Nationalism and the "National Question"

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One of the most vexing questions that the Left faces (however one may define the Left) is the role played by nationalism in social development and by popular demands for cultural identity and political sovereignty. For the Left of the nineteenth century, nationalism was seen primarily as a European issue, involving the consolidation of nation-states in the heartland of capitalism. Only secondarily, if at all, was it seen as the anti-imperialist and presumably anticapitalist struggle that it was to become in the twentieth century.

This did not mean that the nineteenth-century Left favored imperialist depredations in the colonial world. At the turn of this century, hardly any serious radical thinker, to my knowledge, regarded the imperialist powers' attempts to quell movements for self-determination in colonial areas as a blessing. The Left scoffed at and usually denounced the arrogant claims of European powers to bring "progress" to the "barbarous" areas of the world. Marx's views of imperialism may have been equivocal, but he never lacked a genuine aversion for the afflictions that native peoples suffered at the hands of imperialists. Anarchists, in turn, were almost invariably hostile to the European claim to be the beacon of civilization for the world.

Yet if the Left universally scorned the civilizatory claims of imperialists at the end of the last century, it generally regarded nationalism as an arguable issue. The "national *question*," to use the traditional phrase in which such discussions were cast, was subject to serious disputes, certainly as far as tactics were involved. But by general agreement, leftists did not regard nationalism, culminating in the creation of nation-states, as the ultimate dispensation of humanity's future in a collectivist or communist society. Indeed, the single principle on which the Left of the pre-World War I and the interwar periods agreed was a belief in the shared humanity of people regardless of their membership in different cultural, ethnic, and gender groups, and their complementary affinities in a free society as rational human beings with the capacity for cooperation, a willingness to share material resources, and a fervent sense of empathy. The "Internationale," the shared anthem of social democrats, socialists, and anarchists alike up to and even after the Bolshevik revolution, ended with the stirring cry, "The 'Internationale' shall *be* the human race." The Left singled out the international proletariat as the historic agent for modern social change not by virtue of its specificity as a class, or its particularity as one component in a developing capitalist society, but by virtue of its *need* to achieve universality in order to abolish class society — that is, as the class driven by necessity to remove wage slavery by abolishing enslavement as such. Capitalism had brought the historic "social question" of human exploitation to its final and most advanced form. "Tis the final conflict!" rang out the "Internationale," with a sense of universalistic commitment — one that no revolutionary movement could ignore any longer without subverting the possibilities for passing from a "prehistory" of barbarous class interest to a "true history" of a totally emancipated humanity.

Minimally, this was the shared outlook of the prewar and interwar Left, particularly of its various socialistic tendencies. The primacy the anarchists have historically given to the abolition of the state, the agency par excellence of hierarchical coercion, led directly to their denigration of the nation-state and of nationalism generally, not only because nationalism divides human beings territorially, culturally, and economically, but because it follows in the wake of the modern state and ideologically justifies it.

Of concern here is the internationalist tradition that played so pronounced a role in the Left of the last century and the first third of the present one, and its mutations into a highly problematical "question," particularly in Rosa Luxemburg's and Lenin's writings. This is a "question" of no small importance. We have only to consider the utter confusion that surrounds it today, as the

century draws to a close —when a savagely bigoted nationalism is subverting the internationalist tradition of the Left— to recognize its importance. The rise of nationalisms that exploit racial, religious, and traditional cultural differences between human beings, including even the most trivial linguistic and quasi-tribalistic differences, not to speak of differences in gender identity and sexual preference, marks a *de*civilization of humanity, a retreat to an age when the number of fingers with which people made the sign of the cross determined whether they and their neighbors would disembowel each other in bloody conflicts, as Nikos Kazantzakis pointed out in *Zorba the Greek*.

What is particularly disturbing is that the Left has not always seen nationalism as a regressive demand. The modern Left, such as it is today, all too often uncritically embraces the slogan "national liberation" —a slogan that has echoed through its ranks without regard for the basic ideal voiced in the "Internationale." Calls for tribal "identity" shrilly accentuate a group's particular characteristics to garner constituencies, an effort that negates the spirit of the "Internationale" and the traditional internationalism of the Left. The very meaning of nationalism and the nature of its relationship to statism is raising issues, especially today, for which the Left is bereft of ideas apart from appeals for "national liberation."

If present-day leftists lose all viable memory of an earlier internationalist Left —not to speak of humanity's historical emergence out of its animalistic background, its millennia-long development away from such biological facts as ethnicity, gender, and age differences toward truly social affinities based on citizenship, equality, and a universalistic sense of a common humanity— the great role assigned to reason by the Enlightenment may well be in grave doubt. Without a form of human association that can resist and hopefully go beyond nationalism in all its popular variants —whether it takes the form of a reconstituted Left, a new politics, a social libertarianism, a reawakened humanism, a ethics of complementarity— then anything that we can legitimately call civilization, indeed, the human spirit itself, may well be extinguished long before nuclear war, the growing ecological crises, or, more generally, a cultural barbarism comparable only to the most destructive periods in history overwhelms us. In view of today's growing nationalism, then, few endeavors could be more important than to examine the nature of nationalism and understand the so-called "national question" as the Left in its various forms has interpreted it over the years.

A Historical Overview

The level of human development can be gauged in great part by the extent to which people recognize their shared unity. Indeed, personal freedom consists in great part of our ability to choose friends, partners, associates, and affines without regard to their biological differences. What makes us *human*, apart from our ability to reason on a high plane of generalization, consociate into mutable social institutions, work cooperatively, and develop a highly symbolic system of communication, is a shared knowledge of our *humanitas*. Goethe's memorable words, so characteristic of the Enlightenment mind, still haunt as a criterion of our humanity: "There is a degree of culture where national hatred vanishes, and where one stands to a certain extent above nations and feels the weal and woe of a neighboring people as if it happened to one's own."[1]

[1] Goethe, quoted in Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution: A Biographical History,* 3rd rev. ed. (New York: The Dial Press, 1961), p. 578.

