

PERRY ANDERSON

*Editorial*

INTERNATIONALISM:

A BRIEFARY

**F**EW POLITICAL NOTIONS are at once so normative and so equivocal as internationalism. Today, the official discourse of the West resounds with appeals to a term that was long a trademark of the Left. Whatever sense is given it, the meaning of internationalism logically depends on some prior conception of nationalism, since it only has currency as a back-construction referring to its opposite. Yet while nationalism is of all modern political phenomena the most value-contested—judgements of its record standardly varying across a 180-degree span, from admiration to anathema—no such schizophrenia of connotation affects internationalism: its implication is virtually always positive.<sup>1</sup> But the price of approval is indeterminacy. If no-one doubts the fact of nationalism, but few agree as to its worth, at the entry to the millennium the status of internationalism would appear to be more or less the reverse. It is claimed on all sides as a value, but who can identify it without challenge as a force?

Behind this paradox lies an unexamined history. It was Masaryk, a great national leader, who once suggested the clearest and simplest definition of nationalism. It signified, he thought (dissociating himself from it), any outlook that treats the nation as the highest political value.<sup>2</sup> This need not mean that its adherents will in all circumstances, or every context, think only or above all of the nation, to the exclusion of other attachments or identities—in any given situation, the extent of its bearing is always variable. So understood, the formula gives us a counterpart definition of internationalism sufficiently minimal and neutral to allow

for what has been most lacking: some empirical reconstruction of its record. Historically, the term may be applied to any outlook, or practice, that tends to transcend the nation towards a wider community, of which nations continue to form the principal units.

The advantage of a pragmatic definition of this kind is to dispense with a number of conventional preconceptions about nationalism and internationalism, and to suggest more systematic ways of inter-relating the two. Since their first emergence in modern form, some two hundred and fifty years ago, each has undergone a series of metamorphoses. How are these transformations best conceived? Below I suggest a periodization. The pitfalls of any totalizing division of historical time into a categorical sequence are obvious enough. In one way or another, periodization always involves arbitrary simplifications, to a point where not a few of our finest historians would wish to reject it as a procedure altogether. That, however, is easier said than done. In a forthcoming work, Fredric Jameson has remarked with reason that, as narrative beings, we have little choice: 'we cannot not periodize'.<sup>3</sup>

The schema set out here is confined to a few telegraphic notations. Its object is to lay out the inter-relations between nationalism and internationalism as a succession of intelligible phases, each defined by a pair of dominants. The term signifies its own limits: what is 'dominant' will never be exhaustive of the phase in question, but will represent rather the most novel and salient forms of any period, which will always contain a series of counter-currents and sub-tones that can be set aside only provisionally, for the sake of simplification. The procedure adopted will be to match the changing historical versions of internationalism against the successive ideal-types of nationalism to which they could be said historically to correspond, as tracked by five coordinates: 1) the type of capital coeval with, or active in, each successive variant of nationalism; 2) the principal geographical zone of the nationalism in question; 3) its prevalent philosophical idiom; 4) the operative definition of the nation; 5) the relation of the particular

---

<sup>1</sup> The most powerful and original exception is Tom Nairn's 'Internationalism: a Critique', *Faces of Nationalism*, London 1997, pp. 25–45, which deals with its place in the history of socialism.

<sup>2</sup> He was accused of national nihilism by Czech zealots of the pre-war period; after 1914 he changed his position.

<sup>3</sup> *A Singular Modernity*, London 2002 (forthcoming).

nationalism to the dominated classes. The premise of the scheme is that the history of internationalism is best mapped against these coordinates of nationalism. In every period, there has been more than one variety of nationalism and internationalism; and significant conflicts have always existed among, as well as between them. But in this tangled skein, a line of dominants seems nonetheless discernible.

## I

The origins of modern national sentiment as a secular force go back to the eighteenth century. It was then that there erupted the two great revolutions that gave birth to the first ideological conception of the nation, as we understand the term today—the rebellion of the North American colonies against Britain, and the overthrow of absolutism in France. The American and French Revolutions, which effectively invented our idea of the nation as a popular collectivity, were products of societies that were among the most advanced of the time: their ideologies marked a dramatic rupture with the visions of the world that had inspired earlier European revolutions, in the Low Countries in the 16th century and in England in the 17th century, both of them deeply religious uprisings, made in the name of God as much or more than that of the people. The American and French Revolutions occurred, nevertheless, in a world still anterior to the Industrial Revolution; one in which capital continued to be basically commercial or agrarian. Just for that reason, the elites of each were typically capable of mobilizing direct producers in town and country—that is to say, popular masses composed mainly of artisans or cultivators—behind them. There was not yet, as a general social fact, that social chasm between manufacturers and workers which industrial factories would later open up. A single category could notionally embrace all, ascendant and subordinate classes—patriotism. Militants in the struggles of the future United States and in France called themselves ‘patriots’, a term inspired by images and legends of the republics of classical antiquity: Athens, Sparta, Rome.

