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## **MARXISM AND A NATION-STATE**

PANEL: „Contemporary Currents In Marxism“.

I base my thesis of deglobalization, which I will present on Thursday, on a sort of communitarian argumentation which, in my interpretation of Marx, does not contradict his basic philosophy. However, this is not an unproblematic interpretation, so I will discuss it more in detail. The question is, what was Marx's relationship to the state and the nation? This is a key issue in terms of globalization, but not only: the question of the state and the nation was one of the main themes of the Marxist movement during the Second International, when Marx's and Engels' followers Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, and Vladimir Lenin were the main theorists of Marxism. Their arguments are especially valuable in this respect even today.

The standard understanding of Marx's and Engels' views on the state is based on the idea that the ideological fathers of Marxism considered the state to be a bourgeois anachronism that would die in communism. Both the Orthodox Marxists (Kautsky) and the revolutionary Radical Left (Luxemburg, Lenin) followed this thesis. The only ones who questioned this conclusion were the reformist Marxists, led by Bernstein, who relied on the belief that the state could be transformed via democratic mechanisms to serve the interests of the workers, and so socialism could be achieved through gradual development via a democratic social state.

Similar beliefs were typical of other socialist theorists of the 19th century who stood at the birth of German Social Democracy, especially Ferdinand Lassalle. Later, the reformist politics was also adapted by the orthodox Marxists, led by Kautsky, who relied in practice on economic determinism, so that the prospect of the revolution was still delaying until their position had completely merged with social-democratic reformism. These moderate political lines later developed into the standard reform social democracy as we know it today.

Let's concentrate on the Radical Leftist interpretation of Marx, as proposed by Luxemburg, Lenin and other authors who later began to call themselves communists. One of the main topics of the Radical Left was not only the critique of imperialism but also the critique of the imperial state. Luxemburg, as one of the first Marxists, pointed out the drastic practices of Western powers in colonial Africa or Asia. Her famous work *Accumulation of Capital* is still a major work of Marxism in relation to what is now considered globalization: the generation of Marxists of the Second International talked about "imperialism", which still belongs to the key concepts of communist criticism of globalization.

Both Luxemburg and Lenin agreed that the state would die in communism, but unlike the anarchists in line with Marx, they insisted that the state will die only after the long historical process culminating in communism. The transitional phase of communism will include the dictatorship of the proletariat, and therefore something that deserves to be called a state, although Lenin has long tried to avoid this designation (he recalls in *The State and the Revolution* that Engels recommended to use the term *commune* instead of "state", but for example, in the *Letters from Afar* he clearly states that "we need a state", not to mention the works after 1917).

Marxists' attitude towards the state at the time of transition has always distinguished them from anarchists and syndicalists: unlike the anarchists, Marxists rejected utopian ideas that the destruction of the state would automatically bring communism and, on the contrary, insist that capitalist state should be liquidated (Lenin), and replaced by the proletarian state for which the most influential historical inspiration was the Paris Commune of 1871 (popular militias instead of the police and the army, the immediate removability of politicians by citizens, the removal of division of power, etc.).

The subject of this paper is not to analyze the Bolshevik experiment, which begins with the sympathetic Lenin's almost anarchist attack on the state in the *State and Revolution* and ends with paradoxically Stalinist ultra-etatism and mad terror. The key to my argument is that the radical Marxist Left has never in principle rejected a state that would serve the interests of the proletariat. Certainly – in communism, the state will wither away. But communism will not come next Thursday, and after 1989 it is quite obvious that a meaningful left-wing debate should not start with the prospect of communism that once can come in the long run but with analyzing what the left can do for the lowest social classes today and in the near future – in the era of global capitalism, in which socialism, not communism, is the closest.

In this respect, I fully claim the hypothesis accepted by Rodney Peffer in his Marxist theory of justice:

*"Only socialism – unlike fully developed communism – is a practical historical possibility, at least in terms of the near future and the medium-term future." And as he adds, "socialism is characterized by ... the state."*

And from his initial thesis he rightly argues that Marxism necessarily needs to develop the theory of justice. If we were looking at the issue of distribution through a communist ideal, according to which there is enough of everything and co-operation and modesty are prevailing – then the debate about a fair division of wealth has no meaning. But, in the name of a distant ideal, to "throw off" the issue that every realistic theory of society has to deal with, I find ridiculous (in my earlier book *Back to Marx?* I developed the theory of justice beyond orthodox Marxism).

A similar approach which Peffer uses to justice, however, applies to other political and social categories, including a state or a nation. Yes, if we look at the issue through the communist ideal, both the state and the nation will fade away once. This, however, does not mean that it may be reasonable to demand their immediate "withering away" in the historical era, which is very distant from communism.

