

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN EUROPE

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ONE OF THE GREATEST political problems of our times arises from the fact that modern Europe, with many independent countries, constitutes a chaos of conflicting national interests. This confusion is a major hindrance to the economic prosperity of the peoples concerned and also a menace to the peace of the world. The need to unify Europe is especially obvious to an American visiting that area, accustomed as the writer is to living in one vast, continent-wide nation.

First, due to national barriers, travelling in Europe has become a veritable problem, what with the innumerable borders to cross. Visas are hard to get, often entailing weeks of exasperating negotiations. Then there are various "exit," "re-entry," and "military" permits, as well as sundry other inventions of the devil to harass and trip up the unwary traveller. Crossing a border, which is usually done about 2 a.m., is a real test of one's patience and fortitude, what with double and triple examinations of passports, strip-tease searches for possible bootlegged currency, and endless customs rummaging for dutiable objects. In many cases the border officials, the very essence of bureaucracy, consider the

unhappy passengers as suspicious characters who, at best, need barely be tolerated. All these complications are, of course, serious obstructions to the free personal intercourse so necessary for a sane and ordered Europe.

Second, Europe's chaotic nationalism also erects major economic walls between the various peoples. There are mutually exclusive tariffs, quota import and export arrangements, minute and time-consuming inspection of goods in transit, monetary systems that have little or no relationship to each other, vigorous speculation in one another's currency, dog-eat-dog economic competition of one nation with another, and various other economic schemes designed to further the interests of the ruling class of one nation at the expense of all others. This chaotic economic nationalism prevents, of course, anything resembling an orderly development, much less a planned operation, of Europe's economic life.

Third, and this is the most dangerous aspect of the national problem, Europe's conglomeration of disconnected nationalities also gives rise to the sharpest political and military clashes. With various nations trying to expand at the expense of the others, there are inevitably many serious border disputes and repeated gangings-up by one group of states against another. Two scores of disastrous wars during the past century and a half testify eloquently to the explosive quality in Europe's confusion of nations and to its menace for world peace.

MONOPOLY CAPITALISM INTENSIFIES THE CONFUSION

It is clear that if Europe is to play an important role in creating a social system that will help to bring peace, prosperity, and freedom to the harassed world, it will have to find the way to harmonize and link together its many discordant nationalities.

Present-day monopoly capitalism, however, has no effective answer to Europe's great national problem. The same forces in the decaying capitalist system that throw the big capitalist powers into ever-more violent collision with each other, also sharpen up the antagonisms among the smaller countries and between them and the great powers. The further monopoly capitalism decays, the more intense, generally, become national antagonisms. Modern Europe, with its pattern of little national bits and pieces, is the natural product of capitalism.

The ingrained capitalist way of solving the national question, in Europe as well as all over the world, is to subordinate the smaller nations to imperialist domination by the larger ones. Upon this basis the pre-World War I Austrian, Russian, and German Empires in Europe were founded. Naturally, the smaller nations always resist such imperialist domination and they demand self-determination and national independence. Their militant opposition on this basis had much to do with the final overthrow of the Hapsburg, Romanoff, and Hohenzollern imperial dynasties. The achievement of

national independence by a whole series of small nations was one of the most significant features of the great revolutionary upsurge that followed World War I.

The League of Nations was unable to unite the nations of Europe. Within its framework France and Great Britain, true to their imperialist natures, strove to subject the smaller nations to their sway. Obviously they did not succeed, except for a time in the face of the stubborn resistance on the part of the smaller nations. Nor, in the long run, did Germany and Italy, with all their armies and national quisling traitors, accomplish their aim of forcing all of Europe into the ironbound structure of their "New Order." The welter of discordant and disunited European nations therefore remains. While the independent status of the various countries undoubtedly protects them to a considerable degree against the incursions of the big imperialist powers, nevertheless their lack of mutual coordination does great harm to the economic welfare, political liberty, and peace of Europe and the world.