What was the philosophical idiom of this new patriotism? Famously, it was the characteristic rationalism of the Enlightenment, whose most eloquent spokesmen—Rousseau, Condorcet, Paine, Jefferson—pitted common reason against tradition, a conscious collective will against the inert weight of customs. Hence the ruling definition of the nation in this period was essentially political—that is to say, it was an ideal of

the future, not a legacy of the past. The nation was something that free citizens were going to create: it did not pre-exist their intervention as a perennial fact but would emerge as a new kind of community, based on 'natural' rights rather than 'artificial' privileges or restrictions, in which liberty was to be understood as civic participation in public life in the full sense of the term.

In retrospect, one of the most striking features of this Enlightenment patriotism was its universalism. Typically, it assumed a basic harmony between the interests of civilized nations (uncivilized peoples were another matter), all potentially united in a common struggle against tyranny and superstition. Emblematic of this optimistic rationalism was the argument of Kant's essay, *For a Perpetual Peace*: that rivalry between princes was the only important cause of wars—and that once royal ambitions were a thing of the past, as republican constitutions spread, the peoples of Europe would have no further cause to fight one another. In this era, then, the ideals of patriotism and cosmopolitanism marched together; on the plane of values, there was no contradiction between them. Not only, indeed, on the plane of values but also, in good measure, in lives and actions. It is enough to think of the roles played by Lafayette in both the North American War of Independence and the French Revolution itself; or Paine in Philadelphia and Paris, as pamphleteer for the Thirteen Colonies and deputy for the Gironde in the Convention.<sup>4</sup> Further south, in the zone most affected by the North American and French upheavals, the Liberators of the Wars of Independence in Spanish America—Bolívar, Sucre, San Martín—fought not only for their own native provinces but across a continent, to emancipate distant or neighbouring lands, in a spirit of regional fraternity.

## 2

The Hispano-American cycle of struggles lasted through to the third decade of the 19th century. By then, in Europe itself, patriotism and cosmopolitanism of an Enlightenment stamp had already been snuffed out by the corruption of their ideals in Napoleon's military expansionism. There, the struggle against the First Empire had produced counter-revolutionary versions of each: national resistances to French aggression of conservative or clerical hue in Spain, Germany and Russia, and the

---

<sup>4</sup> Sonthonax assisting Toussaint in Saint Domingue, or Pétion sheltering Bolívar, belong to this company.

international concert of the European monarchies of the Restoration period. These offer the first examples of the series of subdominants that punctuate the sequence of phases to be considered.

But the world reinstated at the Congress of Vienna, and policed by the Holy Alliance, still obeyed older principles. Against *anciens régimes* that continued to be based on dynastic legitimacy and religious faith, there soon arose a new configuration—what we may call for the first time, with no more than a touch of anachronism, ‘nationalism’, as distinct from patriotism.<sup>5</sup> This came into being as an expression of the aspiration of propertied classes to form their own state in a world increasingly dominated by the Industrial Revolution, but in which they found themselves in zones less advanced than the original British epicentre, or its sequels. These were classes bent above all on emulating—that is, on catching up—with the leading industrial states of the day. Hence the storm-zone of this new type of nationalism was Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary. Its rhetorical idiom came from European romanticism, and among its major spokesmen were poets and novelists—the Petöfis, Mickiewiczs, Manzoni of the period. Typically, these introduced a cult of the mediæval or pre-modern past of their own countries, in an intellectual operation that reversed that of the rationalist patriotism which preceded it. For romantic nationalism, the essential definition of the nation was no longer political but cultural, and its touchstone would be language, as the accumulated transcript of the experience of past generations.

The prophet of this vindication of cultural particularity had been Johann Gottfried Herder. But if the romantic nationalism that flowered in Europe between the third and seventh decades of the 19th century inverted many of the signs of an earlier kind of patriotism, it still shared important assumptions with it. In exalting German culture, Herder—who came from the Baltic—did not depreciate neighbouring Slavic culture but, on the contrary, lauded it in its own right as a distinctive legacy. The mental world of romantic nationalism was no longer cosmopolitan, but in valuing cultural diversity as such, it tacitly defended a kind of differentiated universalism. Politically, if its first achievements were the Greek and Belgian Revolutions that broke the peace of the

---

<sup>5</sup> In France, Lamartine could speak of ‘nationalism’ by the mid 1830s—there are echoes in England a decade later—but the term entered general use only in the second half of the century.

Restoration, its most grandiose expression was the ‘Springtime of the Peoples’ in 1848. The chain of revolutionary upheavals that convulsed Europe in that year combined national ferment and international contagion across the continent, with barricades from Paris to Vienna, Berlin to Rome, Milan to Budapest. If in Italy, Germany and Hungary struggles for national unity or independence dominated, 1848 was also, of course, a year of failed liberal revolutions, and of the beginning of revolutionary struggles for socialism, announced by *The Communist Manifesto*.

