

The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism (excerpt)

reprint from FE #319 Winter 1985

Fredy Perlman

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Every oppressed population can become a nation, a photographic negative of the oppressor nation, a place where the former packer is the supermarket's manager, where the former security guard is the chief of police. By applying the correct strategy, every security guard can follow the precedent of ancient Rome's Praetorian guards.

The security police of a foreign mining trust can proclaim itself a republic, liberate the people, and go on liberating them until they have nothing left but to pray for liberation to end. Even before the seizure of power, a gang can call itself a Front and offer heavily taxed and constantly policed poor people something they still lack: a tribute-gathering organization and a hit-squad, namely supplementary tax farmers and police, the people's own. In these ways, people can be liberated of the traits of their victimized ancestors; all the relics that still survive from pre-industrial times and non-capitalist cultures can at last be permanently extirpated.

The idea that an understanding of the genocide, that a memory of the holocausts, can only lead people to want to dismantle the system, is erroneous. The continuing appeal of nationalism suggests that the opposite is truer, namely that an understanding of genocide has led people to mobilize genocidal armies, that the memory of holocausts has led people to perpetrate holocausts.

The sensitive poets who remembered the loss, the researchers who documented it, have been like the pure scientists who discovered the structure of the atom. Applied scientists used the discovery to split the atom's nucleus, to produce weapons which can split every atom's nucleus; nationalists used the poetry to split and fuse human populations, to mobilize genocidal armies, to perpetrate new holocausts.

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