To formulate it generally: on the basis of the maximum values that we normatively demand for an ideal society in the distant future, neither realistic political movement can ignore the current problems, the existing phenomena and historical constraints of a particular epoch. Here is the fundamental difference between Marxism and utopian socialism: Marxism contains a piece of political realism that utopians lack; Marxism in its analyzes is based on history, utopians on logical principles and abstract concepts. We can agree in a similar way in the current time, when we can consider the state at this stage of history as one of the very few tools of a workers' class to counter a capitalist globalization.

A much greater contradiction in the Marxist movement has emerged around the issue of **nation**. The left-wing communists, including Luxemburg and Nikolai Bukharin, denied any concessions on the national question on behalf of workers' internationalism. Lenin, on the contrary, advocated the right of peoples to self-determination, and his interpretation of Marx's internationalism was based rather on the emphasis on international co-operation rather than on an effort to eradicate national consciousness as such.

Both streams were underpinned by Marx: everyone found his own in his work. In this, Marx is enchanting until today – his work allows for several possible interpretations that make Marxism one of the most creative streams of political thinking. Luxemburg highlighted Marx's famous thesis, that "workers do not have a homeland"; Lenin drew attention to Marx's support for Irish national independence from Britain and Polish national independence from Russia. The thesis that workers do not have a homeland, many socialists including Jean Jaurés and Bernstein (and later Edward Carr) interpreted not as a Marx's normative program but rather as a critique of the current state in the capitalist states. In the 19th century, the nations neglected the workers and poor people and the national awareness was in thrall of rich urban classes.

When Marx had said that the workers have no homeland, it does not mean they could not have it, but on the contrary, they had to join and fight to become a full-fledged part of nation within the framework of democratic and social changes. Marx shift the vision of the disappearing of the nations like the vision of state to the far future; in the then struggles he expects that proletariat has to *"conquer the political dominion, to rise to the national class, to become a nation"*.

The Marxist Second International at the congress in London in 1896 was able to come to an agreement in its final resolution, that the promotion of the full independence of all nations is a basic requirement, and that the building of international social democracy is in full compliance with this requirement. This belief reflected the typical 19th century ideas of the progressive thinkers convinced that nationalism and internationalism are communicating vessels that are not mutually exclusive (Giuseppe Mazzini was one of the best-known nationalists who, alongside the emancipation of Italian nation also defended the united Europe). This is exactly what I stand in this paper: internationalism does not mean denying national rights, but rather cooperation of nations, which must be free and independent.

Luxemburg, in her critique of imperialism, concludes that nationalism is a danger to be eliminated. Lenin opposed: one thing is the nationalism of the empires, which leads to the absorption of small and weak nations; another thing is the nationalism of small and weak nations fighting for their freedom. The first one must be definitely rejected, the other one, on the contrary, should be supported.

They have never reconciled in this issue: after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Luxembourg wrote a critical document in prison, in which she especially reproached Lenin for his adoption of two key political decisions in November 1917, thanks to which Lenin's revolutionaries de facto gained a great part of population, and therefore the peasants and oppressed nationalities of Imperial Russia, i.e. a land decree and a declaration of self-determination of nations.

It is a paradox that Luxembourg (justifiably) reproached Lenin for a deficit of democracy and suppression of liberty, although the decree on land (giving the land to small peasants instead of socialist nationalization) and the self-determination of the nations (the independence of the nations of the Russian Empire leading to the break-up of Finland or Poland, instead of the principled internationalism, reflecting the authentic will of the population, and thus they were more manifestation of democracy than ideological templates of radical Marxists (Luxembourg with her radical-democratic stress on spontaneous creativity of masses could hardly reproach Lenin that he relies on moods of masses in his politics). Lenin showed not only a greater sense of practice in this but also a greater degree of respect for the opinion of the majority of the population.

To this day, the attitude of some parts of the radical left to the national question is similar to Luxembourgist's idealism, which pretended that the national awareness of the lower classes of society would disappear on its own if we were to ignore it stubbornly enough. Lenin, unlike Luxembourg, attempted to harmonize nationalism and internationalism, and so did not only the revolutionary branch of the Left, but also the reformist social democracy after the World War I and II.

The national question was one of the most important political themes in the period before the World War I and it could not be avoided. However, social democracy has ideologically addressed this issue only marginally: the Marxist phrases of internationalism were enough for it. It turned out fatal.