The overlap was not accidental. For the forms of internationalism that corresponded to romantic nationalism were to find their symbolic home in the First Workingmen’s International. If we ask: what were the social bases of this International—and of the wave of popular urban insurgency in 1848—the answer is pretty clear. They did not lie in any factory proletariat, but overwhelmingly in a pre-industrial artisanate. This was a class in possession of its own means of production—tools and skills; which enjoyed high levels of literacy; was typically located close to the centre of capital cities; and, last but not least, was geographically mobile—a mobility symbolized by the famous tours of young apprentices within or beyond their own countries. In 1848 there were some 30,000 German craftsmen in Paris—Heine said you could hear German spoken on every street corner; in London, Marx and Engels were writing their Manifesto for German artisans working in England; Berlin had its scattering of Polish or Swiss craftsmen, Vienna of Czechs or Italians. Marx was to be flanked by a carpenter and a shoemaker at the founding meeting of the First International. In other words, this was a formation characterized by the paradoxical combination of social racination (including cultural confidence and a sense of high politics) and territorial mobility (including the possibility of a direct experience of living abroad, and sense of solidarity between peoples). Such was the configuration that allowed the passage from national to international struggles, and from international to social struggles, on the barricades of 1848–9. Its exemplary figure was Giuseppe Garibaldi, whose father was a small fisherman, and who began life as a sailor. He was converted to internationalist ideals—his first political conviction—by a group of Saint-Simonian exiles, deported from France in a ship on which he was serving to the Black Sea.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> The sea, element *par excellence* of ferocious proto-national hostilities in the times of Drake, Van Tromp, Duguay-Trouin, had by the 19th century fostered its own maritime international, in a distinctive world peopled by radical sailors and skippers.

Garibaldi became, of course, the great military and political hero of the Roman Republic of 1848, personifying the most generous side of the Italian nationalism of the *Risorgimento*. But after the defeat of the Republic, he fought for a decade as a soldier for progressive causes in Latin America, in Brazil and Uruguay, where he had once served as a sea-captain, before coming back to lead the expedition that liberated Sicily and Calabria from Bourbon rule, clinching national unification in Italy. His career, however, did not stop there. In the 1860s, Lincoln invited him to take up a command in the Northern armies during the American Civil War—a proposition he rejected, rightly suspecting Lincoln's attitude to slavery. On the other hand he accepted the post of General in France, in the defence of the Third Republic against German arms in 1871, and was elected by three French cities to be a deputy in the National Assembly; and after the Paris Commune, publicly adhered to the First International, to the scandal of Mazzini. In the historical figure of Garibaldi, we can see an embodiment of the best values of the European artisanate of this period, in which national and international impulses coexisted without strain.

## 3

From the turn of the 1860s, romantic nationalism was abandoned by the propertied classes that had once espoused or—in the case of Piedmont—manipulated it, as European landowners and businessmen proceeded to complete the last episodes of bourgeois revolution from above, rather than below, with the military regimentation and tight political control that was the hallmark of Bismarck's unification of Germany. Thereafter, the dominant form of nationalism in the West changed abruptly. Now, for the first time, chauvinism proper—long incubating in the social imagination<sup>7</sup>—became a pervasive discourse and atmosphere in the major industrial states: Britain, the United States, France, Germany, Italy. This was the time of politicians like Chamberlain, Ferry, Bülow, McKinley, Crispi. Capital in these countries was becoming increasingly concentrated in larger enterprises, seeking monopolistic control of internal markets or pressing for colonial annexations—the scenario more or less laid out by Hobson and Hilferding. The chauvinism

---

<sup>7</sup> The mythical figure of Nicolas Chauvin, soldier and tiller, swaggering folk-hero of French popular imagination, first surfaced during the Restoration: see Gérard de Puymège, *Chauvin, le soldat-laboureur: contribution à l'étude des nationalismes*, Paris 1993.

that accompanied and secured this new expansionism typically took its vocabulary from social darwinism. Its intellectual idiom was essentially positivist, and its definition of the nation increasingly ethnic—that is to say, a mixture of cultural and physical elements, notably less ideal in register than its predecessor. Declaring relations between peoples to be a ‘survival of the fittest’, this kind of great-power—or would-be great-power—nationalism, of which there were not a few reflections even outside the centre of the system, in the Porfiriato in Mexico or Roca’s rule in Argentina, for the first time preached direct hostility to other nations, or peoples. The chauvinism of the Belle Epoque was an imperialist discourse of superiority.<sup>8</sup> Its functions were twofold. On the one hand, it served to mobilize the population of each state for the intensifying inter-imperialist competition of the period, and for the tasks of colonial conquest. On the other hand, it served to integrate the masses into the political framework of the capitalist order, at a time when the suffrage was beginning to be extended to sectors of the working class. The reigning chauvinism operated to neutralize the risks of that extension of the vote, displacing social tensions from class to national antagonisms. It is no accident that the architects of electoral reform in this period were so often also fomentors of the new jingoism—Disraeli in England, Bismarck in Italy, Giolitti in Italy.

If, on the other hand, we ask what was the dominant form of internationalism in this phase, the answer permits little doubt—it was to be found in the Second International of socialist parties.<sup>9</sup> This was the first time that we see a form of internationalism directly opposed to the dominant type of nationalism—no longer complementary to it, as in the past, but antithetical. Viewed from afar, this International was a much more impressive structure than its predecessor, embracing more parties, more members, more real industrial workers. But appearances proved

---

<sup>8</sup> Galvanizing, of course, the national movements against it that form the most significant subdominant of the period between the Commune and the First World War: Al-Uraby’s revolt in Egypt, Committee of Union and Progress in Turkey, Constitutional Revolution in Persia, Boxers in China, Katipunan in the Philippines.