As regards the national question in Europe, the United Nations is not faring any better than did the old League of Nations, and for the same basic reasons. This time, within the United Nations, it is the United States that is trying, with the help of Great Britain, to secure domination over the nations of Europe (and also of the rest of the world). While many of the nations, intimidated by American imperialist pressure, are

accordingly producing a new crop of quislings, the general effect is to make the fires of nationalism burn still brighter and to make the whole national question in Europe more difficult of solution.

The Pan-American Union is often cited by capitalist apologists as a solution of the national question. But this claim is false and misleading. Actually the Pan-American Union, despite its basis of formal equality, is dominated economically and politically by the United States. This loose federation in no sense brings about a true collaboration of the peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The rising opposition of many nations to American imperialism is proof of these facts.

Nor does the proposed United States of Europe hold the answer to the grave national question. It is not intended to. This scheme, currently advocated by Churchill Tories, Social Democrats and confused liberals, suffers from two fundamental defects, either of which would suffice to destroy its progressive usefulness. First, such a United States of Europe as might be built up under present conditions would inevitably be a tool of Anglo-American imperialism. This means that the old familiar imperialist principle of the big powers dominating the little ones would prevail. This could only complicate still more the maze of nationalist contradictions in Europe. Secondly, by the same token, *i.e.*, Anglo-American domination, the United States of Europe would be an anti-Soviet bloc. This perspective

would kill at the outset any possibilities of its getting all or most of the nations of Europe together on a basis that would mitigate their national antagonisms. The so-called United States of Europe would be still-born, with many vital European states refusing even to join the organization.

Under monopoly capitalism there can be no solution to the national question, in Europe or elsewhere. For it is just as inevitable, under the domination of the trusts and monopolies, that the powerful nations oppress and exploit the weaker ones as it is that the capitalists exploit the workers.

THE WAY TO THE SOLUTION

The problem is not insoluble, however. It remained for Lenin and Stalin, whose principles are embodied in the life and structure of the Soviet Union, to find the answer to the national question. These principles may be briefly stated: to grant all the peoples concerned the right of self-determination and full economic, political, and social equality, and to inculcate among them a spirit of brotherly, Socialist cooperation. These principles apply whether the nations are parts of the same general political union or federation, or exist on an independent basis.

The successful application of this Leninist-Stalinist solution of the national question is one of the very greatest achievements of the Soviet Union. It has transformed the old czarist "prison-house of nations" into a freely cooperating, democratic multi-national union. The main peo-

ples that go to make up the Soviet Union not only enjoy full economic, political, and social equality, but, what is the heart of the whole system, they also possess a keen sense of concern for cultivating one another's welfare. One of the many examples of this dynamic quality of the Soviet Union is the way in which, under the various 5-year plans, the more advanced states of the U.S.S.R. systematically help in the economic and cultural development of the less advanced peoples. Such a cooperative relationship is quite unthinkable under monopoly capitalism.

The handling of the national question in the U.S.S.R. meets the basic needs of the lesser nations. It gives them greater political freedom and security, and it guarantees them faster and more all-around economic and cultural development than they could possibly achieve if they were on their own as independent nations. This explains why there are virtually no national, racial, or religious antagonisms within the U.S.S.R. It also explains why the peoples of Lithuania, Esthonia, and Latvia voted so overwhelmingly to become part of the Soviet Union (a vital fact which capitalist writers are desperately eager to obscure).

But the national question in Europe (and in the rest of the world) does not have to wait for solution until full Socialism is achieved. One of the most significant facts of the postwar situation is that the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe possess within themselves

the capacity for solving the national question. This is because in these countries—Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Roumania, Hungary, etc.—although capitalism, as such, has not been abolished there, the power of the big capitalists and landowners has been either completely broken or seriously weakened. Consequently, the workers, small farmers, and intelligentsia, who are in full or partial control of the governments, are able to deal with the national question on the basis of the Leninist-Stalinist principles of self-determination, full economic, political, and social equality, and Socialist cooperation. These principles, applied to the new situation, it may also be remarked, form the basis of the policy of the Italian, French, and British Communist Parties toward the colonies of their countries and toward neighboring countries.