If Goethe established a standard of authentic humanity here —and surely one can demand more of human beings than empathy for their "own people"— early humanity was less than human by that standard. Although a lunatic element in today's ecology movement calls for a "return to a Pleistocene spirituality," they would in all probability have found that "spirituality" very despiriting in reality. In prehistoric eras, probably marked by band and tribal social organization, human beings were, "spiritually" or otherwise, first and foremost members of an immediate family, secondly, members of a band, and ultimately, members of a tribe. What determined membership in anything beyond one's given family group was an extension of the kinship tie: the people of a given tribe were socially linked to one another by real or fictive blood relationships. This "blood oath," as well as other "biological facts" like gender and age, defined one's rights, obligations, and indeed one's identity in the tribal society.

Moreover, many —perhaps most— band or tribal groups regarded only those who shared the "blood oath" with themselves as human. Indeed, a tribe often referred to itself as "*the* People," a name that expressed its exclusive claim to humanity. Other people, who were outside the magic circle of the real or mythic blood linkages of a tribe, were "strangers" and hence in some sense were not human beings. The "blood oath" and the use of the name "the People" to designate themselves often pitted a tribe against others who made the same exclusive claim to be human and to be "the People," even among peoples who shared common linguistic and cultural traits.

Tribal society, in fact, was extremely wary of anyone who was not one of its own members. In many areas, before a stranger could cross a territorial boundary, he had to submissively and patiently await an invitation from an elder or shaman of the tribe that claimed the territory before proceeding. Without hospitality, which was generally conceived as a quasi-religious virtue, any stranger risked life and limb in a tribe's territory, so that lodgings and food were usually preceded by ritual acts of trust or goodwill. The modern handshake may itself have originated as a symbolic expression that one's right hand was free of weapons.

Warfare was endemic among our prehistoric ancestors and in later native communities, notwithstanding the high, almost cultic status enjoyed by ostensibly peaceful "ecological aborigines" among white middle-class Euro-Americans today. When foraging groups overhunted the game in their accustomed territory, as often happened, they were usually more than willing to invade the area of a neighboring group and claim its resources for their own. Commonly, after the rise of warrior sodalities, warfare acquired cultural as well as economic attributes, so victors no longer merely defeated their real or chosen "enemies" but virtually exterminated them, as witness the near-genocidal destruction of the Huron Indians by their linguistically and culturally related Iroquois cousins.

If the major empires of the ancient Middle East and Orient conquered, pacified, and subjugated many different ethnic and cultural groups, thereby making alien peoples into the abject subjects of despotic monarchies, the most important single factor to erode aboriginal parochialism was the emergence of the city. The rise of the ancient city, whether democratic as at Athens or republican as in Rome, marked a radically new social dispensation. In contrast to the family-oriented and parochial folk who had constituted the tribal and village world, Western cities were now structured increasingly around residential propinquity and shared economic interests. A "second nature," as Cicero called it, of humanistic social and cultural ties began to replace the older form of social organization based on the "first nature" of biological and blood ties, in which individuals' social roles and obligations had been anchored in their family, clan, gender, and the like, rather than in associations of their own choice.

Etymologically, "politics" derives from the Greek *politika*, which connotes an actively involved citizenry that formulates the policies of a community or *polis* and, more often than not, routinely executes them in the course of public service. Although formal citizenship was required for participation in such politics, *poleis* like democratic Athens celebrated their openness to visitors, particularly to skilled craftsmen and knowledgeable merchants of other ethnic communities. In his famous funeral oration, Pericles declared, "We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality, trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; where, in education, from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness [in Sparta], at Athens we live exactly as we please and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger."[2]

In Periclean times, Athenian liberality, to be sure, was still limited by a largely fictitious notion of the shared ancestry of its citizens —although less than it had been previously. But it is hard to ignore the fact that Plato's dialectical masterpiece, *The Republic,* occurs as a dialogue in the home of Cephalos, whose family were resident aliens in the Piraeus, the port area of Athens where most foreigners lived. Yet in the dialogue itself the interchange between citizen and alien is uninhibited by any status considerations.

The Roman emperor Caracalla, in time, made all freemen in the Empire "citizens" of Rome with equal juridical rights, thereby universalizing human relationships despite differences in language, ethnicity, tradition, and place of residence. Christianity, for all its failings, nonetheless celebrated the equality of all people's souls in the eyes of the deity, a heavenly "egalitarianism" that, in combination with open medieval cities, theoretically eliminated the last attributes of ancestry, ethnicity, and tradition that divided human beings from each other.

In practice, it goes without saying, these attributes still persisted, and various peoples retained parochial allegiances to their villages, localities, and even cities, countervailing the tenuous Roman and particularly Christian ideals of a universal *humanitas.* The unified medieval world was fragmented juridically into countless baronial and aristocratic sovereignties that parochialized local popular commitments to a given lord or place, often pitting culturally and ethically related peoples against each others in other areas. The Catholic Church opposed these parochial sovereignties, not only for doctrinal reasons but in order to be able to expand papal authority over Christendom as a whole. As for secular power, wayward but strong monarchs like Henry II of England tried to impose the "king's peace" over large territorial areas, subduing warring nobles with varying degrees of success. Thus did pope and king work in tandem to diminish parochialism, even as they dueled with each other for control over ever-larger areas of the feudal world.

Yet authentic citizens were deeply involved in classical political activity in many places in Europe during the Middle Ages. The burghers of medieval town democracies were essentially master craftsmen. The tasks of their gilds, or richly articulated vocational fraternities, were no less moral than economic–indeed, they formed the structural basis for a genuine moral economy. Gilds not only "policed" local markets, fixing "fair prices" and assuring that the quality of their members' goods would be high; they participated in civic and religious festivals as distinct entities with their own banners, helped finance and construct public buildings, saw to the welfare of the families of deceased members, collected money for charity, and participated as militiamen

[2] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War,* book 2, chapter 4.

in the defense of the community of which they were part. Their cities, in the best of cases, conferred freedom on runaway serfs, saw to the safety of travelers, and adamantly defended their civic liberties. The eventual differentiation of the town populations into wealthy and poor, powerful and powerless, and "nationalists" who supported the monarchy against a predatory nobility —all make up a complex drama that cannot be discussed here.

