were to be victorious, this should be followed by a break of the alliance and the workers revolution.

We prefer to speak of strategy rather than of tactics, since the questions posed by the incandescent period when the *Manifesto* was published do not call for particular, local, or contingent solutions that would vary from one place to another by accounting for alternative choices with regard to specific actions. Tactics consist (as is the case in the army when it is being considered whether a unit is in a situation that favors attack, maintaining its position, or retreat) in determining the moment to initiate, for example, a local strike, or even to give the signal for an attack by an armed proletarian group in a neighborhood or village. Strategy embraces the general orientation of a military cam-

paign or a revolution: either favorable conditions exist, or it is of little use, and is instead disastrous, to change it or reverse positions in the course of the campaign.

Without strategy there is no revolutionary party. For decades and decades the commentators on the *Manifesto* and our other fundamental texts have striven to find excuses for the strategic errors that Marx had committed in his perspective concerning the future action of the communists. This formidable text, however, and with an incomparable brevity, not only contains the interpretive theory of the modern historical process and of the general program of the society that must succeed capitalism, but also contains certain precise references with regard to time frames, postulating a rapid unfolding of the process, in the various zones, concerning the development of class struggles and wars.

It is not possible to dispense with a comprehensive view of the social and political forces in Europe, since the characteristic aspect of this historic period was the fact that, in parallel with the upheaval of the process of formation of nations, together with the lyrical praise for the bourgeois ideology, the movement that arose in Paris found an immediate echo in Vienna, Warsaw, Milan, etc., despite the fact that the resistance offered by the declining pre-bourgeois regime was not the same in the various countries of Europe. In this incandescent atmosphere, everything seemed to indicate that this was the last and decisive attack to overthrow the royal and imperial bastions of the old regime, and in the process putting an end to all kinds of obstacles that stood in the way of the spread of capitalism.

But the exceptional power of this basic proclamation of ours is to be sought in the declaration that, if on the one hand the first act in the drama consisted of the battle for democratic rights and national freedom and against the last survivals of serfdom and medieval obscurantism, on the other hand, within the new capitalist economy, there had already been in existence for about ten years on a grand scale a conflict

between the productive forces and the relations of production that accompanied wage labor and industrial and agrarian commercialism, a conflict that was not directed against the forces of landed feudalism.

Those who today still praise increasing levels of production, and who present themselves as alleged revolutionaries, yet merely join in the chorus of the invitations issued to capital to invest and produce more, should recall the tremendous statement, which had already in 1848 foreseen the fall of the bourgeoisie, since society already had “too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce”.

The core thesis of the *Manifesto* is not that, in the stage that characterized the Europe of that time, Europe would become communist, but that in any period of violent transformation the system of productive relations could shatter and that already in that era it was evident that the relations of a capitalist type did not lead to equilibrium, but to greater contradictions within the limits of the productive forces. A century later the volume of these forces has become much larger, but so too has the thickness of the armored layers that protect the monstrous tank where capital houses these productive forces. The petty bourgeois, incapable of dialectically comprehending the comparison between a scientific prediction and a reality, and who also has not understood the old adage that says, “closing the barn door after the horse has already escaped”, will be horrified to hear a proposition like this: we were closer to the proletarian revolution in 1848 than we were in 1948, just as he will not understand the thesis that he is closer to a state of cretinism with his doctorate than he was when he graduated from elementary school.

The European strategy of 1848 contemplated two formidable tasks for the working class of the different countries: to lend aid to help complete the bourgeois formation of independent national states; and to try to overthrow the power of the victorious bourgeoisie just as it was overthrowing the power of the remnants of feudalism.

History, its vicissitudes and the clash of material forces have caused the conclusion of this process to recede into the distance, but they have not undermined in the least the strategic basis of that time: one cannot win the second point if one has not won the first, that is, one must clear away the last obstacles that stand in the way of the organization of society into national states.

The first obstacle was raised in 1815 and was then reinforced after the defeat of Napoleon: the Holy Alliance of Austria, Prussia and Russia. The position of the *Manifesto* is that there will not be a European social republic if the Holy Alliance is not overthrown, and therefore it was necessary to fight, together with the revolutionary democrats of the time, to cast off the yoke of the Holy Alliance borne by the peoples of Central Europe, and at the same time it was necessary to unmask these democrats before the proletarians by preparing for the time when, once bourgeois national liberation was assured everywhere with its elected democracies, an even more profound crisis would arrive that is the fruit of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, with the historic conflicts and outbursts that it would necessarily entail, instead of the idyllic equality of the citizens in the state and the nations of the world.

If we could only be a little less gossipy and stupid than a salaried politician, who thinks that the course of history ends with the end of his term in office, we would see that this gigantic vision obtained its historic confirmation, however difficult it was to erode the Holy Alliance, even though the triumphant capitalist civilization is even harsher and more despicable.

The fourth chapter, devoted to strategy, analyzes, as everyone knows, the tasks of the communist party in the different countries. A brief commentary serves to establish that the communists in America, England and France, that is, the countries with a highly developed capitalist system, should only have relations with working class parties, while criticizing their critical defects and their demagogic illusions. Then

comes the part (whose elaboration we shall outline in this final part of our exposition) relating to Poland and Germany, that is, the countries subject to the regimes of the Holy Alliance: here the support for bourgeois parties is legitimized: in Poland, the party that advocated the emancipation of the serfs in the countryside and national resurrection; in Germany, the parties of the bourgeoisie, because they fought against the monarchy, the nobility and (this is directed at our modern traitors) the petty bourgeoisie. And no less well-known and repeated in other documents is the fact that this proposal of common actions, with arms in hand, did not overlook for even one second the merciless critique of bourgeois principles and capitalist social relations, and next comes the schema of the bourgeois revolution as the immediate prelude to the proletarian revolution. History did not refute this, but postponed its realization: as we have said so many times, both revolutions failed.

## 9 Revolutionary Retreat and the Workers Movement

The struggles of 1848 did not lead to the general victory of the European bourgeoisie against the forces of absolutist reaction; much less were they capable of leading to a victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, something that was only attempted in France. In the unfavorable period that followed, which lasted until 1866, the position of the Marxists oscillated between, on the one hand, the ruthless critique of the democratic and humanitarian bourgeois liberals, and on the other, providing the necessary encouragement to the struggles for the unity and independence of the nationalities, which were embodied in insurrections and wars between states (Poland, Germany, Italy, Ireland, etc.).

When, after the battles of 1848-1849, Marx and Engels drew up a

balance sheet of that tempestuous period (which seemed so promising that even today popular opinion perceives it as more colorful than Europe and the world are in this terrible century with all its years of disasters and torments), they were convinced that the revolutionary phase would resume, but not in the short term. First, the theory would have to be systematized and then the organization, before it would be possible to think of a general victorious action: and there was no lack of time during which these tasks could be carried out.

In Germany and in all of Central Europe, as in Italy, the balance sheet of the struggle was the same: the insurgent bourgeois liberal revolutionaries in arms were defeated on the barricades; the workers, who had fought alongside them as allies, also suffered from the results of this serious defeat, so the subsequent situation of a dispute between bourgeois and workers over power never even arose. So it was not the communist revolution that was defeated, but the liberal revolution, and the workers had fought everywhere trying to save it from catastrophe, as was foreseen theoretically and expressed politically in the *Manifesto*.