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC INTERNATIONALISM

Czechoslovakia offers a fine example of the developing solution of the national question along the foregoing lines. As never before in their history, the Czechs and Slovaks are working together in a spirit of equality and friendly collaboration. Characteristically, one of the most striking features in their planned economy is the systematic raising of Slovakia's economic status to that already achieved in the Czech lands, while the economic level of the whole country is being raised. It hardly needs to be added that the Communists are the most active

leaders in thus developing the new relations between the two peoples who comprise Czechoslovakia.

Yugoslavia offers an even more striking example of Leninist-Stalinist principles applied in dealing with the national question. For many decades the Balkans have served as the horrible example of small nations that could not live peacefully together. If there was any place in the world where the national question seemed to be hopeless of solution, it was precisely in that vast territory, which was long a notorious breeding ground of wars. The Yugoslav peoples, quarrelling and fighting among themselves, were in the very heart of the boiling pot of national antagonism of the entire Balkan area.

But now order and cooperation have been established among the erstwhile discordant Yugoslav peoples. Today, the six major nationalities in that country, for the very first time are living and working harmoniously together. This unity, born in the fire of struggle against Hitler's army, continues into the postwar period. All differences between the various peoples have not yet been fully ironed out but those that remain are of a minor character and the trend toward unity and cooperation is decisive. In the planned economy of Yugoslavia, similarly to that in Czechoslovakia, the whole country is being systematically developed, with special emphasis being placed on the more backward areas.

Inasmuch as the new democracies in Poland, Roumania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Albania are animated by

the same intelligent approach to the national question as that being put into practice by the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Governments, a new day has undoubtedly dawned for the Balkans as a whole so far as the national question is concerned. The former cock-pit of nations in the Balkan area is well on the way to becoming a region of epoch-making international cooperation.

Weak spots in this general situation are the reactionary regimes in Greece, and Austria. In these countries Anglo-American imperialism is in control and it is making every effort to keep the old reactionary cliques in existence. But it is safe to say that these three countries will not be able to withstand very long the new spirit of democracy and international cooperation that is sweeping through the peoples of Central Europe and the Balkans. Another danger to European collaboration lies in the Anglo-American attempt practically to divide Germany into four pieces. This project, which could only increase national antagonisms in Europe, runs counter to the whole democratic development in Middle and Eastern Europe, and in the long run it will be defeated.

The new democratic international spirit prevailing in this great area is not only expressing itself in more cooperative activities between the different national groups within individual states, but also in more friendly relations between these states themselves. These countries are already developing a whole series of economic and cultural agreements

with each other and with their great neighbor to the East, the U.S.S.R. This augurs well for minimizing and eventual elimination of the age-old national antagonisms in these areas. One of the most remarkable developments in this general respect is the strong and developing movement in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria for an actual consolidation of the two states. If carried out, both countries would greatly benefit from such a move.

The deeper significance of this development of international cooperation in the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe is that it points the way to the ultimate economic and political unification of that crazy-quilt of national antagonisms, modern capitalist Europe. The task of today, however, is not to come forward with grandiose blueprint plans for uniting Europe and overcoming its national chaos. Instead, what has to be done is to break the power of monopoly capital and to make the democratic forces victorious in the respective countries. To the extent and in the measure that this is done, democratic solutions of the national question will be put into effect by the democratic regimes, and the crippling economic, political, military, and social walls now dividing the peoples of Europe

will increasingly topple and fall.

As Lenin and Stalin pointed out, the modern capitalist state was created under the leadership of the capitalist class in its efforts to control the national and international market. In the main, this state-building coincided historically with the interests of the respective nations as a whole. But today the capitalists, specifically the big monopolists, are no longer the leaders of their respective nations in a constructive sense, for they systematically betray their peoples' interests for the sake of their own class interests. The present European hodge-podge of mutually antagonistic states is the maximum that their greedy, self-seeking capitalists can do in the matter of the national question.

The constructive leadership of the nations is now passing over into the hands of the working class and its democratic allies. They alone, now, can and do speak and act in the national interest. They have as a great task, therefore, the solving of the tangled national question in Europe and elsewhere, a heritage from a capitalist system which has exhausted its historical progressive role. And finding this solution to the national question is precisely what the workers in the new European democracies are now doing.