

Patriotism and Internationalism

The word 'nationalism' is used as a synonym for both patriotism, and chauvinism or jingoism.

The linking of that word with socialism by Hitler was an example of how two words, both of which were highly emotive in their own right in the Germany of the 1920s and 30s, could be joined together to become a powerful banner around which to unite the German people.

The resurgence of nationalism on the territory of the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe since the collapse of those 'socialist' states provide other examples of how nationalist sentiments can be used for reactionary ends. The vicious civil war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia has, in the minds of many people, served to confirm the view that nationalist sentiments are deplorable and politically reactionary.

Progressive people in imperialist countries have always been aware of how patriotism has been used to serve reactionary ends, but it must also be remembered that it has also been used to mobilise people for just causes.

One example was Winston Churchill's famous speech, ("We will fight them on the beaches"); another was how the Soviet government mobilised the people of Russia under the slogan of Patriotic War. Another was the slogan used by the Communist Party of China to mobilise the Chinese people against Japanese invaders, and yet another, how patriotism unified the people of Viet Nam in their struggle against French and American aggression.

Patriotism is not only about defending the territorial integrity of the nation, it is also about being proud of the contributions that it has made to the development of human culture.

Patriotism springs from a sense of common identity and what are perceived to be common interests, but it also has a class content which is revealed when one asks the question, which class represents the interests of the nation? (the mass of the people).

Bourgeois 'patriotism' is jingoistic because bourgeois relationships are inherently antagonistic. It is used to mobilise the mass of the people to take the side of their own capitalist class when it is in conflict with the bourgeoisie of other countries.

In retrospect it can be seen that those on the left of the political spectrum in the imperialist countries have allowed the capitalist class to go unchallenged as the patriotic class, the defender of the nation.

The Left have deserted the ideological battlefield by denigrating the whole concept of patriotism.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE.

The domestic struggle of oppressed against oppressor takes place within the context of the already existing, historically developed culture, which is itself partly a product of earlier class struggles. As a consequence, the oppressor classes have their heroes, and the oppressed have theirs. On occasions we have a common hero because throughout history there are periods in which the rulers actually, even if momentarily, represented the interests of the whole nation.

For example, Chaucer played a key part in re-establishing Anglo-Saxon as the language of the people of England, therefore he is honoured by all classes of the population.

Thomas More is honoured by socialists, not because he was an Archbishop of Canterbury, but because he placed himself on the side of the oppressed, those who were, in his day, being driven from the land so that it could be turned over to sheep farming. He wrote Utopia, a book which not only condemned the evictions, but also painted a picture of a land in which poverty had been abolished.

We honour Wat Tyler, John Ball, Jack Straw, and others who led peasant revolts, and the soldiers who took part in the Putney debates during the English civil war. They helped Cromwell create his New Model Army for the purpose of establishing a republic, but refused to serve when he invaded Ireland. We honour the Chartists, who led the struggle to make the franchise universal, the Tolpuddle Martyrs and others who fought for the right of workers to combine in their own interests, the feminist movement epitomised by women like Annie Besant and the Pankhursts. We pay homage to those who fought against conscription during the first world war and against imperialist attempts to crush the newly formed Soviet state. We honour the pioneers of the Shop Stewards Movement and those who organised the mass trespasses during the 1930s which challenged the right of big landowners to deny access on foot to 'their' land.

These movements, and the rights which resulted from them represent the national tradition of which we have a right to be proud.

Those 'left wingers' who try to disassociate themselves from 'the nation', also disassociate themselves from that part of our

culture which belongs to us.

Although European culture in general has its origins in ancient Greece, national variations have occurred as a result of the differing historical experience of its peoples.

As a consequence, the form which the class struggle takes varies from country to country, therefore the people of each country must find their own road to socialism.

The saying that 'workers have no country' is only true in the sense that they do not own the land and other means of production, but nations exist and the working class is part of the nation.

Each successive ruling class has made its contribution to the cultural development of the nation, and the working class must also place its own unique cultural stamp on the culture of our nation if socialism is to have its roots in the people.

THE NATIONAL STATE.

The national state, or the so-called nation state, represents the interests of a particular class within the nation, but in order to gain political power, that class must make it appear as though its own class interests are synonymous with those of the nation, (the majority of the people), as a whole. Indeed, as Marx observes, each ruling class in history has, for a short period of time, actually been representative of the interests of the nation. But once it gains power it creates the conditions for a new social division of labour and hence for the emergence of a new class or classes whose interests are contradictory to its own.

From then on it ceases to represent the interests of the nation as a whole.

The interests of the rising capitalist class coincided with the interests of the nation because they demanded a colossal expansion of the productive forces of society. The bourgeois democratic state, the best framework in which they could expand the productive forces, marked a great social and political advance, a fact that was recognised by both Marx and Engels.

The interests of the capitalist class came to be regarded as synonymous with the interests of the nation.

Now, powerful sections of the capitalist class in European countries express the view that the concept of nation and nationality is out of date, and that the national interest must be subordinate to 'the broader European interest'.