<sup>9</sup> In some respects Anarchism offered a more radical brand of internationalism within the labour movement of this period, as the example of the IWW in America testifies, but it remained sociologically weaker. On the other side of the barricades, the Catholic Church under Pio Nono rallied the faithful to resist secular nationalism as well as socialism, in a clerical mobilization that would eventually issue into Christian Democracy. At this stage, however, it was still accessory as a force.

deceptive. In reality, the change in social base of the new conglomerate did not strengthen it as an International. For the new industrial proletariats of the time were typically defined by a constellation of features whose symmetry was structurally less propitious for resistance to the doctrines of the state than that of the European artisanate at mid-century. In their large majority, the new workers were parked in factories and mines in the provinces, far from the political capitals of their countries—the North of England or France, the *Ruhrgebiet* in Germany. They possessed no means of production of their own; and they lacked the levels of culture and traditions of combativity of the older artisanate. Their basic situation could be defined as the very opposite of that of their predecessors: a combination of territorial immobility and social deracination. The result was a much deeper and more effective purchase of imperialism—with its projections of an imaginary community formed by the nation as a great power—on wide swathes of this class than Marx or any socialist of the previous generation had imagined. The consequence of this fatal grip was the mixture of popular passivity and enthusiasm that greeted the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. When hostilities started, the socialist parties of Western Europe, betraying—with the exception of the Italian—their most solemn promises, threw themselves into the mutual carnage of their peoples. The historical roots of this rush to slaughter lay not in the mere decisions—ignominious as they were—of the leaders of these parties, but in the social conformation of the young proletariats of the epoch.

## 4

If the outbreak of the inter-imperialist conflict buried the pretensions of the Second International, the end of the War once more redefined the ascending forms of both nationalism and internationalism. Amidst economic depressions and crises without precedent, capital moved towards yet more advanced forms of concentration; now, however, no longer in a context of international free trade and long-term boom but rather of recession, protection and autarky. In this conjuncture, the geographical zone that produced the dominant type of nationalism was located in the defeated or disappointed powers of the First World War—that is, Germany, Italy, Austro-Hungary, Japan. Here the emergent force was fascism. Borrowing its idiom, not from positivism, but from forms of modern irrationalism—Sorel or Gentile in Italy, Nietzsche in Germany, the doctrines of *kokutai* in Japan—fascism eventually came

to define the nation as a biological community: race as such. With this, reduction in the ideal content of the nation was brutally complete. In this sense, fascism was an imperialist chauvinism raised to a higher power—unleashing a reactionary fanaticism without precedent. Again, its function was twofold. Firstly, it served to mobilize the subordinate classes against the capitalist victors of the First World War for a second round of inter-imperialist competition, in which the once defeated or frustrated would this time be victorious. In this sense, its ideological leitmotifs were compensation and revenge. At the same time, it functioned as a super-charged mechanism for containment of the masses in countries where parliamentary democracy had fallen into an irreversible crisis and large parts of the working class were moving towards a revolutionary socialism. The two functions were closely inter-connected, since it was defeat or disappointment in the First World War that at once undermined the stability of capitalist democracy, rendering necessary a recourse to counter-revolutionary coercion, and made redoubled preparations necessary for a continental sequel. The project came near to succeeding. By the end of 1941 all Europe from the Channel to the Baltic was integrated into the fascist order, while in the Far East Japan dominated an even vaster space. Nor was the attraction of fascism confined to these zones: in Latin America, the three most important political experiences of the time—the *Estado Novo* in Brazil, the emergence of Peronism in Argentina, the beginnings of the MNR in Bolivia—were all drawn into its magnetic field.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, if the chauvinism bred by capital had radicalized into fascism, so too had radicalized—in the opposite direction—the internationalism of labour. In one country, the moral collapse of the European labour movement had been avoided. In 1917, workers and soldiers led by the Bolshevik Party carried out a socialist revolution in Russia. The regime that emerged from this upheaval was the first and only state in history to include no national or territorial reference in its name—it would simply be the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, without designated place or people. That is to say, the intention of its founders was unconditionally internationalist. Soon afterwards, the Bolshevik leaders set up the Third International to coordinate the action of the new Communist parties that had sprung into being across the world,

---

<sup>10</sup> Asian examples of its appeal include the Lebanese Falange; the Golden Square in Iraq; the RSS in India; the Blue-Shirts in China; in Africa, the Broederbond; in America, at the other end of the spectrum, Garveyism.

fired by example of the Russian Revolution.<sup>11</sup> The contrast with the Second International would be dramatic. In Europe, the parties of the Comintern showed an iron discipline in their rejection of any form of local nationalism, and capacity to resist the pressures of the dominant classes in their own states, born of the terrible lessons that the First World War had taught a generation of working-class militants.