The exceptions to this historical rule were England and France. In England the feudal reaction had already been militarily defeated over a century before and the country was already undergoing class conflicts between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie: where, as was the case with Chartism, these conflicts assumed an initial political form, even if it was in the form of vague programs full of democratic ideologies, the bourgeoisie had not hesitated for even a minute to violently repress them, although at the same time it had to make a series of legislative and reformist concessions mitigating the inhuman exploitation of the factory operatives.

France followed a different course, of extraordinary significance for the theory and politics of the proletarian revolution. After the defeat of Napoleon, which for Marx was a decisive defeat of the bourgeois revolutionary force by the European absolutist reaction (it is

necessary to know the truth about this, in the face of all those who listen to the phrases about Caesar, the despot, the dictator, the person who stifled liberty in 1789 and suchlike stories; in a letter from Marx to Engels dated December 2, 1856, Marx writes that it is a "... historical fact that the intensity and the viability of all revolutions since 1789 may be gauged with fair accuracy by their attitude towards Poland. Poland is their 'external' thermometer. This is demonstrable *en détail* from French history. It is conspicuous in our brief German revolutionary period, likewise in the Hungarian. Of all the revolutionary governments, including that of Napoleon I, the *Comité du salut public* is an exception only in as much as it refused to intervene, not out of weakness, but out of 'mistrust'..."). Now let us review the series with which we are already familiar. Between 1815 and 1831, a Bourbon ruled, placed on the throne by Austria, Prussia and Russia after Waterloo. In 1831 the revolutionary insurrection in Paris overthrew the absolute monarchy and Orleans mounted the throne, with a parliamentary constitution. It was therefore a victory for the bourgeoisie, who were henceforth supported by the workers.

The bourgeois monarchy, however, openly favored the big landowners and financiers, and in February 1848 Paris rose again and proclaimed the republic. Bourgeois, petty bourgeois and workers proclaimed, as Marx enthusiastically recalled, the resplendent (without any knowledge of neon lights) slogan of 1793: "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*".

This time the working class, which the new government immediately rebuffed by refusing to implement the social reforms it had promised in exchange for workers support, began the struggle to go further than their traitorous allies. This struggle took the form of the impressive battles of June 1848 described by Marx in that book that is both science and epic, *The Class Struggles in France*, which was first published serially in three issues of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Politisch-ökonomische Revue* in 1850. The crushing defeat of the workers historically established the capacity of the modern republican and

democratic bourgeoisie to carry out more ruthless repressions than the feudal aristocracy and the despotic monarchy. From that moment we have possessed the complete revolutionary schema utilized against the opportunist wave of the first world war, and which had to be mobilized against the opportunism of the second world war as well. It is in these pages that we find the fundamental political thesis: Destruction of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class! And also: Permanent revolution, class dictatorship of the proletariat! These are the “forgotten words of Marxism” reestablished by Lenin. And these were the words that were forgotten again, whose memory must be reestablished today against the renegades from Marxism and Leninism, and which Engels highlighted in his Introduction to the edition of 1895 by formulating the fundamental economic thesis: “*appropriation of the means of production ... and, therefore, the abolition of wage labour, of capital and of their mutual relations*” (Introduction by Engels to the 1895 edition of *The Class Struggles in France*).

If the state, as in Russia, takes possession of capital without abolishing capital, it does the same thing as a bourgeois state. The state that economically abolishes capital, wage labor and the relations of exchange between capital and labor, can only be the state of the proletariat!

In France — but not in the rest of Europe — after 1848 the series of glorious alliances made with the Jacobin bourgeoisie was denounced by the workers, and it is precisely from 1848 that we possess our model — yes, model, the revolution is the discovery of a historic model — of the communist class revolution. These denunciations were not revocable since they were marked by the blood of tens of thousands of workers who fell at the barricades, three thousand of whom were bestially shot down by the bourgeois republic after they had surrendered and been taken prisoner.

Marx justified the fact that in 1852, during the coup d'état of Louis Napoleon, which was by no means a return to feudalism, the French

proletariat, which certainly could not be accused of baseness, opposed with icy indifference the fall of that fake democracy. The Italian proletariat did not acquit itself nearly so well with that banal episode involving Mussolini, which was comparable to the French case!

The French nation is a conquest that is already assured by history. The proletariat no longer has any impediments standing in the way of its “liberation from its own national bourgeoisie”. The workers of France, with the uprisings of June and the Paris Commune, have served this great mission with great honor since the conspiracy of Babeuf in the great revolution. But they belied their tradition in 1914 and 1939, which were two serious crises for the bourgeoisie. Here, too, the words of Marx are valid: “*A new revolution is only a consequence of a new crisis. The one, however, is as sure to come as the other.*”

## 10 National Struggles after 1848

The development of the revolution in Germany in 1848 did not reach the stage of the political victory of the bourgeoisie and its establishment in power; and therefore the German proletariat, which at that time was not very numerous, did not reach the strategic point of attacking the bourgeoisie after having first supported it. From then on the position of the Marxist communists is that of favoring a process leading to the creation of a German national state and a liberal revolution against the Prussian dynasty and state, as a necessary transitional stage towards an open class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The process leading to the formation of the German state is particularly complex from the historical point of view. We still do not have a united German national state: such a state did not exist before the first world war, and only Hitler finally created it with the forced annexation of Austria, which had been deprived after its defeat in the

first world war of its rule over peoples of other nationalities. Today, after the second world war, the victors have divided the Germans into three states: East Germany, West Germany and Austria. But while both sides are talking about the reunification of the two Germanies, everyone is trying to isolate the weak and small Austria from them.

In order to characterize the position of Marxism on this issue we could provide innumerable quotations from the post-1848 period. The Prussian state is defined as a feudal and reactionary state that cannot be transformed into a bourgeois political state within its territory, and the Hohenzollern monarchy is also viewed as an adversary of the bourgeois revolution. Dynasty, aristocracy, army and bureaucracy, all are considered in terms of nationality as non-German, with influences and connections of non-national, Russophilic, Baltic and Philoslavic kinds. An indisputable basic element in the analysis of the formation of political nationality after the advent of capitalism, is the antagonism with the great bordering nationalities, and although this is fully applicable to the French, who are age-old enemies, it is completely missing from the eastern frontiers: within this process we must consider as particularly contradictory the wars of Frederick II, which, although they reinforced the power of Prussia, did so by transforming Prussia into a garrison-state.

With respect to the wars against Napoleon, they did not provide a suitable foundation for the German nation, either, since they were waged against the vanguard of the new bourgeois and national society formed by the armies of the Convention, the Consulate and the First Empire, and their nature was distorted due to the alliance with the oppressors of the nationalities, the autocrats of Russia and Austria. As a result, these wars could not serve as foundation for the process of German unification.

We must nonetheless obtain a clear understanding of the position of Marx and Engels, since on the one hand they refused to consider the Prussian state and territory as the basis for a modern nation,

but on the other hand were not in favor of the preservation and independence of the small states and principalities. Prussia, without these minor states, or without preserving its hegemony over them, is not the German nation that was awaited for centuries, but one cannot speak of a Bavarian or Saxon nation, either, and the diminutive grand duchies are pure feudal residues. Marx and Engels never — because they had their sights set on the model of the neighboring “single and indivisible republic” — supported a federal system.

For Marx and Engels a democratic state centralization in which each citizen would be juridically German and a subject of the central power would have been a great step forward. Later, the revolutionary assault of the increasingly more numerous German working class would be directed against this united capitalist state.

After the defeat in 1850 of the domestic anti-feudal insurrection, with the full capitulation of the weak bourgeoisie to Prussianism, the change could only be expected to be brought by wars between states, wars based on national questions. Marx’s positions with regard to the war with Denmark in 1849, the Austro-French war of 1859, the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, and finally the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 which led to the creation of the empire although this empire would always retain a Prussian and Bismarckian imprint, are of particular interest.