At various times and places some cities created forms of association that were neither nations nor parochial baronies. These were intercity confederations that lasted for centuries, such as the Hanseatic League; cantonal confederations like that of Switzerland; and more briefly, attempts to achieve free city confederations like the Spanish *comuñero* movement in the early sixteenth century. It was not until the seventeenth century —particularly under Cromwell in England and Louis XIV in France— that centralizers of one form or another finally began to carve out lasting nations in Europe.

Nation-states, let me emphasize, are *states* —not only nations. Establishing them means vesting power in a centralized, professional, bureaucratic apparatus that exercises a social monopoly of organized violence, notably in the form of its armies and police. The state preempts the autonomy of localities and provinces by means of its all-powerful executive and, in republican states, its legislature, whose members are elected or appointed to represent a fixed number of "constituents." The citizen in a self-managed locality vanishes into an anonymous aggregation of individuals who pay a suitable amount of taxes and receives the state's "services." "Politics" in the nation-state devolves into a body of exchange relationships in which constituents generally try to get what they pay for in a "political" marketplace of goods and services. Nationalism as a form of tribalism writ large reinforces the state by providing it with the loyalty of a people of shared linguistic, ethnic, and cultural affinities, indeed legitimizing the state by giving it a basis of seemingly all-embracing biological and traditional commonalities among the people. It was not the English people who created an England but the English monarchs and centralizing rulers, just as it was the French kings and their bureaucracies who forged the French nation.

Indeed, until state-building began to acquire new vigor in the fifteenth century, nation-states in Europe remained a novelty. Even when centralized authority based minimally on a linguistic commonality began to foster nationalism throughout western Europe and the United States, nationalism faced a very dubious destiny. Confederalism remained a viable alternative to the nation-state well into the latter half of the last century. As late as 1871, the Paris Commune called upon all the communes of France to form a confederal dual power in opposition to the newly created Third Republic. Eventually the nation-state won out in this complex conflict, and statism, in fact, was firmly linked to nationalism. The two were virtually indistinguishable from each other by the beginning of this century.

Nationalism and the Left

Radical theorists and activists on the Left dealt in very different ways with the host of historical and ethical problems that nationalism raised with respect to efforts to build a communistic, cooperative society. Historically, the earliest leftist attempts to explore nationalism *as a problem* obstructing the advent of a free and just society came from various anarchist theorists. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon seems never to have questioned the ideal of human solidarity, although he never denied the right of a people to cultural uniqueness and even to secede from any kind of

"social contract," provided to be sure that no one else's rights were infringed upon. Although Proudhon detested slavery —he sarcastically observed that the American South "with Bible in hand, cultivates slavery," while the American North "is already creating a proletariat"[3] —he formally conceded the right of the Confederacy to withdraw from the Union during the Civil War of 1861–65.

More generally, Proudhon's confederalist and mutualistic views led him to oppose nationalist movements in Poland, Hungary, and Italy. His antinationalist notions were somewhat diluted by his own Francophilism, as the French socialist Jean Jaures later noted. Proudhon feared the formation of strong nation-states on or near France's borders. But he was also a product in his own way of the Enlightenment. Writing in 1862, he declared: "I will never put devotion to my country before the rights of Man. If the French Government behaves unjustly to any people, I am deeply grieved and protest in every way that I can. If France is punished for the misdeeds of her leaders, I bow my head and say from the depths of my soul, *"Merito haec patimur"*—"We have deserved these ills."[4]

Despite his Gallic chauvinism, the "rights of Man" remained foremost in Proudhon's mind; nor was he oblivious to the fact that India and China were, in his words, "at the mercy of barbarians."[5] "Do you think that it is French egoism, hatred of liberty, scorn for the Poles and Italians that cause me to mock at and mistrust this commonplace word *nationality*," he wrote to Herzen, "which is being so widely used and makes so many scoundrels and so many honest citizens talk so much nonsense? For pity's sake … do not take offense so easily. If you do, I shall have to say to you what I have been saying for six months about your friend Garibaldi: «Of great heart but no brain.»"[6]

Michael Bakunin's internationalism was as emphatic as Proudhon's, although his views were also marked by a certain ambiguity. "Only that can be called a *human* principle which is universal and common to all men," he wrote in his internationalist vein; "and nationality separates men, therefore it is not a principle."[7] Indeed, "There is nothing more absurd and at the same time more harmful, more deadly, for the people than to uphold the fictitious principle of nationality as the ideal of all the people's aspirations." What counted finally for Bakunin was that "Nationality is *not a universal human principle."* Still further: "We should place *human, universal justice above all national interests.* And we should once and for all time abandon the false principle of nationality, invented of late by the despots of France, Russia, and Prussia for the purpose of crushing the sovereign principle of liberty."

Yet Bakunin also declared that nationality "is a historic, local fact, which like all real and harmless facts, has the right to claim general acceptance." Not only that, but this is a "natural fact" that deserves "respect." It may have been his rhetorical proclivities that led him to declare himself "always sincerely the patriot of all oppressed fatherlands." But he argued that the right of every

[3] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, letter to Dulieu, December 30, 1860; in *Correspondence*, vol. 10, pp. 275.; republished in Stewart Edwards, ed., *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, trans. Elizabeth Frazer (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 185.

[4] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *La Federation et l'unite en Italie* (1862), pp. 122–25, in Edwards, *Selected Writings,* pp. 188–89.

[5] Proudhon, letter to Dulieu, December 30, 1860, in *Correspondence,* vol. 10 (Paris, 1875), pp. 275–76; republished in Edwards, *Selected Writings,* p. 185.

[6] Proudhon, letter to Alexander Herzen, April 21, 1861, in *Correspondence*, vol. 11, pp. 22–24; in Edwards, *Selected Writings,* p. 191.

[7] All Bakunin quotations are from P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe; London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1953), pp. 324–35; emphasis added.

nationality "to live according to its own nature" must be respected, since this "right" is "simply the corollary of the general principle of freedom."[8]

The subtlety of Bakunin's observations should not be overlooked in the midst of this seeming self-contradiction. He defined a general principle that is human, one that is abridged or partially violated by asocial or "biological' facts that for better or worse must be taken for granted. To be a nationalist is to be less than human, but it is also inevitable insofar as individuals are products of distinctive cultural traditions, environments, and states of mind. Overshadowing the mere fact of "nationality" is the *higher* universal principle in which people recognize themselves as members of the same species and seek to foster their commonalities rather than their "national" distinctiveness.

