

ALBANIA

ARABIA

ZIMBABWE

MANN

KURDISTAN

WALES

BASQUE

SCOTLAND

STALIN'S  
"DEFINITION"

BENGAL

OF A

NATION

BRITANNY

IRELAND

(Theoretical basis of "left"

Great-National Chauvinism)

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## STALIN'S DEFINITION OF A NATION

"A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture".

Marxism and The National Question. by J.V.Stalin.

"I think that every popular revolution, if it really is a popular revolution, is a constructive revolution, for it breaks up the old system and constructs, creates a new one. Of course, there is nothing constructive in such revolutions - if they may be called that - as take place say, in Albania, in the form of comic opera "risings" of tribe against tribe. But Marxists never regarded such comic opera "risings" as revolutions. We are obviously not referring to such "risings", but to a mass popular revolution in which the oppressed classes rise up against the oppressing classes". Interview - given to the First American Labour Delegation, by J.V.Stalin September 9th 1927.

When J.V.Stalin spoke the last paragraph Albania had revived its language, carried through a revolution of national liberation in 1912 and a bourgeois-democratic revolution in 1924.

There are some comrades in Britain who like to counterpose the words of Stalin to the actual situation in a given country; to whom books, statements, periodicals etc. are more real than what is staring them in the face.

Albania achieved national liberation after hundreds of years of enslavement, restored its national language and is now building a socialist society. For this we can be thankful that the Albanian comrades did not take J.V.Stalin's opinion of Albania too seriously.

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Lenin and Stalin's writings both exhibit a very positive attitude towards the right of nations to self-determination. Lenin, it is true, says "Given united action by the Great-Russian and Ukrainian proletarians, a free Ukraine is possible; without such unity, it is out of the question". Today, thanks to Chairman Mao Tse-tung, we realise that peoples' war by an oppressed nation can succeed even in face of opposition from the proletariat of the oppressing nation.

What concerns us now, however, is a particularly nasty hypocritical manoeuvre by Great-nation chauvinists who pretend, of course, to be all in favour of the rights of nations to self-determination. They then proceed to argue that Wales, Scotland, Cornwall, Bengal, Brittany, Quebec etc. are not nations. To justify their stand they make a joint appeal to the words of Stalin and to the narrow chauvinist prejudices of the English, French, Canadian or Pakistani people.

Sometimes the chauvinists proudly point out that only 25% of the Welsh speak Welsh. Since the English ruling class have spent nearly

400 years of oppression trying to kill the Welsh language, it is remarkable that it exists at all, and a great tribute to the resilience of the Welsh people and the strength of the Welsh character and culture.

One of the methods adopted was to force Welsh parents to send their children to English-speaking schools. If a teacher heard a child speak Welsh he made him wear a wooden collar called the Welsh Not. The child could only get rid of this by passing it on to another child who was heard speaking Welsh, even in the playground. Whoever was wearing the Welsh Not at the end of the day received a beating.

The aim of English education was thus to cultivate traitors among the Welsh people, knowing that it is much easier to rule a country which is divided against itself. A similar device was adopted in Ireland.

But even where the independent language was killed, as in Cornwall, the chauvinists still have the common territory and psychological make-up to contend with. So they tend to fall back on the economic life.

Nobody can deny that the economic life of Scotland is bound up with England, the economic life of Brittany is bound up with France, the economic life of Quebec with Canada. Until recently, the economic life of East Bengal was bound up with Pakistan. Pakistan oppressed and exploited East Bengal.

In fact, very shortly after Stalin gave his famous definition, the economic life of all the small or weak nations of the world became bound up with that of the great and powerful nations. It is therefore not surprising that no national liberation movement has found Stalin's definition any help at all in achieving its aims.

Even in the Soviet Union, the Russian nation is far more equal than all the others. The Russian publication Soviet News proudly pointed out on 10th October 1972 that "the Russian language has become the mighty implement for communication among the Soviet Nations", "the mightiest of instruments for helping to make Soviet society monolithic" etc. etc.

The Chinese communists point out in Leninism or Social-Imperialism:

"Now the Soviet revisionist new tsars have restored the old tsars' policy of national oppression, adopted such cruel measures as discrimination, forced migration, splitting and imprisonment to oppress and persecute the minority nationalities and turned the Soviet Union back into the prison of nations." (P.22).