In all of these wars, as we have pointed out on other occasions, Marx and Engels clearly took sides and supported the victory of one of the contenders, and engaged in political agitation in support of their views. Their positions were naturally far removed from apologetics for the bourgeois radicals and the national revolutionaries of various nationalities who were then travelling all over Europe and who are treated by Marx and Engels—even the most illustrious ones like Kosuth, Mazzini, Garibaldi and others (not to speak of the French of the same ilk who completely lacked any justification for the historical appearance of the bourgeois fatherland, such as Blanc, Ledru-Rollin and

other pompous figures)—as phonies and sanctimonious donkeys. We must constantly keep this distinction in mind, so that our historical reconstruction is not ingenuously considered as just another example of the recent and contemporary nauseating praise lavished by “proletarians” on all the Churchills, Trumans, DeGaulles, Orlandos, Nittis and so many other present-day liberators and partisans. A few references and just one quotation will do, as we refer the reader to a few of our “Threads of Time” on the Nation, War, and Revolution (issues nos. 9 to 13 of *Battaglia Comunista*, 1950).

War between Piedmont and Austria in 1848 and 1849. Austria is condemned despite its being the victim of aggression, since this was a war for the formation of the Italian nation.

War between Prussia and Denmark in 1849 for the conquest of Schleswig-Holstein. Commonly condemned as a war of aggression on the part of Prussia; Marx and Engels support it, however, because its purpose was to incorporate ethnically German territories into the Prussian state.

War between Napoleon III in alliance with Piedmont against Austria in 1859, and subsequent conflicts in Italy in 1860. The position of Marx and Engels is clearly in favor of the constitution of the united Italian state, and therefore in favor of the defeat of Austria; Engels demonstrated that German interests were not defended on the banks of the Mincio. Does that mean that Marx and Engels supported Bonaparte? Now we also see the text that also invoked the struggle against Bonaparte on the Rhine, proposed much later, against Russia. The Second Empire is also castigated for having defrauded the Italian nation in Nice, Savoy and also in Corsica. Marx would later refer to this in his text on the Paris Commune, ferociously stigmatizing the intervention in defense of the papacy and against Rome as the capital of Italy, as he did after the intervention of the Second French Republic crushed the Roman Republic in 1849.

Since we shall discuss the wars of 1866 and 1870 below, we shall

submit the quotation that clarifies the thought of Marx: the necessary demand in support of the formation of the German nation, in order afterwards to overthrow the bourgeoisie; denunciation of the counterrevolutionary state ruled from Berlin.

The letter to Engels, dated March 24, 1863:

“... Vincke and Bismarck do, in fact, accurately represent the principle of the Prussian State; that the ‘State’ of Prussia (a very different creature from Germany) cannot exist either without Russia as she is, or with an independent Poland. The whole history of Prussia leads one to this conclusion which was drawn long since by Messrs Hollenzollern (Frederick II included). This princely consciousness is infinitely superior to the limited mentality of the subject that marks your Prussian liberal. Since, therefore, the existence of Poland is necessary to Germany and completely incompatible with the State of Prussia... the Polish question simply provides further occasion for proving that it is impossible to prosecute German interests so long as the Hollenzollerns’ own state continues to exist.”

We see at every step, then, Germany, the German nation, German interests: clearly German national interests. This clearly expresses, with respect to a particular case—but one that was very important—the thesis that the unitary and centralized constitution of the national state is in the interest of the bourgeoisie, since it is the form of its class power, but it is also in the interest of the proletariat up until the moment of its realization, because from that moment on the scramble for political and class positions commences, by means of which the proletariat will overthrow the power of the national bourgeoisie.

## II The Polish Question

Complete solidarity with the demand for the national independence of Poland, oppressed by the Czar, was of fundamental importance because it was not just a matter of a historical opinion expressed in theoretical texts, but of a real and distinct political alignment of the forces of the First International. Not only did it offer and provide the most complete support of the forces of the European workers, but the Polish revolt is considered as a springboard for the resumption of a revolutionary situation and the general struggle on the whole continent.

We shall follow these manifestations of the texts and documents of our school in detail because we have to show that the opinion that Marxist politics, with regard to making evaluations and deductions as the different contingent situations arise, has no difficulty in changing course, is erroneous; to the contrary, the political decisions are rigidly bound, stage by stage, to a unitary view of the general historical course of the revolution and, in the case at hand, to the materialist-historical definition of the function of nationalities according to the succession of the great and typical modes of production.

The fragmentary and episodic utilization of these elements has been practiced for more than a half century by various tendencies, for the purpose of justifying the incessant reversals of opportunism and eclecticism, which with each passing day claim to have elaborated a new doctrine and a new norm, shamelessly transforming the devils of yesterday into the angels of today, or vice versa.

The Polish question, however, is important even from other points of view. It might seem that a marked display of sympathy for the struggles for national independence possesses an almost Platonic dimension because it is limited exclusively to only writings and studies of a historical or social theoretical type, and also due to the fact that these efforts are not also translated onto the plane of political programs and

action programs of the party, of the real and true communist proletarian party that during the period we are examining (1847-1871) already had assumed as its original and proper content the struggle between the proletariat and capitalism, and the destruction of that social mode of production. But it is not the writers Marx and Engels whom we shall call to testify, but Marx and Engels the international leaders of the communist movement. If someone after a superficial and juvenile reading, might deduce that the writings of Engels on the Po, the Rhine, Nice and Savoy were merely political-military studies undertaken during a lull in the class revolution, departing from the social-economic method (not to mention, in case this was not obvious, that within this conception it is permitted to open up parentheses and 'free trade zones' of every kind within the Marxist doctrine of the course of human affairs, in each and every one), it is very important to show that all the deductions he makes are born from an absolute adherence to the root of the materialist explanation of history and of the discernment of the collective human "journey" in time in the light of the development of the productive forces. No one should be allowed to forget this, even if they are holding a sword, or rather a scalpel, a pen, a paintbrush, a chisel or a saw, or the hammer and sickle.

A "situational" Marx and Engels are very much suited to the Kominform and similar congregations, and comprise the core falsification among all the miserable falsifications that circulate in that milieu.

In a letter dated February 13, 1863, Marx inquires of his friend Engels about the events in Poland. The news of that heroic insurrection in the cities and the countryside, which became a real civil war waged against the Russian forces, caused Marx to exclaim:

"This much is certain, the era of revolution has now fairly opened in Europe once more. And the general state of affairs is good." But the memory of the bitter defeats of

1850 is still too fresh: “But the comfortable delusions and almost childish<sup>7</sup> enthusiasm with which we welcomed the revolutionary era before February 1848, have gone by the board... Old comrades ... are no more, others have fallen by the wayside or gone to the bad and, if there is new stock, it is, at least, not yet in evidence. Moreover, we now know what role stupidity plays in revolutions, and how they are exploited by blackguards.”

So get going, idlers, you are not children anymore, but senile; rise up to the level of Karl Marx with regard to this point.