Such humanistic principles were to be taken very seriously by anarchists generally and strikingly so by the largest anarchist movement of modern times, the Spanish anarchists. From the early 1880s up to the bloody civil war of 1936–39, the anarchist movement of Spain opposed not only statism and nationalism but even regionalism in all its forms. Despite its enormous Catalan following, the Spanish anarchists consistently raised the higher human principle of social liberation over national liberation and opposed the nationalist tendencies within Spain that so often divided Basques, Catalans, Andalusians, and Galicians from one another and particularly from the Castilians, who enjoyed cultural supremacy over the country's minorities. Indeed, the word "Iberian" rather than "Spanish" that appears in the name Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) served to express not only a commitment to *peninsular* solidarity but an indifference to regional and national distinctions between Spain and Portugal. The Spanish anarchists cultivated Esperanto as a "universal" human language more enthusiastically than any major radical tendency, and "universal brotherhood" remained a lasting ideal of their movement —as it historically did in most anarchist movements up to the present day.

Prior to 1914, Marxists and the Second International generally held similar convictions, despite the burgeoning of nineteenth-century nationalism. In Marx and Engels's view, the proletariat of the world had no country; authentically unified as a class, it was destined to abolish all forms of class society. *The Communist Manifesto* ends with the ringing appeal: "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!" In the body of the work (which Bakunin translated into Russian), the authors declared: "In the national struggles of the proletarians of different countries, [Communists] point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality."[9] And further: "The working men have no country. We cannot take away from them what they have not got."[10]

The support that Marx and Engels did lend to "national liberation" struggles was essentially strategic, stemming primarily from their geopolitical and economic concerns rather than from broad social principle. They vigorously championed Polish independence from Russia, for example, because they wanted to weaken the Russian empire, which in their day was the supreme counterrevolutionary power on the European continent. And they wanted to see a united Germany because a centralized, powerful nation-state would provide it with what Engels, in a letter to Karl Kautsky in 1882, called "the normal political constitution of the European bourgeoisie."

[8] Proudhon, letter to Dulieu, December 30, 1860, in *Correspondence,* vol. 10 (Paris, 1875), pp. 275–76; republished in Edwards, *Selected Writings,* p. 185.

[9] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Selected Works,* vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), p. 120.

[10] Ibid., p. 124.

Yet the manifest similarities between the internationalist rhetoric of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* and the internationalism of the anarchist theorists and movements should not be permitted to conceal the important differences between these two forms of socialism —differences that were to play a major role in the debates that separated them. The anarchists were in every sense *ethical* socialists who upheld universal principles of the "brotherhood of man" and "fraternity,"[11] principles that Marx's "scientific socialism" disdained as mere "abstractions." In later years, even when speaking broadly of freedom and the oppressed, Marx and Engels considered the use of seemingly "inexact" words like "workers" and "toilers" to be an implicit rejection of socialism as a "science"; instead, they preferred what they considered the more scientifically rigorous word *proletariat,* which specifically referred to those who generate surplus value.

Indeed, in contrast to anarchist theorists like Proudhon, who considered the spread of capitalism and the proletarianization of preindustrial peasantry and craftspeople to be a disaster, Marx and Engels enthusiastically welcomed these developments, as well as the formation of large, centralized nation-states in which market economies could flourish. They saw them not only as desiderata in fostering economic development but, by promoting capitalism, as indispensable in creating the preconditions for socialism. Despite their support for proletarian internationalism, they derogated what they saw as "abstract" denunciations of nationalism *as such* or scorned them as merely "moralistic." Although internationalism in the interests of class solidarity remained a desideratum for Marx and Engels, their view implicitly stood at odds with their commitment to capitalist economic expansion with its need in the last century for centralized nation-states. They held the nation-state to be good or bad insofar as it advanced or inhibited the expansion of capital, the advance of the "productive forces," and the proletarianization of preindustrial peoples. In principle, they looked askance at the nationalist sentiments of Indians, Chinese, Africans, and the rest of the noncapitalist world, whose precapitalist social forms might impede capitalist expansion. Ireland, ironically, seems to have been an exception to this approach. Marx, Engels, and the Marxist movement as a whole acknowledged the right of the Irish to national liberation largely for sentimental reasons and because it would produce problems for English imperialism, which commanded a world market. In the main, until such time as a socialist society could be achieved, Marxists considered the formation of large, ever more centralized nation-states in Europe to be "historically progressive."

Given their instrumental geopolitics, it should not be surprising that as the years went by, Marx and Engels essentially supported Bismarck's attempts to unify Germany. Their express distaste for Bismarck's methods and for the landed gentry in whose interests he spoke should not be taken too seriously, in my view. They would have welcomed Germany's annexation of Denmark, and they called for the incorporation of smaller European nationalities like the Czechs and Slavs generally into a centralized Austria-Hungary, as well as the unification of Italy into a nation-state, in order to broaden the terrain of the market and the sovereignty of capitalism on the European continent.

Nor is it surprising that Marx and Engels supported Bismarck's armies in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 —despite the opposition of their closest adherents in the German Social Democratic party, Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel— at least up to the point when those armies crossed the French frontier and surrounded Paris in 1871. Ironically, Marx and Engels's own arguments

[11] Despite the genderedness of these words–the product of the era in which Bakunin lived–they obviously may be interpreted as signifying humanity generally.

were to be invoked by the European Marxists who diverged from their antiwar comrades to support their respective national military efforts at the outbreak of the First World War. Prowar German Social Democrats supported the Kaiser as a bulwark against Russian "Asiatic" barbarism —seemingly in accordance with Marx and Engels's own views— while the French Socialists (as well as Kropotkin in Britain and later in Russia) invoked the tradition of their country's Great Revolution in opposition to "Prussian militarism."

Despite many widespread claims that Rosa Luxemburg was more anarchistic than a committed Marxist, she actually vigorously opposed the motivations of anarchic forms of socialism and was more of a doctrinaire Marxist than is generally realized. Her opposition to Polish nationalism and Pilsudski's Polish Socialist Party (which demanded Polish national independence) as well as her hostility toward nationalism generally, admirable and courageous as it was, rested principally not on an anarchistic belief in the "brotherhood of man" but on traditional Marxist arguments —namely, an extension of Marx and Engels's desire for unified markets and centralized states at the expense of Eastern European nationalities, albeit with a new twist.