In this respect they are reflecting the interests of the

European-based transnational corporations and finance houses which need an expanded internal market so as to grow strong enough to challenge, on an international scale, those that are based in the U.S. and Japan.

The logic of this position is that European capital must also present a united political front to the rest of the world, i.e. political decisions must be made at a European rather than a national level.

It is by no means certain that this idea of a united Europe will ever come to fruition, but the working class should oppose this attempt to form a European imperialist bloc, for that is what it amounts to.

The resistance to full economic and political integration put up by the British ruling class reflects its fear that such a Europe will be dominated by the German capitalist class, an outcome that could not possibly benefit the British working class, or that of other countries for that matter.

In that respect, the interests of those sections of the British ruling class which are opposed to further European integration coincide with the interests of the British working class, therefore, on that issue, there is a need for the working class to support the 'Euro-sceptics', while at the same time becoming more resolute in the struggle to protect the interests of the international working class against the depredations of British capital.

Both europhiles and eurosceptics agree on the necessity of internationalising trade and competing with each other to reduce labour costs by increasing competition between workers on an international scale.

Capitalist internationalism is for the purpose of intensifying its exploitation of the workers in every country by increasing the competition between them on an international scale, and the reason for this is quite clear - capitalism can continue to expand only as long as it can keep costs falling at a faster rate than prices on a world scale.

Working class internationalism springs from the recognition that the working people of all lands have a common interest in creating a world in which the exploitation of man by man no longer exists.

COMMAND STRUCTURES.

The activities of each transnational corporation and financial institution is directed by a very small group of managers who have

absolute power to make decisions that are untrammelled by governments and shareholders alike. They have the power to conduct their activities like military operations.

The working class cannot hope to achieve that kind of command structure on a national, let alone an international scale. Any notion that workers can establish, on an international scale, the degree of ideological and organisational unity necessary to counter, head on, the machinations of international capital is idealist in the extreme.

That is a matter of realism, not defeatism. It is the preference for idealistic 'solutions' to practical problems that gives rise to disillusionment and defeatism.

Although the activities of individual corporations are conducted like military operations, the relations between them are inherently antagonistic, and it is for the workers of each country to exploit the contradictions between international capitals as best they can, and cooperate when and where the opportunity arises.

There is an obvious need for the working class of each country to learn from the experience of others and, where appropriate, draw general conclusions, but the idea of a central directing body which can dictate policy, strategy, or tactics to national units is impractical for the simple reason that experience has shown that it does not work.

The general rule should be that the working class of each country should refuse to be drawn into imperialist adventures by its own capitalist class. That is the best kind of support that can be given to the workers of other countries, other than aid projects for specific purposes.

THE EUROPEAN UNION.

For all the high minded aims ascribed to the conception by most of the establishment politicians, it is an imperialist bloc in the process of creation.

It represents a recognition by European-based capitals, that if they are to survive in the face of competition from the U.S., and an Asian bloc led by Japan, then contradictions between themselves must be moderated through some form of regulation so that competition will be on the basis of 'a level playing field'; hence the Social Chapter.

Laws which limit the length of the working day and year, set a minimum hourly rate of pay, lay down safety regulations in the workplace, and minimum environmental standards, all need to be

supported and improved upon. But concessions 'from above' carry with them the danger of weakening the resolve of the working class to carry through the struggle on its own behalf through mass actions, by strengthening the legalistic tendencies that are encouraged by the majority of trade union leaders and social democrats.

The British T.U.C., which was initially opposed to membership of the EEC, changed its stance in order, so it thought, to bring the provisions of the Social Chapter into British law without the necessity for industrial struggle. When the Tory Government opted out of the Social Chapter the TUC limited itself to name calling instead of mobilising workers to demand that those provisions within it which could be of benefit to the working class be incorporated into British law. In this way they could have both had the cake and eaten it, they could have distanced themselves from the European integrationists while using the provisions contained in the Social Chapter as a focus for struggle against the Tory government.

On a world scale, large scale capital in the US, Europe, and Japan aim to regulate competition between them in ways which will enable them collectively to increase their exploitation of the world's peoples, hence their desperation to conclude the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, (GATT).

The more that international trade is integrated in its present pattern, the less possibility there will be that the working class in any individual country will be able to become the dominant class in that society. Therefore priority must be given to disrupting the present pattern of international trade so as to allow each country more freedom of action in determining its own economic priorities.

The struggle for national independence and the right of all countries to self-determination was smothered by the joint efforts of Western and Soviet imperialism, and weakened by the victory of the capitalist-roaders in China, but the objective need for such a struggle still exists and it should not be baulked just because it is difficult.

Although it may seem paradoxical, working class internationalism can best be expressed by the workers in each country striving to make their country as economically self-reliant as possible, and providing mutual assistance to each other to achieve that end.

This aim falls short of establishing socialism in one country, but it will benefit the working class world wide if the conditions

can be created in which the workers in each country are better able to influence their own conditions of life so that they can move towards socialism in accordance with their own historically determined conditions and traditions.