

No Compromise with Nationalism

l'Insécurité sociale

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The following is a translation of the introduction to the French edition of Fredy Perlman's *The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism*, which originally appeared in **FE #319, Winter 1985**. It has been published in France by the group l'Insécurité sociale, which previously published some material from the FE on technology called *1984: Pire Que Prévu* (1984: Worse than Expected). For these texts in French and more information, write l'Insécurité Sociale, B.P. 243, 75564 Paris, France. This introduction to the pamphlet on nationalism was translated by Michael William and Lorraine Perlman.

Any analysis of the world we live in must take into account its fundamental structure: a monstrosity which continually denies the human being and which is known variously as Nation, State or Country. There are no acceptable compromises with nationalism, the ideology which underlies this structure.

To call oneself anti-nationalist may well appear banal. However, we are often confronted with anti-nationalists who are in favor of state power, or those who would destroy the state but who still support one or another nationalism. Glaring examples can be found in both the past and present, and the very use of terms such as internationalism (in other words, inter-nationalism) has been and remains characteristic of this confusion.

Without going into the twists and turns of what has been called the workers' movement, it is worth remembering that theoreticians such as Marx or Engels did not hesitate to distinguish between "counterrevolutionary nations" (or "barbarous" ones or those "without a history") and "revolutionary nations." Counterrevolutionary nations are said to be composed of peoples who in the past have been incapable of establishing states. Revolutionary nations are those in which the forces of production can best expand; in which there are no obstacles to inverting the relations of domination between human beings and nature! According to Engels, only the large nation-state provides "the normal organizational structure of the dominant European bourgeoisie, and [it] is equally indispensable in establishing harmonious international cooperation, without which a proletarian government will be unrealizable."

Such nations were promised a bright future (and this prediction unfortunately turned out to be accurate), since an end to class conflict would mean an end to rivalries between nations. As they compete in establishing national and inter-national organizations, both the libertarian and marxist tendencies of our day have revived this "attractive" version of nationalism. Contemporary examples of pseudo "anti-nationalisms" are innumerable.

Imperialism the Initial Stage of Capitalism

We could take as a first example the reactions provoked by the specter of Le Pen. (FE note: a racist, nationalist member of French parliament and leader of the fascist Front National.) Social democrats of all shades have presented a united front against the belligerent outpourings of our "national savior." Echoes of their virtuous choir can undoubtedly be heard as far away as Muroroa. But peel away the anti-nationalist and anti-xenophobic rhetoric,

and we find the same people who are now in power (or waiting in the wings)—the people who are reinforcing discriminatory measures against immigrants and injecting musty nationalism into school curricula. These are the same ones who not so long ago mounted a commercial media campaign to “*touche pas a mon pote*” (leave my friend alone) aimed at defusing elements of consciousness contained in the movement begun by some second generation immigrant children.

The situation in New Caledonia offers a second example. It would have seemed that the time had passed—even for those who started out by being appalled by colonial crimes—for uncritical support for the rise to power of national/state butchers in the former colonies (Algeria, Indochina, Latin America...). With the emergence of Caledonian nationalism, however, the crimes of Castro and Ho Chi Minh have magically disappeared.

Now, the “anti-authoritarian” masses, still anti-statists in principle to be sure, actively support the new future state. Some peer through a magnifying glass in search of something to distinguish the program of the FNLKS (Front National de Libération Kanake Socialiste) from a mere classical nationalism; others, in the end, have found the creation of a Kanak state legitimate. Undoubtedly this state is expected to be one which is no longer precisely a state! Like the one set up by a certain...What’s his name again? Vladimir? Illich?

One would have believed the case definitely closed, but then one comes a-across the names of the organizations of these very “anti-authoritarians” at the bottom of a tract calling for an “anti-imperialist” demonstration alongside those of every bolshevik, Stalinist or syndicalist outfit to be found in la belle France. Let’s hope all of these folks have found it reassuring that the FN LKS was able to aid in maintaining law and order before the 1985 elections in New Caledonia.

It was in the midst of these gloomy events that we received Fredy Perlman’s text “The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism.” His text begins by noting that nationalism (“left” or “right”) continues to prosper, despite the death sentence pronounced against it on different occasions during the last century. Attempting to understand why this has been the case, Fredy outlines various forms nationalism has taken over the centuries, rather than trying to define it in a static manner.

As he says in the text, “the term signifies a succession of historical experience.” He thereby deconstructs the discourse which presents imperialism and nationalism as contradictory phenomena, since in fact they are simply two aspects of a society based on domination. This leads him to reject the theory of imperialism as “the final stage of capitalism;” for him, on the contrary, imperialism constitutes the initial stage of capitalism, the colonization of human beings through the creation of nation states.

When capitalist social relations are added, domination becomes coherent and rational. Tributes and pledges of allegiance are no longer offered only periodically to more or less distant empires, instead, they are given uninterruptedly, because at every moment peoples’ existence, and more globally, that of nature, can enhance the power of capital.

If this domination appears to be more specifically incarnated in political forces which have particularly exalted nationalism during this century (bolshevik, fascist, nazi...), these forces in no way constitute diabolical exceptions which are fortunately counter-balanced by the democratic societies, but are instead particular expressions of the general movement of the domination of capitalist relations. To present them otherwise not only constitutes a negative justification of other forms of domination, but lacks dissuasive value as well. Nationalism is reproduced in spite of an awareness of the existence of genocides or even as a result of it.

The preceding comments should clarify our interest in translating and distributing this text. Just as we were completing the translation and preparing to send it to Fredy to look over, we learned of his sudden death (in 1985). But it should not be mistakenly assumed that this pamphlet is either a homage or an obituary. We are neither obituary writers, nor do we compare our modest publications with the life of a comrade. We are simply publishing this text as announced, because of its inherent value.

We had planned to include another of Fredy Perlman’s texts on Zionism,* to shed additional light on one of the particular aspects of nationalism. This text should appear in a separate pamphlet in a few months.

— March 1986

* This pamphlet, *Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom*, and *The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism*, which both appeared as essays in the FE, are available through our bookservice for \$1.00 and \$1.50 respectively. Other titles

by Fredy Perlman may be obtained through us or from Black & Red, P.O. Box 01374, Detroit MI 48202. [<http://www.blackandred.org/>]

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