"Now the Soviet revisionist renegade clique has subverted the socialist system, exercised a bourgeois dictatorship and

substituted national oppression for national equality and the jungle law of the bourgeoisie for mutual help and fraternity among the nationalities. Now that the proletarian basis, the socialist basis, of the original union has been discarded, will not the huge multi-national "union" under the rule of the bourgeoisie of a new type one day undergo the same crisis and end in failure, as the Austro-Hungarian empire did in the past?". (P.49).

Even in the Stalin era, when great developments took place in the languages and cultures of the oppressed nations of the Soviet Union, Russian was the generally accepted and internationally recognized language of the U.S.S.R. Ukrainian for example, was, and is, a kind of linguistic "frill" in addition to Russian.

A Jewish "nation", Birobidjan, was set up in the Soviet Union in 1928 on Chinese territory stolen by the Tsars. The Crimean Tatars were exiled from the Crimea. The entire East Prussian population, workers, peasants, capitalists and landlords, were exiled from East Prussia after the Second World War, after two centuries as part of Germany.

The Soviet Union, led by Stalin, recognized Israel, a creation of Western imperialism, before most of the population had got off the immigrant ships. Israel had at that time no common language, but it had a lot of machine guns.

So much for J.V. Stalin's theory as applied to modern times. What about England? Is that a nation?

By 1031 England had been established within the present borders, with the exception of Cumberland and Westmoreland. (Cumberland and Westmoreland were added to England in 1092). The Scots had been pushed back into Scotland, the Welsh into Wales, and the Cornish into Cornwall. Athelstan, for example, an English king, specifically evicted the Cornish residents of Exeter in England.

So England meets all the necessary Stalin criteria. It is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language - English, and a common territory - England. There is a common monopoly capitalist economic life and a common monopoly capitalist and State-sponsored culture. But it still can't be a nation. For, says Stalin (op.cit) "A nation is not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations. Such, for instance, was the case in Western Europe. The British, French, Germans, Italians and others were formed into nations at the time of the victorious advance of capitalism and its triumph over feudal disunity".

England, formed substantially by 1031, cannot therefore be a nation. Neither can Wales, Scotland, Cornwall, Brittany, the Basque country, Catalonia, etc. who are faulted both by the definition and

by the "definite epoch" condition.

Having in mind Stalin's ignorance of the situation in foreign countries such as Albania, his arbitrary and unproved definition and "definite epoch", and the way in which he arbitrarily waived his own principles in particular cases, it is not surprising that his definition has been commonly accepted by national-chauvinists and others who are no friends of national liberation.

It is, therefore, important for Marxists to investigate the origins of nations. Engels, in his book, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" draws heavily on the research of Lewis Henry Morgan contained in "Ancient Society" (researches in the lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization). This book, as Engels pointed out, "is ignored in England as much as possible, and he (Morgan), is dismissed with condescending praise for the excellence of his former works". Even among Marxists, Morgan is known only by the extensive, but partial, use made of his researches by Engels.

Morgan defines a nation as "an assemblage of tribes who had coalesced in a gentile society upon one common territory". (P.65).

Morgan studied how nations came about both in relation to Athenian, Roman and many other societies and in relation to contemporary Iroquois society and found many common features.

"The plan of government of the American aborigines commenced with the gens and ended with the confederacy, the latter being the highest point to which their governmental institutions obtained. It gave for the organic series, first, the gens, a body of consanguines having a common gentile name; second, the phratry, an assemblage of related gentes united in a higher association for certain common objects; third, the tribe, an assemblage of gentes usually organized in phratries, all the members of which spoke the same dialect, and fourth, a confederacy of tribes, the members of which respectively spoke dialects of the same stock language". (P.65).

"The process of coalescence arises later than the confederacy in gentile society; but it was a necessary as well as vital stage of progress by means of which the nation, the state, and political society were at last attained. Among the Iroquois tribes it had not manifested itself". (P.138).

The enormous influx of European immigrants in the 19th century and the massacres and clearances of the American Indian population, of course, ensured that the Iroquois never developed into a nation.

Morgan also shows how, with the development of private property, the nation ceased to be organized on the old gentile form and began to be organized on the state form. Not being a Marxist, he did not clearly see that the transition to the state form is necessitated

by the need of the propertyowners to protect their property rights from the rest of the people. Engels in "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" supplements Morgan on this.

Morgan provides an adequate explanation of how England became a nation by 1031 when "rising capitalism" was not even a nasty gleam in an entrepreneur's eye.