This letter gives, with a handful of indications, which we shall complement by referring to subsequent letters, the balance sheet of the attitude of all the European political forces towards the Polish insurrection. The Prussian “nationalists”, who turned into supporters of national independence in order to deprive the Viennese Emperor of his status as the leader of the German confederation and hypocritically proclaimed their sympathy with Italy and Hungary which were demanding their independence, were caught with their hands in the cookie jar: they were just so many filthy Russophiles and they closed ranks against the Poles. The Russian democratic revolutionaries (Herzen) were also put to the test; despite their Slavic predilections they had to defend the Poles against the Russian state (refusing to agree to support a proposal that once a constitution was granted by the Czar, Poland should continue to be a Russian province). The bourgeois governments of London and of Plon-Plon (Napoleon III) expressed their hypocritical support for the Polish cause due to their rivalries with Russia, but both were suspect, and the betrayal of the French is a matter of record; their agents were in constant contact with

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<sup>7</sup>Bordiga’s note: This marks the first instance of the use of this adjective that was so frequently utilized by Lenin, but always in a non-disrespectful way

the right wing of the Polish movement that would effectively back down, especially if the revolt were to suffer a setback.

Almost nobody could or wanted to create a European “democracy” out of insurrectionary Poland; and Marx immediately tried to get the International Workingmen’s Association, which had been formed in London on September 28, 1864, to publish a practical action program. Before the famous meeting in Saint Martin’s Hall, Marx addressed the English workers Association. He sketched out his plan in brief: a short proclamation to the workers of all countries on the part of the English — a meticulous treatise on the Polish question written about particular aspects by Marx and Engels. And just after September 1864 there were discussions within the General Council, over which Marx exercised a moral chairmanship although he had not officially accepted the position, concerning what kind of action to undertake. These discussions led to some debates of great interest that clarified the political problems of the moment.

Pro-Polish action is therefore included in all the documents that emanated from the party, from the workers International; and it was considered to be the principal lever for the maximum development of workers agitation in Europe by helping to precipitate the occasions for the emergence of a revolutionary movement. Therefore the elaborations concerning principles about the historic problem of the support of the internationalist proletariat for a national struggle have a great importance.

## 12 The International and the Question of Nationalities

Within the General Council of the First International and under the leadership of Marx, a series of interesting debates provides the elements for the rectification of errors of principle on the question of

the historic struggles of nationalities. The tendency to ignore them instead of explaining them from the materialist point of view, rather than being evidence of an advanced internationalism is instead a manifestation of particularist and federalist positions derived from utopian and libertarian theories that Marxism had jettisoned.

The same congress of the International Workingmen's Association that was convoked in solidarity with the Poles (it produced a letter from the English workers to the French workers with respect to Poland) also expressed support for the Armenians oppressed by Russia, and as Marx himself recounts, many elements who were radical democrats and who aroused the mistrust of the workers also attended this congress. Concerned about theoretical clarity but also about the power of the movement, at a historical moment when the demands for independence had a real revolutionary content, Marx arranged to have an unsuitable report shelved and drafted the powerful Inaugural Address, in which the struggle of the proletarian class in England and on the continent was given the greatest emphasis.

Marx's famous letter of November 4, 1864, totally clarifies the position that should be taken with regard to the arrival of so many democrats in the workers ranks. This is interesting with regard to any attempt to form a correct evaluation of the activities of those who would today be accused of right-wing deviation with regard to the national question. A certain Wolff proposed a statute that he claimed was the same one adopted by the Italian workers societies: Marx writes that the latter "... are essentially associated Benefit Societies... I saw the stuff later. It was evidently a concoction of *Mazzini's*, and that tells you in advance in what spirit and phraseology the real question, the labour question, was dealt with. As well as how the nationalities question intruded into it." When Eccarius asked him to attend the meeting of the subcommittee, Marx heard "a fearfully cliché-ridden, badly written and totally unpolished preamble pretending to be a declaration of principles, with Mazzini showing through the whole thing from

beneath a crust of the most insubstantial scraps of French socialism.”

There was also, in the Italian declaration, “something quite impossible, a sort of central government of the *European* working classes (with Mazzini in the background, of course)”.

Finally, Marx drafted the Address, reducing the statutes from 40 to 10 articles, and read the text that would later become historical, accepted by all. His method, however, was not clearly illustrated in this text. Many of the people in attendance will not understand anything, he commented to Engels, and they are the types that would join the liberals in a campaign to demand universal suffrage.

Everyone knows that the famous Address, after the social and class part, contains a final paragraph referring to international politics, which states that the workers demand that the relations between states should be subject to the same moral norms that rule over relations between men. The phrase is repeated in the first address on the war of 1870, and not only expresses a bourgeois postulate, like all those concerning the national question, but expresses it in a purely propagandistic form. Marx will be excused for having had to act *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo* — harshly with regard to content, but gently with regard to form. But the false Marxists of our time have also fallen beneath the worst urine streams of the ultra-bourgeois democrats. Let us take a look at Marx’s true clarification:

“Insofar as International politics is mentioned in the ‘Address’, I refer to countries and not to nationalities, and denounce Russia, not the *minores gentium* [smaller nations]. The Sub-Committee adopted all my proposals. I was, however, obliged to insert two sentences about ‘duty’ and ‘right’, and ditto about ‘Truth, Morality and Justice’ in the preamble to the rules, but these are so placed that they can do no harm.”

On December 10, 1864, Marx summarized the debate on the proposal of Fox concerning the appeal on behalf of Poland. This good democrat went to great extremes in order to speak of “the concept of ‘class’, [or] at least a semblance of it”. But there was a point that did not escape Marx, an expression of sympathy for the French democracy that was almost extended as far as “Boustrapa” (Plon-Plon).

“I opposed this and unfolded a historically irrefutable tableau of the constant French betrayal of Poland from Louis XV to Bonaparte III. At the same time, I pointed out how thoroughly *inappropriate* it was that the Anglo-French Alliance *should* appear as the ‘core’ of the International Association, albeit in a democratic version.”

The proposal was accepted with Marx’s revisions, but the Swiss delegate Jung, representing the minority, voted against this “altogether ‘bourgeois’” text.

To get an idea of the degree of interest stimulated by the question of the revolt in Poland, we should point out that the General Council not only had direct contacts with the bourgeois Poles, but that in one session it even received representatives of the aristocracy, since they also formed part of the national anti-Russian union. These aristocrats assured the Council that they, too, were democrats, and that the national revolution in Poland was impossible without a peasant uprising. Marx restricted himself to asking himself whether these people really believed what they were saying.

Let us now move on to 1866: once again the Polish question was “the real bone of contention” in the Association. A certain Vésinier accused the International, no less, of having become “*a committee of nationalities in tow to Bonapartism*”. This aroused Marx’s wrath. “This ass” had attributed to the Parisian delegates, who to the contrary had considered it inopportune, a paragraph on Poland included

in the agenda of the Geneva Congress. In this paragraph it was deplored that, “yielding to pernicious influences, questions such as the abolition of Russian influence in Europe that bear no relation to the aims of the Association, were included in the programme of the Geneva Congress, etc.” should be addressed. Vésinier’s thesis is as follows: it is neither class-based nor internationalist to encourage a national war by the Poles against the Russians and to become enemies of Russia, because we must be for peace among the peoples. As justification for this position he recalled the iniquities of the Bonaparte regime and of the English bourgeoisie, and the emancipation in Russia and Poland of the serfs, which only recently took place, and asserted “that it was the duty of the Central Committee to proclaim solidarity and fraternity among all peoples, *and not to put one of them alone beyond the pale of Europe*”. Vésinier then accused the Poles of using the Association “to help to restore their nationhood, without concerning themselves with the question of the emancipation of the workers”. Marx restricted himself to pointing out the howlers that all this nonsense and fairy tales were full of, depicting it as “the Muscovitist line pursued by Proudhon and Herzen” and saying that Vésinier “is just the fellow for the Russians. Of little merit as a writer... But with talent, great rhetorical power, much energy and above all unscrupulous through and through”.