In the USSR itself, however, Stalin's victory within the CPSU, based on the promise that it would be possible to build 'socialism in one country', crystallized a new form of nationalism, specific to the autocracy rapidly being constructed by the Soviet Union. In short order the activities of the Third International were utterly subordinated to the interests of the Soviet state, as Stalin interpreted them. The upshot was the arresting phenomenon, without equivalent before or since, of an internationalism equally deep and deformed, at once rejecting any loyalty to its own country and displaying a limitless loyalty to another state. Its epic was played out by the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War, shadowed by Comintern emissaries—Codovilla, Togliatti, Gerö, Vidali and others—recruited from across all Europe and the Americas. With its mixture of heroism and cynicism, selfless solidarity and murderous terror, this was an internationalism perfected and perverted as never before.

The decisive test of the Third International came soon afterwards, with the outbreak of the Second World War. At that juncture the Communist Parties of France, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway—all countries attacked by Nazi Germany—refused to support their own governments, contending that the conflict was once again merely an inter-imperialist contest and so of no interest to the masses. Few positions could have been more unpopular and politically mistaken, given that the working class had every interest in defending representative democracy against fascism. Yet the stance of these parties also showed all the distance between the Third and Second Internationals. Two years later, Hitler invaded the USSR. Thereupon the Communist Parties in Europe threw themselves into the battle against Nazism, soon playing a leading role in the Resistance at the head of mass movements fighting against German occupation, as their counterparts in China and Korea were already doing against Japanese expansion. In the new

---

<sup>11</sup> Pitted against Lenin's internationalism was, of course, the version offered by Wilson—short-lived as a challenge to it, amid the vindictive reparations clauses at Versailles and the fiasco of the League of Nations.

situation, there was no longer any contradiction between what they saw as their international duty to help the motherland of socialism and their national duty to take up arms against the *Wehrmacht*—the two formed a single task, which they accomplished with general *éclat*. At the height of these battles, Stalin suddenly announced the dissolution of the Third International, officially on the grounds that it had become an anachronism, in reality to propitiate his allies Britain and America. With this act, a long historical cycle came to a close. The defeat of fascism and the end of the Second World War would set in train radical transformations both of nationalism and of internationalism, now no longer confined to Europe but extended to all parts of the world.

## 5

So far, analysis has perforce focused on the geographical zones of Europe and North America—not by reason of any special virtue of these lands, but because of the determinant role of Western capitalism in the history of the world in that long span which stretches from the American and French Revolutions to the Great Depression and the Second World War. After 1945, this changes radically. Now, finally, the larger part of humanity enters the stage as a central force. As it does so, in the new phase that opens in 1945 and runs till, let us say, 1965, there occurs a sudden, spectacular exchange in the respective relations of capital and labour to nationalism and internationalism. In retrospect, we can see that this was one of the great watersheds of the twentieth century. Hitherto the dominant forms of nationalism—from the noblest ambitions of Enlightenment patriotism to the most criminal inhumanities of fascism—were always an expression of the propertied classes, while from the 19th century onwards the corresponding forms of internationalism—whatever their vices or limits—were an expression of the labouring classes. After 1945, this double connexion—capital/the national, labour/the international—capsizes. Nationalism becomes predominantly a popular cause, of exploited and destitute masses, in an intercontinental revolt against Western colonialism and imperialism. Internationalism, at the same stroke, starts to change camps—assuming new forms in the ranks of capital. This was to be a fateful mutation.

The new type of nationalism that became dominant on a world scale after 1945 was anti-imperialism, and its principal geographical zones

were Asia, Africa and Latin America. What were its structural traits? Socially, it was much more heterogeneous than the successive forms of nationalism in Europe. The movements of national liberation that now swept the Third World were led by a wide gamut of social classes. There were cases where the local bourgeoisie dominated the whole process—India was the most important. In others, middle classes without much prior accumulation of capital took the lead, using the movement to raise themselves into a true bourgeoisie after winning power, as had earlier happened in Mexico or Turkey. A more precarious and volatile variant of this pattern occurred in a good number of African countries, where the nationalist movement was led by bureaucrats or officers of the colonial state itself. In still other cases, intellectuals of lower-middle-class origin came to the top, as in Indonesia. If any single group can be traced throughout the motley cadres of this great arc of upheavals, it might be rural school-teachers. Last, but not least, there were also those cases where Communist parties captured the leadership of the movement for national liberation, propelling it to outright revolutions against capital, as in China or Vietnam. In Cuba there was a mixture of this and the preceding variant.

What was the intellectual idiom of post-war anti-imperialism? It was syncretistic. Just as there was no social uniformity in the leadership of the different movements of national liberation, so its ideological expressions were hybrid and variegated—at the limit, capable of drawing on rationalist, romantic, positivist and irrationalist currents of thought all at the same time. Kemalism in Turkey, Sukarnism in Indonesia, the composite ideology bequeathed successively by Obregón, Calles and Cárdenas in Mexico, were exemplary in this regard. Combinations or recapitulations of earlier doctrines abounded. The most distinctive feature of this anti-imperialism, however, was its capacity to make use not merely of ideologemes of diverse origin within the parameters of classical bourgeois thought, but also of systems of belief either prior to the Enlightenment or posterior to capitalism—that is to say, religion on the one hand and socialism on the other. Late examples of the first would include the Iranian Revolution; of the second, Sandinism in Nicaragua. What was the mass basis of this anti-imperialism? Numerically its most important component were peasants. This was true above all of the Communist revolutions of the period—China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia in the European periphery itself. These were upheavals qualitatively distinct from the October Revolution to which they looked back. For all triumphed under

the banner of the nation, whereas the Russian Revolution in the hour of its victory had been exempt from any nationalist connotation.