By the turn of the century, new considerations had come to the foreground that induced Luxemburg to modify her views. Like many social democratic theorists at the time, Luxemburg shared the conviction that capitalism had passed from a progressive into a largely reactionary phase. No longer a historically progressive economic order, capitalism was now reactionary because it had fulfilled its "historical" function in advancing technology and presumably in producing a class-conscious or even revolutionary proletariat. Lenin systematized this conclusion in his famous work *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism.*

Thus both Lenin and Luxemburg logically denounced the First World War as imperialist and broke with all socialists who supported the Entente and the Central Powers, deriding them as "social patriots." Where Lenin markedly differed from Luxemburg (aside from the famous issue of his support for a centralized party organization) was on how, from a strictly "realistic" standpoint, the "national question" could be used against capitalism in an era of imperialism. To Lenin, the national struggles of economically undeveloped colonized countries for liberation from the colonial powers, including Tsarist Russia, were now inherently progressive insofar as they served to *undermine* the power of capital. That is to say, Lenin's support for national liberation struggles was essentially no less pragmatic than that of other Marxists, including Luxemburg herself. For imperialist Russia, appropriately characterized as a "prison of nations," Lenin advocated the unconditional right of non-Russian peoples to secede under any conditions and to form nation-states of their own. On the other hand, he maintained, non-Russian Social Democrats in Russia's colonized countries would be obliged to advocate some kind of federal union with the "mother country" if Russian Social Democrats succeeded in achieving a proletarian revolution.

Hence, although Lenin's and Luxemburg's premises were very similar, the two Marxists came to radically different conclusions about the "national question" and the correct manner of resolving it. Lenin demanded the right of Poland to establish a nation-state of its own, while Luxemburg opposed it as economically unviable and regressive. Lenin shared Marx's and Engels's support for Polish independence, albeit for very different yet equally pragmatic reasons. He did not honor his own position on the right to secession during the Russian Civil War most flagrantly in his manner of dealing with Georgia, a very distinct nation that had supported the Mensheviks until the Soviet regime forced it to accept a domestic variant of Bolshevism. Only in the last years of his life, after a Georgian Communist party took command of the state, did Lenin oppose Stalin's attempt to subordinate the Georgian *party* to the Russian —a preponderantly intraparty conflict

that was of little concern to the pro-Menshevik Georgian population. Lenin did not live long enough to engage Stalin on this —and other— policies and organizational practices.

Two Approaches to the National Question

The Marxist and Marxism-Leninist discussions on the "national question" after the First World War thus produced a highly convoluted legacy that affected the policies not only of the Old Left of the 1920s and 1930s but those of the New Left of the 1960s as well. What is important to clarify here are the radically different premises from which anarchists and Marxists viewed nationalism generally. Anarchism in the main, aside from some of its variants, advanced *humanistic*, basically *ethical* reasons for opposing the nation-states that fostered nationalism. Anarchists did so, to be more specific, because national distinctions tended to lead to state formation and to subvert the unity of humanity, to parochialize society, and to foster cultural particularities rather than universality of the human condition. Marxism, as a "socialist science," eschewed such ethical "abstractions."

In contrast to the anarchist opposition to the state and to centralization, not only did Marxists support a centralized state, they insisted on the "historically progressive" nature of capitalism and a market economy, which required centralized nation-states as domestic markets and as means for removing all internal barriers to commerce that local and regional sovereignties had created. Marxists generally regarded the national aspirations of oppressed peoples as matters of political strategy that should be supported or opposed for strictly pragmatic considerations, irrespective of any broader ethical ones.

Thus two distinct approaches to nationalism emerged within the Left. The ethical antinationalism of anarchists championed the unity of humanity, with due allowance for cultural distinctions but in flat opposition to the formation of nation-states; while the Marxists supported or opposed the nationalistic demands of largely precapitalist cultures for a variety of pragmatic and geopolitical reasons. This distinction is not intended to be hard and fast; socialists in pre-World War I Austria-Hungary were strongly multinational as a result of the many different peoples who made up the prewar empire. They called for a confederal relationship between the German-speaking rulers of the empire and its largely Slavonic members, which approximated an anarchist view. Whether they would have honored their own ideals in practice any better than Lenin adhered to his own prescriptions once a "proletarian revolution" actually succeeded we will never know. The original empire had disappeared by 1918, and the ostensible libertarianism of "Austro-Hungarian Marxism," as it was called, became moot during the interwar period. To its honor, I may add, in February 1934 in Vienna, Austrian socialists, unlike any other movement apart from the Spaniards, resisted protofascist developments in bloody streetfighting; the movement never regained its revolutionary elan after it was restored in 1945.

Nationalism and the Second World War

The Left of the interwar period, the so-called Old Left, viewed the fast-approaching war against Nazi Germany as a continuation of the "Great War" of 1914–18. Anti-Stalinist Marxists predicted a short-lived conflict that would terminate in proletarian revolutions even more sweeping than those of the 1917–21 period. Significantly, Trotsky staked his adherence to orthodox Marxism

itself on this calculation: if the war did not end in this outcome, he proposed, nearly all the premises of orthodox Marxism would have to be examined and perhaps drastically revised. His death in 1940 precluded such an a reevaluation on his own part. When the war did not conclude in international proletarian revolutions, Trotsky's supporters were hardly willing to make the sweeping reexamination that he had suggested.

Yet this reexamination was very much needed. Not only did the Second World War fail to end in proletarian revolutions in Europe; it brought an end to the whole entire era of revolutionary proletarian socialism and the class-oriented internationalism that had emerged in June 1848, when the Parisian working class raised barricades and red flags in support of a "social republic." Far from achieving any successful proletarian revolutions after the Second World War, the European working class failed to exhibit a semblance of internationalism during the conflict. Unlike their fathers a generation earlier, no warring troops engaged in fraternization; nor did the civilian populations exhibit any overt hostility to their political and military leaders for their conduct of the war, despite the massive destruction of cities by aerial bombers and artillery. The German army fought desperately against the Allies in the West and were prepared to defend Hitler's bunker to the end.