Vésinier’s proposal was defeated; “we are commemorating their [the Polish] revolution on 23 January”. We are totally of the opinion that every armed revolution “against the existing social conditions” is worth more than any theory endowed with an exaggerated extremism and that the pacifism between the peoples that Vésinier invoked was really an embrace between the bourgeoisie of the West and the Czar of all the Russias, in the genuine or feigned belief that this served the interests of the working class.

## 13 The Slavs and Russia

The historical cycle of the formation of bourgeois nation states, which proceeded in parallel with the spread of industrialism and the formation of the great markets, spread to England, France, Germany and Italy; other lesser powers could be considered to be constituted nations: Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, Sweden and Norway. The Marxist demand applied to the typical case of Poland, and we must evaluate it as a declaration of war against the “Holy Alliance” of Russia, Austria and Prussia. But this cycle would come to an end, in the Marxist view, leaving unresolved, among other problems, the problem of the Slavs of Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

In 1856 Marx had become interested in a book by the Pole Mieroslawski, openly directed against Russia, Germany and Pan-Slavism, in which the author proposed “a free confederation of Slavic nations with Poland as the Archimedean people”, which means the people of the vanguard, the pioneer of freedom. Something of this kind was to take place with the formation of the Little Entente of the Slavic states (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Poland as the most important and homogeneous state) after the first world war and the dissolution of the Austrian Empire (1918). And everyone knows that lasted for barely twenty years, until there was another repartition between the Germans and the Russians in 1939.

Marx’s critique of Mieroslawski’s social theory is very interesting. Besides criticizing Mieroslawski for founding his great hopes on the English and French governments, Marx points out that he does not foresee the future major industrialization of many Polish cities and regions and bases his independent state on the “‘democratic’ Lechitic community”. At first the Polish peasants were united in free communities, in a kind of agrarian guild system, confronting a “dominium”, or territory under the military and administrative control of a noble; the nobles, in turn, elected the king. The land of the free peasants

was soon usurped, one part by the monarchy and the other by the aristocracy, and the peasant communities were subjected to serfdom. Nonetheless, a “*peasant middle class*” survived, with the right to form a semi-nobility, a sort of “*Equestrian Order*”: but the peasants could become members of this order only if they participated in a war of conquest or in the colonization of virgin lands; this stratum in turn was transformed into a kind of “lumpen-proletariat of the aristocracy”, a kind of tatterdemalion nobility: “This kind of development is interesting”, Marx writes, “because here serfdom can be shown to have arisen in a purely economic way, without the intermediate link of conquest and racial dualism.” In fact, the king, the high and low nobility, and the peasantry were all of the same race and spoke the same language, and the national tradition was as old as it was strong. Marx’s thesis therefore establishes that the class yoke appeared with the development of the productive technical means, even within a uniform ethnic group, just as in other cases it appeared as the result of a clash between two races and two peoples, in which case race and language, in turn, functioned as “economic agents” (Engels—see Part 1).

Evidently the Polish democrat did not foresee the appearance in the conflict of a real industrial bourgeoisie and much less that of a powerful and glorious proletariat, which in 1905 held their own against the Czarist troops, and even rose up during the second world war in a desperate attempt to take power in the martyred capital against the German and Russian General Staffs, ending up just like the communards of Paris, who fell in the crossfire of their enemies.

Marx’s attention never for even a moment strayed from Russia, since he considered the Czar’s army as the mobile reserve force of the European counterrevolution, always ready to cross the frontiers whenever it had to restore “order” by crushing any movement that sought to overthrow the states of the old regime, thus cutting off the road towards the different points from which the revolution of the proletariat could emerge. Almost ten years later, Marx was interested in the

doctrine of Duchinski (a Russian professor from Kiev, who lived in Paris at the time). Marx relates that Duchinski maintained that

“the real Muscovites, i.e., inhabitants of the former Grand Duchy of Moscow, were for the most part Mongols or Finns, etc., as was the case in the parts of Russia situated further east and in its south-eastern parts. I see from it at all events that the affair has seriously worried the St Petersburg cabinet (since it would put an end to Panslavism in no uncertain manner). All Russian scholars were called on to give responses and refutations, and these in the event turned out to be terribly weak. The purity of the Great Russian dialect and its connection with Church Slavonic appear to lend more support to the Polish than to the Muscovite view in this debate. (...) It has ditto been shown geologically and hydrographically that a great ‘Asiatic’ difference occurs east of the Dnieper, compared with what lies to the west of it, and that (as Murchison has already maintained) the Urals by no means constitute a dividing line. Result as obtained by Duchinski: Russia is a name usurped by the Muscovites. They are not Slavs; they do not belong to the Indo-Germanic race at all, they are *des intrus* [intruders], who must be chased back across the Dnieper, etc. Panslavism in the Russian sense is a cabinet invention, etc. I wish that Duchinski were right and at all events that this view would prevail among the Slavs. On the other hand, he states that some of the peoples in Turkey, such as Bulgars, e.g., who had previously been regarded as Slavs, are non-Slav.” (Letter from Marx to Engels, dated June 24, 1865).

We do not know if this passage from Marx’s letter was used in the recent bourgeois polemic against the Russian Revolution, since

according to the common view the Russian people are Asiatic and not European (and furthermore, according to mainstream opinion, that is why they have to endure a dictatorship!). This racial thesis, absolutely inoffensive for authentic Marxism, is prejudicial to our contemporary Russians who follow in the footsteps of Stalin, and rely on a racial, national and linguistic tradition rather than on the class bond of the world proletariat.

In the Marxist sense, the fact that the Great Russians should be classified as Mongolians rather than as Aryans (we should not forget that famous phrase that Marx so often invokes: “*Grattez le Russe, et vous trouverez le Tartare*”, “scratch a Russian and you will find a Tartar”) is of fundamental importance with regard to the following question: is it necessary to await the formation of a vast capitalist Slavic super-nation that would include the whole Russian territory, or would at least extend to the Urals, in order to conclude the cycle in which the forces of the European working class must offer themselves up to the cause of the formation of nations, so that once this cycle is terminated the European revolution becomes possible? Marx’s response was that the formation of modern nation states as a premise for the workers revolution corresponds to an area that extends in the east as far as the eastern borders of Poland, and under certain circumstances might include the Ukraine and Little Russia as far as the Dnieper. This is the European area of the revolution, the first one that must be addressed, and the cycle that served as the prelude to the next cycle characterized by purely class-oriented action, is the one that later came to an end in 1871.

We must not forget, in order to prevent ethnology from being transformed into the sole determining factor, that peoples of the Mongolian stock, that is, of the Finnish race, form nations in Europe (Hungary and Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) which, because they are socially advanced, are within the European historical zone, and Marxism had a favorable view during this period of their attempts to win

independence from the three regimes of the Holy Alliance.

## 14 The Wars of 1866 and 1870

As the Polish insurrection collapsed and this road by which the revolution might be resumed was closed, just as it was closed in 1848, Marx and Engels perceived that war between Austria and Prussia was approaching. Italy would undoubtedly participate in this war as a result of the pressing problem of Venetian independence, while the position of Russia and France remained in doubt; it was clear that a new period of upheaval was gathering momentum. Sedan would settle all accounts, and the only enemy of the revolution would be the French Empire, which would have to be defeated.