What was happening meanwhile in the camp of capital? There the new situation created after 1945 could be defined roughly as follows. Firstly, with the end of the Second World War, the United States occupied a position within the capitalist world that no state had ever before enjoyed. Germany, Japan and Italy were defeated and ruined, Britain and France impoverished and weakened. The US dominated the universe of capital far more decisively than Britain had ever done in the 19th century. Secondly, there was no longer only one state—Russia—in which capitalism had been overthrown. Out of the vortex of the War had emerged a vast belt of countries where private ownership of the means of production had been abolished—in half of Europe and a third of Asia. A Communist bloc on a world scale now appeared to threaten the existence of capitalism. In these conditions, capital suddenly discovered an internationalism of its own. National conflicts between capitalist states—which had provoked two world wars—were stilled. The existence of a single hegemonic power made possible an international coordination of their interests; the existence of the Communist bloc made it necessary.<sup>12</sup>

The result was a process of commercial, ideological and strategic unification that began with the monetary accords of Bretton Woods, continued with the Marshall and Dodge Plans for the reconstruction of Europe and Japan, issued in the creation of NATO and the setting up of GATT, and culminated in the birth of the European Economic Community, with US encouragement. The trajectory of this growing international integration passed from the generalized restoration of free trade to the beginnings of an outright supersession of national sovereignty in the European Common Market. This was a dramatic inversion of the tendencies that had prevailed in the inter-war period—something without precedent in the history of capitalism. If we wanted a term, we could provisionally

---

<sup>12</sup> The forms of Communist internationalism that persisted after the dissolution of the Third International, tighter but more brittle than Western unity, helped to cement it. Obedience to the international centre in Moscow was still the rule as long as Stalin lived; under Khrushchev, who could rely on no such reflexes, half-hearted attempts were made to reconstitute formal conferences of fraternal parties, abandoned soon after he fell. In the Third World, the Bandung Conference led to the creation of a Non-Aligned Movement that remained more shadow than substance.

describe it as a supra-nationalism, in the double sense of the position of the United States above all other nations, and of the emergence of the European Community above the states of Western Europe.

A key consequence of this change was a shift, within the reigning ideology of the advanced capitalist states, from the nation state to liberal democracy as the dominant means of discursive integration of the labouring classes of the West. The official ideology of the West during the period of the Cold War no longer gave pride of place to defence of the nation—supreme value right down to and through the Second World War, on all sides—but rather to an exaltation of the Free World. This change coincided with the generalization and effective consolidation, for the first time, of a representative democracy based on universal suffrage as the modal type of capitalist state in the advanced countries—a phenomenon which dates essentially to the 1950s.

## 6

From the mid-60s onwards, this configuration underwent a significant alteration, as a series of structural changes modified the relations between states and markets across the advanced capitalist world. Once post-war reconstruction was complete, the German, French, Italian and above all Japanese economies grew much faster than the American, and by the mid 70s the Bretton Woods system had passed away. At the same time, the weight of multinational corporations, typically based in one state but extending their operations across the frontiers of many, had become ever more powerful and invasive, rendering earlier forms of control by national authorities over the processes of accumulation increasingly precarious. Subsequently, and yet more decisively, financial markets interlocked into vast circuits of intercontinental investment and speculation, beyond the reach of any traditional mechanisms of domestic regulation. Thus the return to strength of German or Japanese capitalism did not signal any reversion to the acute inter-imperialist conflicts of the inter-war period. Far from any slide back to the world of the tariff walls and the arms race, the major capitalist states now moved to higher levels of policy coordination, beyond those of the post-war period. The European Community advanced towards a single market, and eventually a single currency, even acquiring a weak parliament. The US, Japan and other powers multiplied meetings and agreements to facilitate joint management of the ups and downs of

the world capitalist economy. By the late seventies, the hour of the G7 had struck. Something like Kautsky's vision of 'ultra-imperialism' had come to pass.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, we might term this type of internationalism, characteristic of capital in the last decades of the 20th century, transnationalism, to suggest its difference from the kind that preceded it. Transnational in the double sense, firstly, of the institutional bonds that now tied the three principal zones of capital, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, into a single compact; and secondly, in the ascent of new forms of intercontinental enterprise and financial speculation, escaping classic state boundaries. Ideologically, the official discourse of the period did not abandon, but reinforced, the primacy of democratic over national values—rendering these, indeed, more plausible with a remote-controlled democratization of Mediterranean dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece, regimes which had flagrantly contradicted the rhetoric of the Free World in the previous phase.