Above all, an elevated awareness of class distinctions and conflicts in Europe gave way to nationalism —partly in reaction to Germany's occupations of home territories, but partly also, and significantly, as a result of the resurgence of a crude xenophobia that verged on outright racism. What limited class-oriented movements did emerge for a while after the war, notably in France, Italy, and Greece, were easily manipulated by the Stalinists to serve Soviet interests in the Cold War. Hence although the Second World War lasted much longer than the first, its outcome never rose to the political and social level of the 1917–21 period. In fact, world capitalism emerged from World War II stronger than it had been at any time in its history, owing principally to the state's massive intervention in economic and social affairs.

Struggles for "National Liberation"

The failure of serious radical theorists to re-examine Marxist theory in the light of these developments, as Trotsky had proposed, was followed by the precipitate decline of the Old Left; the general recognition that the proletariat was no longer a "hegemonic" class in overthrowing capitalism; the absence of a "general crisis" of capitalism; and the failure of the Soviet Union to play an internationalist role in postwar events.

What came to foreground instead were national liberation struggles in "Third World" countries and sporadic anti-Soviet eruptions in Eastern European countries, which were largely smothered by Stalinist totalitarianism. The Left, in these instances, has often taken nationalist struggles as general "anti-imperialist" attempts to achieve "autonomy" from imperialism, and state formation as a legitimation of this "autonomy," even at the expense of a popular democracy in the colonized world.

If Marx and Engels often supported national struggles for strategic reasons, the Left in the twentieth century, both New and Old, has often elevated such support for such struggles into a mindless article of faith. The strategic "nationalisms" of Marxist-type movements largely foreclosed inquiry into *what kind of society* a given "national liberation" movement would likely *produce,* in a way that ethical socialisms like anarchism in the last century did not. It was —or

if not, it *should* have been— a matter of the gravest concern for the Old Left in the 1920s and 1930s to inquire into what *type* of society Mao Tse-tung, to take a striking case in point, would establish in China if he defeated the Kuomintang, while the New Left of the 1960s should have inquired into what type of society Castro, to cite another important case, would establish in Cuba after the expulsion of Batista.

But throughout this century, when "Third World" national liberation movements in colonial countries have made conventional avowals of socialism and then proceeded to establish highly centralized, often brutally authoritarian states, the Left often greeted them as effective struggles against imperialist enemies. Advanced as "national liberation," nationalism has often stopped short of advancing major social changes and even ignored the need to do so. Avowals of authoritarian forms of socialism have been used by "national liberation" movements very much the way Stalin used socialist ideologies to brutally consolidate his own dictatorship. Indeed, Marxism-Leninism has proved a remarkably effective doctrine for mobilizing "national liberation" struggles against imperialist powers and gaining the support of leftist radicals abroad, who saw "national liberation" movements as largely anti-imperialist struggles rather than observing their true social content.

Thus, despite the populist and often even anarchistic tendencies that gave rise to the European and American New Left, its essentially international focus was directed increasingly toward an uncritical support for "national liberation" struggles outside the Euro-American sphere, without regard for where these struggles were leading and the authoritarian nature of their leadership. As the 1960s progressed, this incredibly confused movement in fact steadily shed the anarchistic and universalistic ambience with which it had begun. After Mao's practices were elevated to an "ism" in the New Left, many young radicals adopted "Maoism" unreservedly, with grim results for the New Left as a whole. By 1969, the New Left had largely been taken over by Maoists and admirers of Fidel Castro. An utterly misleading book like *Fanshen*, which uncritically applauded Maoist activities in the Chinese countryside, was revered in the late 1960s, and many radical groups adopted what they took to be Maoist organizational practices. So heavily focused was the New Left's attention on "national liberation" struggles in the Third world that the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1969 hardly produced serious protest by young leftists, at least in the United States, as I can personally attest.

The 1960s also saw the emergence of yet another form of nationalism on the Left: increasingly ethnically chauvinistic groups began to appear that ultimately inverted Euro-American claims of the alleged superiority of the white race into an equally reactionary claim to the superiority of nonwhites. Embracing the particularism into which racial politics had degenerated instead of the potential universalism of a *humanitas,* the New Left placed blacks, colonial peoples, and even totalitarian colonial nations on the top of its theoretical pyramid, endowing them with a commanding or "hegemonic" position in relation to whites, Euro-Americans, and bourgeois-democratic nations. In the 1970s, this particularistic strategy was adopted by certain feminists, who began to extol the "superiority" of women over men, indeed to affirm an allegedly female mystical "power" and an allegedly female irrationalism over the secular rationality and scientific inquiry that were presumably the domain of all males. The term "white male" became a patently derogatory expression that was applied ecumenically to all Euro-American men, irrespective of whether they themselves were exploited and dominated by ruling classes and hierarchies.

A highly parochial "identity politics" began to emerge, even to dominate many New Leftists as new "micronationalisms," if I may coin a word. Not only do certain tendencies in such "identity"

movements closely resemble those of very traditional forms of oppression like patriarchy, but "identity politics" also constitutes a regression from the libertarian and even general Marxian message of the "Internationale" and a transcendence of all "micronationalist" differentia in a truly humanistic communist society. What passes for "radical consciousness" today is shifting increasingly toward a biologically oriented emphasis on human differentiation like gender and ethnicity —not an emphasis on the need to foster of human universality that was so pronounced among the anarchist writers of the last century and even in *The Communist Manifesto.*

Toward a New Internationalism

How to assess this devolution in leftist thought and the problems it raises today? I have tried to place nationalism in the larger historical context of humanity's social evolution from the internal solidarity of the tribe to the increasing expansiveness of urban life and the universalism advanced by the great monotheistic religions in the Middle Ages and finally to ideals of human affinity based on reason, secularism, cooperation, and democracy in the nineteenth century. We can say with certainty that any movement that aspires to something less than these anarchist and libertarian socialist notions of the "brotherhood of man," certainly as expressed in the "Internationale," is less than human. Indeed, from the perspective of the end of the twentieth century, we are obliged to ask for even more than what nineteenth-century internationalism demanded. We are obliged to formulate an ethics of complementarity in which cultural differentia mutualistically serve to enhance human unity itself, in short, that constitute a new mosaic of vigorous cultures that *enrich* the human condition and that foster its *advance* rather than fragment and decompose it into new "nationalities" and an increasing number of nation-states.