On April 10, 1866, Marx thought that it was the Russians who wanted war, because they had concentrated troops on the Austrian and Prussian frontiers, with the intention of taking advantage of the situation and occupying the other two parts of Poland. This would mean the end of the Hohenzollern regime, but the real objective was to eventually descend upon revolutionary Berlin in order to support the Hohenzollerns. Marx and Engels hoped that at the news of the first military defeat Berlin would rise.

It was something new that, despite the fact that they opposed Austria on the Venetian question, Marx and Engels nonetheless considered that an Austrian victory would be useful, with respect to its effects on the anti-Prussian revolution.

As for Napoleon III, the latter was no less hostile towards the proletarian cause than Alexander of Russia, and up to this point his dream had been “to become the fourth member of the Holy Alliance”, a dream that was now shattered.

After the outbreak of the war, the Council of the International debated the situation on June 19, 1866, vigorously addressing the prob-

lem of nationalities.

“The French, very strongly represented, gave vent to their cordial dislike for the Italians.” Marx revealed the fact that the French were at bottom against the Italo-Prussian alliance and would have preferred the victory of Austria. In this session, however, what was of greater importance than taking a position was the theoretical question: “The representatives of ‘*jeune France*’ (*non-workers*), by the way, trotted out their view that any nationality and even nations are ‘*des préjugés surannés*’ [outdated prejudices].” Here Marx drily commented: “Proudhonised Stirnerianism.” (Stirner is the philosopher of extreme individualism who, focusing everything on the subject’s “ego”, on the one hand helped inform the theory of the super-dictator of Nietzsche, and on the other, the theory that rejected the state and society, the basic theory of the anarchists: both theories are the quintessence of bourgeois thought. Proudhon on the economic and sociological terrain glorified the small autonomous group of producers who exchanged their products with the other groups.) Marx further clarified this condemnation, denouncing the retrograde nature of something that was being passed off as radical. As we have already pointed out, the position that Marx attacked did not involve the supersession of this historically bourgeois, but operative, postulate of the nation, but rather fell short of it.

“Everything to be broken down into small ‘*groupes*’ or ‘*communes*’, which in turn form an ‘association’, but not a state. Furthermore, this ‘individualisation’ of mankind and the *mutualisme* it entails are to proceed by bringing history to a halt in every other country and the whole world waits until the French are ready to carry out a social revolution. Then they will demonstrate the experiment to us, and the rest of the world, being bowled over by the force of their example [do you not get the impres-

sion that he could be speaking of today's Russians?], will do the same. Just what Fourier expected from his *phalanstère modèle* [today they would say the socialist fatherland, the country of socialism...]. *D'ailleurs*, everyone who clutters up the 'social' question with the 'superstitions' of the Old World is a 'reactionary'."

On this occasion Marx, ordinarily so reluctant to engage in public activity, could not avoid speaking out against his future son-in-law Lafargue. His speech caused the English to break out in laughter when he pointed out that Lafargue, after abolishing nationality, had spoken in French, a language unknown to most of those present: "I went on to suggest that by his denial of nationalities he seemed quite unconsciously to imply their absorption by the model French nation."

What was Marx's position on this war? First and foremost, he favored a Prussian defeat. And in the same letter to Engels, rather than in an address to the Council (we must keep in mind the confidential nature of the writings that we are now quoting), he says: "For the rest, the position is difficult now because one must equally oppose the silly Italianism of the English, on the one hand, and the mistaken polemic against it of the French, on the other, and above all prevent any demonstration which would involve our Association in a one-sided course." Therefore, in the war of 1866, Marx did not openly take the side of any of the belligerents, an attitude comparable to that of the Poles during the anti-Russian insurrection.

After the Austrian victories in Italy, Austria was defeated at Sadowa by Prussia, and Napoleon intervened as a mediator. On July 7, 1866, Marx wrote: "Beside a great Prussian defeat, which perhaps (oh but those Berliners!) might have led to a revolution, there could have been no better outcome than their stupendous victory." Marx thought that the best interest of Bonaparte would have been served by an alternation of victories and defeats between the Austrians and Prussians,

so that a strong Germany should not be formed with an overwhelming central hegemony, so that Bonaparte with his military force intact would become the arbiter of Europe. Marx also thought that Italy's position was very dangerous and that Russia stood to gain no matter what happened. As everyone knows, Austria, accepting the mediation of France, surrendered Venice to France: in order to obtain Venice, the King of Savoy had to once again engage in a rapprochement with his former ally of 1859, who defiantly proclaimed his famous "*jamais*" to the occupation of Rome.

With this panorama the position of the International is precise: the war will be unleashed by Bonaparte, who was equipping his infantry with needle-guns, when he saw the opportunity to strike (Marx in a letter dated July 7 considered the technological development of weaponry as an application of economic determinism — "Is there any sphere in which our theory that the organisation of labour is determined by the means of production is more dazzlingly vindicated than in the industry for human slaughter?" — and suggested to Engels that he should write a study on the topic; today it seems that everything is reduced to the following question: who has the atomic bomb?). The second point is that it is necessary for the France of Napoleon to be defeated in this war.

We have continually insisted concerning the proletarian policy with respect to a domestic and revolutionary war for national independence, such as the Polish insurrection of 1863 (or the Italian uprisings of 1848 and 1860), in which case the position to take was unambiguous and total. We shall not repeat everything that has been said about the war of 1870 between France and Prussia. The proclamations of the International totally ruled out any support for either the government of Bismarck or that of Bonaparte: concerning this question there is no doubt. But the International openly desired the defeat of the Second Empire (just as in 1815 it would have preferred the victory of the First Empire).

In the Address of the General Council dated July 23, 1870, the valiant opposition to the war demonstrated by the French sections is applauded, but then this oft-used phrase appears: for the Germans the war is a “war of defense” (which would later be the object of a historically indomitable commentary by Lenin). This phrase was followed by an open attack on Prussian policy and the invitation to the German workers to fraternize with the French: the victory of Germany would be a disaster and would reproduce “all the miseries that befell Germany after her [so-called] wars of independence [against Napoleon]”. It was necessary to wait for someone like Lenin to come along and say: the philistine petty-bourgeois cannot understand how one can desire the defeat of both belligerents! Beginning in 1870, the general theory of proletarian defeatism was already in effect.

With the next quotation we shall see the historical evaluation of Marxism concerning this phase of 1866 and 1870 and the role played by the feudal powers of the East and by the bourgeois dictatorships of the West (without forgetting that we have to discourage the use of the word “if” in the story for all those cretins who seek to be published): “If the battle of Sadowa had been lost instead of being won, French battalions would have overrun Germany as the allies of Prussia.”

A defensive war means a war in the historically progressive sense, and this was the case, as Lenin has maintained, between 1789 and 1871, but never after that (we shall never tire of throwing this in the faces of the just war advocates of 1939-1945). This means that if Moltke had departed one day before Bazaine, and if the war cry had been: “To Paris, To Paris!” instead of “To Berlin, To Berlin!” — the Marxist assessment would have been the same.

## 15 The Commune and the New Cycle

The frustrated revolution of 1848 in Germany did not break out again in 1866 or in 1871 due to the overwhelming victories of Prussian militarism. But the tremendous defeat of French militarism stimulated the uprising of the proletariat of Paris, not only against the fallen regime but against the entire republican bourgeois class that had capitulated to the reactionary Prussian forces, and also against the Prussian forces themselves. The fall of the revolutionary government of the Commune in no way diminished the historical importance of the new cycle which from that moment forward imposed on the European communists only one historical goal: the proletarian dictatorship.