Morgan (ibid p.363) points out that "The Celtic branch of the Aryan family retained, in the Scottish clan and Irish sept, the organisation into gentes to a later period of time than any other branch of the family, unless the Aryans of India are an exception".

As Engels says (The Origin of the Family ?.153):-

"The oldest Celtic laws preserved for us still show the gens in full bloom. In Ireland, it is alive in the popular instinct to this day, after it has been forced out of actual existence by the English. It was in full force in Scotland until the middle of the eighteenth century, and here it also succumbed only to the weapons of, laws and courts of the English".

In Wales, too, the tribes had no chance to coalesce into a nation before massive intervention from English armies cut short the process,

What England did between 1066 and 1300 to the development of Irish, Welsh, Scottish and Cornish nations is, of course, ~~small~~ compared to the activities of imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Swahili-speaking people of Africa were split up on purely arbitrary grounds between the various imperialists. The American Indians were decimated and confined to reservations. The Bengali people were divided between India and Pakistan. The Zionist state of Israel, backed by all the Great Powers, except People's China, evicted part of the Arab people from Palestine.

All over the world, with the decline of imperialism, peoples whose coalescence into nations was cut short, for one reason or another, are striving for national self-determination. Whether they succeed or not depends on the strength and resolve of the people involved and in particular on whether it has a Marxist-Leninist party of the proletariat, an army under the leadership of such a party, and a united front of all revolutionary classes and all revolutionary groups under the leadership of such a party.

As Chairman Mao said, on May 20th 1970:-

"A weak nation can defeat a strong, a small nation can defeat a big. The people of a small country can certainly defeat aggression by a big country, if only they dare to rise in struggle, dare to take up arms and grasp in their own hands the destiny of their country. This is a law of history".



Such are the only criteria which have to be satisfied for the emergence of a nation. Stalin's hotchpotch is redundant.

### THE EFFECT OF IMPERIALISM AND COLONISATION

The fight for self-determination of nations is, in general, a fight against imperialism, social-imperialism and reaction. This fight is therefore a component part of the world proletarian revolution.

However, certain places exist where colonists were sent by imperialism and colonialism. For example, colonists were despatched to Ireland to take over the land hitherto belonging to the Irish people. Even today wealthy English colonists throw their weight around in Wales and Cornwall, using their economic power and the backing of the English establishment.

Colonists went to Palestine, South Africa and Rhodesia. In the case of Palestine, the Zionist colonists became a majority by evicting the Arabs from the best lands. If the Rhodesian Land Apportionment Act and the South African Bantustan policy work, it is conceivable that the Europeans could become a majority in certain areas of Rhodesia and South Africa, by the simple process of expelling the Africans from the best land and admitting them only as non-citizens to do the hard work on a temporary basis. Israel does this already to the Arabs of Gaza and the West Bank.

Do the Northern Ireland Protestants, Zionist Israel, White Rhodesia and White South Africa have the status of nations and, therefore, the right to self-determination? Or do Ireland, the Arab nation, Zimbabwe and Azania have the status of nations?

Fairly obviously Ireland, the Arab nation, Zimbabwe and Azania have the prior claim, being descended from the original tribes of the area. Moreover, the Irish, Arab and Black African struggle is directed against imperialism, forms part of the world proletarian revolution, and only demands that there be no special privileges for the colonists.

On the other hand, as a result of largely voluntary immigration and the voluntary adoption of a common language English-speaking nations have coalesced out of scattered groups of settlers in the U.S.A. and Australia, vastly outnumbering the original inhabitants.

It is, however, no part of the role of this pamphlet to say that such and such is a nation because of such and such.

Our sole aim has been to set people's national aspirations free from dogmatism and chauvinism, to leave the actual inhabitants of a region with the right to determine that region's destiny.

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FOOTNOTE

We should like to thank comrades and friends in Cornwall, Ireland and Wales who have helped us with their suggestions and criticisms. If we have not made use of all of them, it is because we felt it was inappropriate for us to comment on particular strategy and tactics in this pamphlet.

This pamphlet was written in English not because English is the practical language of communication, while Welsh is the language of poetry, Gaelic is the language of this, and Irish is the language of that, etc. We should like to see this pamphlet in other languages, but we have to counter 'left' national-chauvinism where it is strongest, namely in England.

Having said this we should like to hear your opinions and, perhaps, produce other publications amplifying this question. If you want to receive our publications detach the perforated slip below and return to this address, with or without an accompanying letter.

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