No less significant is the need for a radical social outlook that conjoins cultural variety and the ideal of a unified humanity with an ethical concept of what a new society *should be* like —one that is universalistic in its view of humanity, cooperative in its view of human relationships on all levels of life, and egalitarian in its idea of social relations. While internationalist in their *class* outlook, nearly all Marxist attitudes toward the "national question" were instrumental: they were guided by expediency and opportunism, and worse, they often denigrated ideas of democracy, citizenship, and freedom as "abstract" and presumably, "unscientific" notions. Outstanding Marxists accepted the nation-state with all its coercive power and centralistic traits, be they Marx and Engels, Luxemburg, or Lenin. Nor did these Marxists view confederalism as a desideratum. Luxemburg's writings, for example, simply take confederalism *as it existed in her own time* (particularly the vicissitudes of Swiss cantonalism) as exhausting all the possibilities of this political idea, without due regard for the anarchist emphasis on the need for a profound social, political, and economic democratization of the municipalities that are to confederate with each other. With few exceptions, Marxists advanced no serious critique of the nation-state and state centralization as such, an omission that, all "collectivistic" achievements aside, would have foredoomed their attempts to achieve a rational society if nothing else had.

Cultural freedom and variety, let me emphasize, should not be confused with nationalism. That specific peoples should be free to fully develop their own cultural capacities is not merely a right but a desideratum. The world will be a drab place indeed if a magnificent mosaic of different cultures do not replace the largely deculturated and homogenized world created by modern capitalism. But by the same token, the world will be completely divided and peoples will be chronically

at odds with one another if their cultural differences are *parochialized* and if seeming "cultural differences" are rooted in *biologistic* notions of gender, racial, and physical superiority. Historically, there is a sense in which the national consolidation of peoples along territorial lines did produce a social sphere that was broader than the narrow kinship basis for kinship societies because it obviously is more open to strangers, just as cities tend to foster broader human affinities than tribes. But neither tribal affinities nor territorial boundaries constitute a realization of humanity's *potentiality* to achieve a full sense of commonality with rich but harmonious cultural variations. Frontiers have no place on the map of the planet, any more than they have a place on the landscape of the mind.

A socialism that is not informed by this kind ethical outlook, with a due respect for cultural variety, cannot ignore the potential *outcome* of a national liberation struggle as the Old and New Lefts alike so often did. Nor can it support national liberation struggles for instrumental purposes, merely as a means of "weakening" imperialism. Certainly, such a socialism cannot, in my view, promote the proliferation of nation-states, much less increase the number of divisive national entities. Ironically, the success of many "national liberation" struggles has had the effect of creating politically independent statist regimes that are nonetheless as *manipulable* by the forces of international capitalism than were the old, generally obtuse imperialist ones. More often than not, "Third World" nations have not cast off their colonial shackles since the end of the Second World War: they have merely become domesticated and rendered highly vulnerable to the forces of international capitalism, with little more than a facade of self-determination. Moreover, they have often used their myths of "national sovereignty" to nourish xenophobic ambitions to grab adjacent areas around them and oppress their neighbors as brutally as imperialists in their own right, such as Ghana's oppression under Nkrumah of the Togo peoples in West Africa or Milosevic's attempt to "cleanse" Muslims from Bosnia. What is no less regressive, such nationalisms evoke what is most sinister in a people's past —religious fundamentalism in all its forms, traditional hatreds of "foreigners," a "national unity" that overrides terrible internal social and economic inequities, and most commonly, a total disregard for human rights. The "nation" as a cultural entity is superseded by an overpowering and oppressive state apparatus. Racism commonly goes hand in hand with "national liberation" struggles, such as "ethnic cleansing" and wars for territorial gain, as we see most poignantly today in the Middle East, India, the Caucasus, and Eastern Europe. Nationalisms that only a generation ago might have been regarded as "national liberation" struggles are more clearly seen today, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet empire, as little more than social nightmares and decivilizing blights.

Put bluntly, nationalisms are regressive atavisms that the Enlightenment tried to overcome long ago. They introject the worst features of the very empires from which oppressed peoples have tried to shake loose. Not only do they typically reproduce state-machines that are as oppressive as the ones that colonial powers imposed on them, but they reinforce those machines with cultural, religious, ethnic, and xenophobic traits that are often used to foster regional and even domestic hatreds and subimperialisms. No less important, in the absence of genuine popular democracies the sequelae of understandably *anti-imperialist* struggles too often include the strengthening of imperialism itself, such that the powers that have been seemingly dispossessed of their colonies can now play the state of one former colony against that of another, as witness the conflicts that ravage Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent. These are the areas, I may add, where nuclear wars will be more likely to occur as the years go by than elsewhere in the world. The development of an Islamic nuclear bomb to countervail an Israeli one or of a

Pakistani bomb to countervail an Indian one —all portend no good for the South and its conflict with the North. Indeed, the tendency for former colonies to actively seek alliances with their erstwhile imperialist rulers is now a more typical feature of North-South diplomacy than is any unity by the South against the North.

Nationalism has *always* been a disease that divided human from human —"abstract" as traditional Marxists may consider this notion to be— and it can never be viewed as anything more than a regression toward tribal parochialism and the fuel for intercommunal warfare. Nor have the "national liberation" struggles that have produced new states throughout the "Third World" and in Eastern Europe impaired the expansion of imperialism or eventuated in fully democratic states. That the "liberated" peoples of the Stalinist empire are less oppressed today than they were under Communist rule should not mislead us into believing that they are also free from the xenophobia that nearly all nation-states cultivate or from the cultural homogenization that capitalism and its media produce.