The Second Address of the International dated September 9, 1870 appeared after the victory at Sedan and the surrender of the French army, the expulsion of Napoleon and the proclamation of the Republic. This Address is a firm exhortation against the proposals to annex Alsace and Lorraine, and against the claim that this annexation was necessary to create a military security corridor; it scornfully noted the lack of any similar Prussian concern for the Russian borders and foresaw “a war with the Slavonic and Roman races”. In this text it is also said that the German working class “have resolutely supported the war, which it was not in their power to prevent”, but was now calling for peace and for the recognition of the Republic proclaimed in Paris. This claim aroused some serious doubts; the Parisian proletariat, however, was advised not to revolt against this republic. The Third Address, however, the personal work of Marx, not only constitutes an expression of the politics of the proletariat, but is also a historical pillar of the revolutionary theory and program. Marx read it on May 30, 1871 — as Engels recalls in his Postscript to the 1891 edition — only two days after the last combatants of the Commune fell in Belleville.

This classic source of revolutionary communism to which we must

incessantly refer, dispenses with the kinds of concerns that six months before had led the General Council to advise the Paris proletariat not to plunge into such an impossible enterprise because the resulting catastrophe would favor more Prussian invasions and annexations, causing the reemergence of another major problem of national independence in the very heart of the most advanced part of Europe. The International of the workers of the whole world united with all its forces with the first revolutionary government of the working class and took note of the lessons that the ferocious repression had transmitted to the future history of the proletarian revolution.

These lessons have been betrayed twice on a world scale, in 1914 and 1939, but the goal of our patient reconstructions and of our tireless repetitions is to show that, despite these betrayals, these lessons will be taken up again in a future historical period, just as they were set forth in that memorable text.

The alliance of Versailles and the Prussians to crush the red Commune, meaning that the former had assumed, under the pressure of the latter and the orders of Bismarck, the role of executioner of the revolution, leads to the historical conclusion that “the highest heroic effort of which old society is still capable is national war [which up until then we had to support]; and this is now proved to be a mere governmental humbug, intended to defer the struggle of classes, and to be thrown aside as soon as that class struggle bursts out into civil war”.

Lenin did not invent the rule: transform the war between nations into a civil war; he found it already written. Lenin did not say that this slogan he proclaimed to the European proletarian parties in 1914 and 1915 should be modified in later situations, that the phase of alliances in favor of national wars would return, the phase of “peace ... between the working men of France and the appropriators of their produce”, as the text quoted above puts it. Marx and Lenin revealed the historical law according to which, from 1871 until the destruction

of capitalism, there are two alternatives in Europe: either the proletarians pursue defeatism in all wars, or, as Engels prophetically wrote in the 1891 Postscript, and as we can see this prediction in effect today, "... is there not every day hanging over our heads the Damocles' sword of war, on the first day of which all the chartered covenants of princes will be scattered like chaff; (...) a race war which will subject the whole of Europe to devastation by 15 or 20 million armed men..." (Postscript by Engels to the 1891 edition of Marx's *The Civil War in France*).

First: Marxism has always foreseen war between bourgeois states; second: it has always admitted that in particular historical phases it is not pacifism but war that accelerates general social development, as was the case with the wars that enabled the bourgeoisie to form national states; third: since 1871 Marxism has established that there is only one way that the revolutionary proletariat can put an end to war: with civil war and the destruction of capitalism.

## 16 The Imperialist Epoch and Irredentist Residues

The survival, in the epoch of wars of independence and national formation of a bourgeois revolutionary character, of a great number of cases in which lesser nationalities are subjected to states of another nationality in Europe itself, does not obviate the fact that the proletarian International must reject any justification for war between states for reasons of irredentism, unmasking the imperialist purposes of every bourgeois war, and calling upon the workers to sabotage such wars from both sides. The inability to put this into practice has determined the destruction of revolutionary energies under the opportunist waves of the two wars, and will also determine the same outcome in a future war if the masses do not abandon the opportunist

leadership in time (social democratic or kominformist), thus allowing capitalism to survive its violent and bloody crises.

It was Lenin who showed, with reference to the war of 1914, that the war broke out due to the economic rivalry between the major capitalist states for the appropriation of shares of the productive resources of the world and especially those of the colonies in the underdeveloped continents. He never overlooked the existence of serious national problems in various metropolitan states; the perfect example is the Austrian monarchy which ruled over various Slavic, Latin and Magyar regions, not to forget some Ottoman groups. Another example was Russia, whose feudal state straddled the border between Europe and Asia. This is why, when considering Russian national questions, one cannot even reach a conclusion without keeping in mind the purpose of this work and others that will follow, in which the dynamic of the class and national struggles on the non-European continents and between races of color will be addressed (the eastern question; the colonial question).

The socialists of the Second International based their betrayal on three sophisms. The first was to support the nation in case of defensive war; the second was to support a war against a “less developed” country; and the third was that the war of 1914 would resolve the problems of irredentism. The difficulty posed by the irredentist issues of the time was formidable: France, for example, wanted to recover Alsace and Lorraine, but had no intention of surrendering Corsica or Nice. England contributed its support, but did not declare the independence of Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus. Three countries wanted to liberate Poland, each in order to exercise its exclusive rule over that country.

Furthermore, everyone knows that the best example of resistance to the seduction of irredentism was provided by the Italian party; an even more classical example was that of the Serbian party, which was active in a nation that was surrounded by fellow Serbians who were

subjects of other national powers, attacked by a much more powerful Austria, but which mounted a furious campaign against the militarism of Belgrade and the patriotic fever. Concerning the importance of these national questions, we have set forth the basic theses in a series of "Threads of Time" published in 1950-1951, and here we shall restrict ourselves to providing a brief summary.

1. The radical Marxists correctly combat the social democratic thesis of simple linguistic "cultural" autonomy within the unified state in multi-national countries, advocating total autonomy for the minority nationalities, but not as a bourgeois result or one made possible by the bourgeoisie, but as the result of the overthrow of the central state power, on the part of the proletarians of its nationality.
2. Those formulas are bourgeois and counterrevolutionary which advocate the liberation and equality of all nationalities, since this is impossible under the capitalist regime. However, resistance mounted against the state colossi of capitalism by the oppressed nationalities and the small "semi-colonial" powers or small states under protectorates, are forces that contribute to the downfall of capitalism.
3. Within the confines of the cycle in which the proletarian International denies any support or contribution on the part of its own organized political forces for wars between states, refusing to accept that the involvement in such a war of an alliance of despotic feudal states, or states that are less democratically organized than the others, should be a reason to fail to comply with this historic international position, and everywhere adopts defeatism for its own country, which does not obviate the fact that in its historical analysis it can and must foresee the different effects that can be expected from the events of a war.

In other texts we have offered numerous examples: in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 in which the Franco-British democracies supported the Russians, Marx openly sympathized with the Turks. In the Greco-Turkish war of independence of 1899, without going so far as to volunteer to fight like the anarchists and republicans, the left socialists supported Greece, just as they sympathized with the revolution of the Young Turks, and with the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian liberation struggle against Ottoman rule in the Balkan wars of 1912. And the same thing could be said of the Boer War against the English, a war — like the Spanish-American War of 1898 — that had extra-European impacts and was fought for imperialist purposes.

But these were only episodes that punctuated the great period of calm that lasted from 1871 to 1914. Next came the world wars: every proletarian party that has supported its state at war or its allies is a traitor, and everywhere the tactic of revolutionary defeatism must be applied. From this crystal-clear conclusion, however, one must not deduce that the victory of one or another side will not make any difference with respect to a more advantageous development of events from a revolutionary perspective.