Meanwhile, outside the advanced capitalist zone itself, anti-imperialism had lost impetus, ceasing to constitute the dominant form of nationalism by the 70s. Major battles were still fought. But the long-deferred victory of the Vietnamese Revolution and dissolution of the Portuguese empire, when they came, appeared like epilogues to an earlier time. In the larger part of Africa and Asia, decolonization was an accomplished fact; in Latin America, Cuban attempts to break out of isolation had failed. Struggles for national liberation continued in South Africa, Palestine, Central America, but they no longer had the same global significance. Another and quite distinct sort of nationalism now took front stage. The large Communist bloc that emerged after the War out of the struggle against fascism in Eurasia was made up of quite distinct historical components. In most of Eastern Europe—Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, East Germany—Stalin imposed communist regimes from above, by military pressure, creating a ring of client states answering to the interests and instructions of the USSR. In Yugoslavia, Albania, China and Vietnam, on the other hand, indigenous revolutions were victorious, creating fully independent Communist states. All were led, however, by parties deeply formed—in doctrine and discipline—by the Stalinized Third International.

---

<sup>13</sup> For Kautsky's original conception, see the text of 'Ultra-Imperialism', NLR 1/59, January–February 1970, pp. 41–46. Its correspondence to the realities of inter-capitalist coordination by the seventies is noted by the principal liberal theorist of the new regime, Robert Keohane: *After Hegemony*, Princeton 1984, p. 43.

The founding ideology of Stalinism—the doctrine of ‘socialism in one country’—had nourished an unconditional loyalty to the Soviet Union when these parties were still struggling for power as persecuted and prohibited organizations. But once in power, the same doctrine—logically and ironically—produced its very opposite, a sharp conflict with the Soviet Union as each non-Russian party acquired its own state. In effect, the sacred national egoism practised by Stalin now became generalized—often, of course, also provoked by the arrogance of Stalin and his successors. The result was an ever more accelerated disintegration of the internationalism of the classical Communist movement, as Communist states multiplied. First Yugoslavia entered into conflict with the Soviet Union; then Albania with Yugoslavia—already in the late 40s. Next the conflict between Russia and China exploded in the early 60s, escalating into armed border clashes between the two powers, permanently destroying any chance of unity in the Communist world. Then, in a further twist of the spiral, outright wars broke out between successive Communist states—fighting between Vietnam and Cambodia, fighting between China and Vietnam. By the second half of the 70s, it was obvious that the dominant form of nationalism in the world had become the fratricidal fissiparity of Communism.<sup>14</sup>

What were the historical roots of this clamant involution of Leninist traditions, in stark contrast with the contemporary evolution of capitalist states? Two inter-connected forces were fundamental. Firstly, and most obviously, within the replicated framework of ‘socialism in one country’, the forces of production in the Communist states—starting out at a much lower level than in the West—never had any chance of catching up with the advanced capitalist economies, which enjoyed commercial and industrial cross-connexions completely lacking in the Eastern bloc. Technologically and organizationally, forces of production there never surmounted national frontiers, leaving average productivity of labour in the USSR, for example, at about two-fifths of West German or French levels. In other words, the persistence of bureaucratic nationalism in the Communist world was materially rooted in forces of production that were objectively less internationalized than those of the capitalist world. This nationalism in turn blocked any chance of overcoming the lag. The

---

<sup>14</sup> The signal exception was Cuba, whose aid to revolutionary and national liberation movements, from Nicaragua to Angola, offers the most striking internationalist counter-current of the period.

pitiful withering of COMECON, in comparison with the flowering of the Common Market in Europe, was a direct outcome.

What was happening in the political and ideological superstructures erected over these cramped economic bases? In the advanced capitalist countries, the decline of nationalism corresponded to the rise of liberal democracy as a superior legitimation of the social order, and as mechanism for integrating the population into it. But in the Communist countries no socialist democracy existed: political life was completely expropriated by the dominant bureaucracies. In this situation, the regimes in place had ever greater recourse to nationalism as a surrogate for integrating the masses into the political framework of their rule. For, as Marx well understood, the nation can always function as an imaginary community that compensates for the lack of real liberty or equality of its members. In this sense, the fissiparity of the Communist world in these years was also a direct product of the suppression of popular sovereignty in the states in question. The absence of any free association of the producers led with a fatal logic to the envenomed nationalism of inter-Communist conflicts.

For a period, this was a surrogate that more or less functioned in Russia, China, Yugoslavia, Albania or Vietnam, where the ruling parties had made autochthonous revolutions and defeated invaders in the past, giving the states they had created a claim to national validity. In the majority of East European countries, on the other hand, the Communist regimes lacked any such legitimacy. Although they too tried to play the national card—Romania is the most notorious example—they had no credibility for it. Imposed under threat from the Red Army in 1945, they were held in place only by repeated military interventions from the USSR thereafter—in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968. To the lack of any popular democracy was here super-added a thorough-going humiliation of national sentiment—and in the Communist zone closest to the dynamism of the capitalist economies, and so most capable of measuring the distance between the two. In Eastern Europe, the earthquake of 1989 was long prepared. Its aftershocks then destabilized the two contiguous states, historically more legitimate, but both multi-national federations—the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Each was pulled into a dynamic of irresistible disintegration, with the awakening of successive separatisms amidst deepening economic and political crisis. Today, at the beginning of a new century, what

is the most salient form of nationalism in the world?<sup>5</sup> In all probability, it might seem, the type of conflict whose pattern has been set by the post-Communist secessions, but which extend far into the post-colonial world itself: from the Balkans to the Caucasus, the Horn of Africa to the Great Lakes, Kashmir to Mindanao.