No left libertarian, to be sure, can oppose the *right* of a subjugated people to establish itself as an autonomous entity —be it in a confederation based on libertarian municipalism or as a nation-state based on hierarchical and class inequities. But to oppose an oppressor is not equivalent to calling for *support* for everything formerly colonized nation-states do. Ethically speaking, one cannot oppose a wrong when one party commits it, then support another party who commits the same wrong. The trite but pithy maxim —"My enemy's enemy is not my friend"— is particularly applicable to oppressed people who may be manipulated by totalitarians, religious zealots, and "ethnic cleansers." Just as an authentic ethics must be reasoned out and premised on genuine humanistic potentialities, so a libertarian socialism or anarchism must retain its ethical integrity if the voice of reason is to be heard in social affairs. In the 1960s, those who opposed American imperialism in Southeast Asia and at the same time rejected giving any support for the Communist regime in Hanoi, and those who opposed American intervention in Cuba without supporting Castroist totalitarianism, stood on a higher moral ground than the New Leftists who exercised their rebelliousness against the United States predominantly by supporting "national liberation" struggles without regard to the authoritarian and statist goals of those struggles. Indeed, identified with the authoritarians whom they actively supported, these New Leftists eventually grew demoralized by the absence of an ethical basis in their liberatory ideas. Today, in fact, liberatory struggles based on nationalism and statism have borne the terrifying harvest of internecine bloodletting throughout the world. Even in recently "liberated" states like East Germany, nationalism has found brutal expression in the rise of fascist movements, German nationalism, plans to restrict the immigration of asylum-seekers, violence against "foreigners" including victims of Nazism like gypsies, and the like. Thus the instrumental view of nationalism that Marxists originally cultivated has left many "leftist" tendencies like Social Democrats in a condition of moral bankruptcy.

Ethically, let me add, there are some social issues on which *one must take a stand* —such as white and black racism, patriarchy and matriarchy, and imperialism and "Third World" totalitarianism. An unswerving opposition to racism, gender oppression, and domination *as such* must always be paramount if an ethical socialism is to emerge from the ruins of socialism itself. But we also live in a world in which issues sometimes arise on which a leftists cannot take *any* position at all —issues in which to take a position is to operate within the alternatives advanced by a basically irrational society and to choose the lesser of several irrationalities or evils over other irrationalities or evils. It is not a sign of political ineffectuality to reject such a choice altogether and

declare that to oppose one evil with a lesser one must eventually lead to the support of the worst evil that emerges. German Social Democracy, by abetting one "lesser evil" after another during the 1920s, went from supporting liberals to conservatives then to reactionaries —who finally brought Hitler to power. In an irrational society, conventional wisdom and instrumentalism can produce only ever-greater irrationality, using virtue as a patina to conceal basic contradictions both in its own position and in society.

"[L]ike the processes of life, digestion and breathing," observed Bakunin, nationality "… has no right to be concerned with itself until that right is denied."[12] This was a perceptive enough statement in its day. With the explosions of barbarous nationalism in our own day and the snarling appetites of nationalists to create more and more nation-states, I am obliged to add that "nationality" is a form of *indigestion* and that its causes must be vomited up if society is not to further deteriorate because of this malady.

Seeking an Alternative

If nationalism is regressive, what rational and humanistic alternative to it can an ethical socialism offer? There is no place in a free society for nation-states —either as nations or as states. However strong may be the impulse of specific peoples for a collective identity, reason and a concern for ethical behavior oblige us to recover the universality of the city or town and a directly democratic political culture, albeit on a higher plane than even the *polis* of Periclean Athens. Identity should properly be replaced by community —by a shared affinity that is humanly scaled, nonhierarchical, libertarian, and open to all, irrespective of an individual's gender, ethnic traits, sexual identity, talents, or personal proclivities. Such community life can only be recovered by the new politics that I have called libertarian municipalism: the democratization of municipalities so that they are self-managed by the people who inhabit them, and the formation of a confederation of these municipalities to constitute a counterpower to the nation-state.

The danger that democratized municipalities in a decentralized society would result in economic and cultural parochialism is very real, and it can only be precluded by a vigorous confederation of municipalities based on their material interdependence. The "self-sufficiency" of community life —even if it were possible today— would by no means guarantee a genuine grassroots democracy. The confederation of municipalities, as a medium for interaction, collaboration, and mutual aid among its municipal components, provides the sole alternative to the powerful nation-state on the one hand and the parochial town or city on the other. Fully democratic, in which the municipal deputies to confederal institutions would be subject to recall, rotation, and unrelenting public purview, the confederation would constitute an extension of local liberties to the regional level, allowing for a sensitive equilibrium between locality and region in which the cultural variety of towns could flourish without turning inward toward local exclusivity. Indeed, beneficial cultural traits would also be "trafficked," so to speak, within and between various confederations, along with the interchange of goods and services that make up the material means of life.

By the same token, "property" would be municipalized, rather than nationalized (which merely reinforces state power with economic power), collectivized (which simply recasts private entrepreneurial rights in a "collective" form), or privatized (which facilitates the re-emergence

[12] P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism,* p.325.

of a competitive market economy). A municipalized economy would approximate a system of usufruct based entirely on one's needs and citizenship in a community rather than one's proprietary, vocational, or professional interests. Where a municipal citizens' assembly controls economic policy, no *one* individual controls, much less "owns," the means of production and of life. Where confederal means of administering a region's resources coordinate the economic behavior of the whole, parochial interests would tend to give way to larger human interests and economic considerations to more democratic ones. The issues that municipalities and their confederations address would cease to range around economic self-interest; they would focus on democratic procedures and simple equity in meeting human needs.

Let there be no doubt that the technological resources that make it possible for people to *choose* their own lifestyles and have the free time to participate fully in a democratic politics are absolutely necessary for the libertarian, confederally organized society that I have sketched here. Even the best of ethical intentions are likely to yield to some form of oligarchy, in which differential access to the means of life will lead to elites who have more of the good things in life than other citizens do. On this score, the asceticism that ecomystics and deep ecologists promote is insidiously reactionary: not only does it ignore the freedom of people to choose their own lifestyle —the only alternative in the existing society to becoming a mindless consumer— but it subordinates human freedom *as such* to an almost mystical notion of the dictates of "Nature" —prescribing a "return to the Pleistocene," to the Neolithic, or to food gathering, to cite the most extreme examples. A free ecological society —as distinguished from one regulated by an authoritarian ecological elite or by the "free market"— can only be cast in terms of an ecologically confederal form of libertarian municipalism. When at length free communes replace the nation and confederal forms of organization replaces the state, humanity will have rid itself of nationalism.

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Murray Bookchin
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