Our position on this question is well-known. The victory of the Western democracies and of America in the first and second world wars has caused the chances for the communist revolution to recede into the distant future, while a different outcome would have made it more likely to take place sooner. The same thing must be said about the American capitalist monster in a third world war, which could very well take place within one or two decades.

The precondition for the triumph of the communist revolution is the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie: more than just a precondition, it is the revolution itself. But in the domain of war between states, which, until it can be proven to be otherwise, has up until now mobilized greater physical energies than the social war, revolutionary preconditions can also be perceived: the two principal pre-

conditions are catastrophes for Great Britain and the United States of America, the gargantuan engines of the terrible historical inertia of the capitalist system and mode of production.

## 17 A Formula for Trieste Offered to the “Contingentists”

The position of the communists on the current conflict over Trieste can be summarized in these basic points: since 1911 the position of the Italian proletariat against the demands for national unity has been clearly expressed; in the war for Trieste and Trentino in 1915 the socialists denied their support, and the groups that later formed the communist party in Livorno in 1921 advocated sabotage of the national war; after 1918 the proletariat of the region of Giulia of both races and languages united firmly around revolutionary socialism and the party of Livorno; the communist proletariat must show the same resolute disdain for the nationalist policies of the governments of Rome and Belgrade, and even more for the disingenuous and deceitful policies of the kominformists.

Due to a strange coincidence this work is being written while an unforeseen series of events has placed Trieste under the spotlight of international politics. What do the communists have to say about the Trieste Crisis?

The Communist Party of Italy formed in Livorno in 1921 clearly demanded the most resolute opposition to the war that liberated Trieste and the Giulian and Trentine territories, because that party was the heir of the groups that, rejecting the sacred union in the war and the slogan of “neither support nor sabotage”, advocated Leninist defeatism, proclaiming in May 1915 the (indefinite) general strike as a last-ditch attempt to stop the mobilization, and spurring the old party

into action during the whole course of the war and in the period after the defeat at Caporetto.

Therefore, we do not want Trieste. But the proletarian and revolutionary Trieste was ours, and the majority of its political sections, the trade unions, and the cooperatives, including people who spoke both Italian and Slovenian—it did not matter!—were members of the communist party, which featured the glorious *Lavoratore* that was published in the two languages with the same articles on theory, propaganda and political and organization agitation. And in the communist ranks, red Trieste was in the front line in the battle against fascism, which was victorious only thanks to the help of the tricolor carabinieri.

All of this has nothing in common with the positions of today's so-called Italian communists, who yesterday advocated that Trieste should pass into the hands of Tito because it would thus become part of a socialist fatherland, and today proudly display a contemptible nationalism by calling Tito “the executioner” par excellence.

The rivalry between the state of Belgrade and that of Rome, in the context of the repugnant world diplomatic struggle, as is also the case with the rivalry between the Italian parties with respect to the question of how to resolve the problem of Trieste, proceeds in accordance with the most superannuated nationalist formulas, and those who are most prone to make a crude use of the ethno-linguistic and historical sophisms are not the authentic bourgeoisie, but the “Marxists”, Tito and Togliatti.

We are not concerned, and not only because of our slight numerical force, with the usual question: what do you advocate in terms of practice, just what do you propose? But for those Marxists with a concrete and positivist bent to their politics, we shall treat them to a formula that they have never really thought about. The problem of dual nationality and dual languages is unfathomable, and is not resolved by writing speeches for Venetians and Slovenes in English or

Serbo-Croatian.

In substance, the situation is that in the cities, organized in a bourgeois way, the Latins prevail, while the Slavs, on the other hand, live in isolated villages in the interior of the country and especially all along the coast. The merchants, industrialists, industrial workers and professionals are Italian; the rural landowners and peasants are Slavs. A social difference that is presented as a national difference, and which will disappear if the workers take over the industries and the peasants appropriate their landlords, but which cannot be eliminated by drawing lines on a map.

In the constitution of the USSR, gentlemen of the *Botteghe Oscure*/footnoteA reference to the headquarters of the Italian Communist Party, and in its imitation version in the People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Marxist gentlemen of Belgrade, the foundation of the alliance between workers and peasants was the following formula: one representative for every one hundred workers, one for every one thousand peasants.

Hold any plebiscite on any question you please (you took this formula from Mussolini, your common enemy) with the rule that the vote of the inhabitant of the city and small cities (those, for example, with more than ten thousand inhabitants) will equal ten, and that of the inhabitant of the small town and the countryside will equal one. Then you will be able to extend the democratic vote to the entire area situated between the borders of 1866 and those of 1918: then you can grab Gorizia, Pola, Fiume and Zara.

But on all sides they have gulped down so much disgusting bourgeois democracy that they bow down before the sacred dogma, which makes the wealthy class laugh shamelessly, to see the sacred dogma repeated everywhere that each person's vote has the same weight.

With an arithmetic like ours most people would be in favor of the thesis that says, to hell with both of them!

## 18 The European Revolution

Within the historical development of the social productive forces, Trieste is a point of convergence of economic factors that extend beyond the frontiers of the states in question, and a crucial point of the modern industrial and communications apparatus: in any event, any interruption that takes place has a very negative impact on the operations of exchange, which is the infrastructure of that great movement for the formation of national units, which came to an end in the 19th century. In the middle of the 20th century, there is only an international future for Trieste, one that cannot be effectively found by way of political and commercial agreements between bourgeois forces, but only in the European communist revolution, in which the workers of Trieste and the surrounding region will be one of the leading assault forces.

At the high point of the first emergence of capitalism in Italy, one of whose first political states was the Most Serene Republic of Venice, it is indisputable that Venetian dependence on Trieste, an advanced port and emporium of the Adriatic in the middle of a feudal and semi-barbarous Europe, was historically very progressive.

When the opening up of the great maritime trade routes of the Atlantic caused the downfall of Mediterranean capitalism, and the world market was being created thanks to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, by way of the Atlantic trade routes, in Trieste there was always the chance, due to geographical factors, that the new mode of production would penetrate the interior of Central and Eastern Europe, where the landed anti-industrial reactionaries seemed to be so well entrenched, and had erected age-old obstacles to the new human organization.

The policy of the far-flung Austrian Empire which connected the Adriatic port with the nascent industrial centers of Germany, Hungary and Bohemia, was nonetheless progressive compared to the bar-

riers erected by the Russians and the Turks, and enabled capitalism to gradually spread.

For the return of full-scale industrialism to the Italian peninsula and for its establishment in the Balkans, a positive factor was the one that was being forged by its connection with the powerful German economy, in the latter's attempt to undermine Anglo-Saxon predominance in the Mediterranean basin.

Since the defeat of the Axis, Trieste has always remained a leading issue, and in order to more effectively arrange America's colonization of Europe and its other repugnant schemes, America has subjected the city and its territory to a state of emergency.

All communist revolutionaries salute the proletariat of Trieste because over the whole period spanning various phases they have been occupied and obscenely represented by the worst kinds of capitalism and the most ferocious militarist nationalisms, celebrating their orgies of cruelty, corruption and exploitation.

Because so many rapacious claws and so many representatives of a shameless and brazen colonialism have concentrated in such a small area, Trieste will not find a national solution from any side, regardless of the language that is utilized to invoke it.

The solution can only be international: but just as it will not come from summit meetings or conflicts between states, it will not come from their democratic fornications, from the sordid unity of European servitude, either.

We do not forecast a national flag over the Castle of San Giusto, but the coming of the European proletarian dictatorship, which will not fail to find among a proletariat that has endured such painful experiences, when the time comes, the most resolute combatants.