## 7

If that is so, what is the dominant form of internationalism today? In the most recent of its metamorphoses to date we are, with the disappearance of the Soviet bloc, for the first time in the presence of a truly global hegemon, as the United States reaches a pinnacle of power beyond the dreams of any other state in history. Internationalism, in conventional parlance, traditionally had as its opposite some version—however conceived—of nationalism. In the US, however, from early in this century the term internationalism acquired a pregnantly different antonym: here its opposite was isolationism. The antithesis of the two terms—internationalism/isolationism—makes clear their common presupposition: at stake was never the primacy of national interest, which formed the common ground of both, but simply the best way of realizing it. The historical origin of the couplet lies in the peculiar combination created by the American ideology of a republic simultaneously exceptional and universal: unique in the good fortune of its institutions and endowments, and exemplary in the power of its radiation and attraction.<sup>15</sup> This is a janus-faced messianism, allowing either for a fervent cult of the homeland or for a missionary redemption of the world—or, in more realist style, of diplomatic admixtures of the two. Internationalism has always had an honoured place in the dualist vocabulary of this tradition. In practice, it has typically operated as little more than a self-satisfied codeword for forward policies to be pursued by the American state at large. Just as isolationism never meant the slightest derogation from the Monroe Doctrine, the Olney Declaration or the Platt

---

<sup>15</sup> The notion of the US as something other than a nation-state now has its versions on the Left, where the juridical matrix of the American constitution and the ethnic mosaic of immigration are conceived as synoptic of an emergent global catallaxy. For a critique in depth of this idealizing conception, see Gopal Balakrishnan, 'Virgilian Visions', *NLR* 5, September–October 2000, pp. 142–48, who in more Machiavellian vein suggests a political system geared for unlimited expansion, combining old-fashioned force with economic, cultural and demographic neutralization or negation of all other power centres.

Amendment—that is, sovereign US command over the Western hemisphere—so, from the outset, internationalism in this American sense simply meant the readiness and will to extend US power to Eurasia: Wilson’s interventions, starting in Mexico and ending in Russia, setting its logic from the start.

For the better part of a century, this sense of internationalism remained an idiosyncratic domestic locution, of little interest outside US borders, where robuster terms could be found for what its practice represented. Today, however, in the absence of any alternative or countervailing power, American hegemony has for the first time been able to impose its self-description as a global norm. With the UN as a fig leaf, a compliant regime funded in Russia, troops in Germany and Japan, an off-shore protectorate in China, bases in a dizzying array of client states,<sup>16</sup> and fire power several times that of potential rivals combined, the will of the United States has been rebaptized with a euphemism worthy of the co-prosperity sphere. Today its synonym is simply—nothing less than—the ‘international community’ itself, without reference to which no unctuous speech by the UN Secretary General, arrogant communiqué from NATO, sententious editorial in the *New York Times*, *Le Monde* or the *Guardian*, not to speak of every reassuring nightly newscast is today complete. Internationalism in this sense is no longer coordination of the major capitalist powers under American dominance against a common enemy, the negative task of the Cold War, but an affirmative ideal—the reconstruction of the globe in the American image, *sans phrases*. The tattered if victorious flag of the Free World has been lowered. In its place the banner of human rights has been erected—that is, first and foremost, the right of the international community to blockade, to bomb, to invade peoples or states that displease it: Cuba, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq—and to nourish, finance, and arm states that appeal to it: Turkey, Israel, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan. As for Chechens, Palestinians, Tutsi, Sahrawi, Nuer and still lesser breeds, most without even a state, charity—as Clinton’s National Security Adviser Samuel Berger had occasion to remark—cannot, after all, be ubiquitous.

Resistances to the new dispensation still appear, for the most part, as chaff in the wind. Nationally, European allies intermittently shuffle their

---

<sup>16</sup> ‘On any given day before September 11, according to the Defense Department, more than 60,000 military personnel were conducting temporary operations and exercises in about 100 countries’: *Los Angeles Times*, 6 January 2002.

feet at excessive American 'unilateralism'—essentially, discomfiting failures to go through the motions of diplomatic consultation that have traditionally served as a cover for their subordination; from time to time Russia and China bargain weakly over their favours in the Security Council. Internationally, Islamic fundamentalism and Catholic post-integrism muster as residual place-holders for alternative forms of life, notionally less captive to the world of consumption. The movements gathered at Porto Alegre flicker as an emergent diaspora of social opposition, whose outlines have yet to be drawn. Meanwhile, we shelter under the skies of infinite justice and enduring freedom. But if it is possible to regret the days, not so long ago, when the civilization of capital went its way with less sanctimony, there is no reason to suppose that this is the end of the road for what might be meant by internationalism. Its history is full of ironies, zig-zags, surprises. It is unlikely we have seen the last of them.