The empty clichéd internationalism in the historical era, when the labour class itself succumbed nationalist delusion before the World War I, meant for the social-democratic parties a complete fall to bottom: the ignorance of reality led to the situation that social democracy, on the surface firmly internationalist in its templates and clichés until 1914, in practice in a matter of days, betrayed its internationalism and supported imperial governments in the World War I. For Luxembourg it was a signal to further strengthen her resistance to any nationalism; for Lenin it was, on the contrary, a signal to devote more attention to the national question. In this respect, Marx was more credibly followed by such Marxists, who tried to understand the national question, not to eliminate it.

In Central Europe, this kind of Marxist thinking has always prevailed because the national question was understood as the right of small nations to exist, and not as the national imperialism of the powers. In the Second International era, national issues in the Central European area were seized by, for example, Austro-Marxists, who, however, refused to accept the demands of the oppressed nations of Austria-Hungary on the basis of territorial independence, but they emphasized cultural autonomy; Lenin was the most consequent in this issue and demanded the full right of the nations to self-determination.

The main argument in connection with the national question, was formulated by Marx, Lenin, and Leo Trotsky, each of them in a similar context. **Attacks to the nationalism of the small and weak nations are mostly the most suitable for the imperial powers that control these small peoples.** When French Marxist Paul Lafargue spoke that the nations were only "obsolete superstitions," Marx had reproached to him that he speaks like a French chauvinist, according to whom only the French nation had the right to exist.

Marx argued similarly in relation to Ireland, where he expected from the English workers the support of their Irish comrades who sought independence from the British Empire. It has to be shown that workers are not national chauvinists.

Lenin had similarly reproached chauvinism to those Russian Marxists, who boasted of internationalism, but in fact they only defended the imperial interests of Russia that oppressed the smaller and weaker nations: Lenin was consistent in this until his death and permanently attacked the Great Russian chauvinism hiding under the cover of internationalism.

Trotsky explains the whole problem in the relationship of empires and subjugated nations as follows: *"The desire of the ruling nation to maintain the status quo looks like it was superior to 'nationalism', as well as the desire of the victorious nation to maintain its prey, easily acquiring the form of pacifism."*

If you win the war take another country what belongs to it, then pacifism is the most profitable way for you – because you do not want to lose your prey. If you are a power and control small and weak peoples, then the resistance to nationalism is the most advantageous approach for you – because you do not want to lose your power over others. It would be a tragedy for Marxism if it applies its normative visions to the reality in such an awkwardly way to serve the imperial interests of the powers. Several theorists of Marxism of the Second International understood it, and I think the modern Marxists should follow them.

In **modern Marxism**, in general, three approaches of Marxists to the **nation-state in the era of global capitalism** can be recognized.

First, it is the famous thesis of Marxist (post) structuralism (Toni Negri and Michael Hardt), according to which global capitalism has resulted in a formless empire that lacks bearer of the power in the imperial states, but it itself creates a global totality of power, a structure of relations in which it is impossible to detect a centre or periphery. It is impossible to return to the state in view of this radical globalized interpretation.

The second view also argues that globalization devour a state, which is manifested by the growing power of transnational corporations, markets and financial capital (e.g. David Harvey, Samir Amin), but it considers some form of de-globalization as desirable and possible. I defend this de-globalization view in my book.

The third view differs from the first two in the descriptive plane, because it considers the nation state to be a key player in global capitalism and an indispensable tool for its maintenance. Ellen Meiksins Wood, for example, in this context writes:

*" But, while no one would deny the global reach of capital, there is little evidence that today's 'global capital is less in need of national states than were earlier capitalist interests. Global capital, no less than 'national' capital, relies on nation states to maintain local conditions favourable to accumulation as well as to help it navigate the global economy."*

I think it's important to work also with this view and develop a realistic perception of international politics.

It can be said that none of the Marxist views can claim the absolute truth and each of them is useful in some ways for the criticism of global capitalism. In certain, especially economic aspects, globalization weakens the regulatory and redistributive functions of the welfare state, but in geopolitical context one can still feel that great power politics determines the character of international politics more than ideals of transnational ideologies.

At the level of description, it can be argued that globalization has weakened the national state at social, economic and ideological level; in the level of prescription, it can be argued that a certain degree of de-globalization and a return to state regulatory functions at this stage of history have a greater chance to bring success to a socialist alternative than the utopian cosmopolitan visions of a global state that, in view of the current weak position of the international labour movement, suits mainly transnational capital.

One more methodological remark. As regards **the realist contra structuralist paradigms**, in the current Marxist theory, there are two fundamental views on the role of the state (powers) in globalization.

The first is closer to the classic Lenin's definition of imperialism. According to this line of argumentation, the dominance of financial capital and (transnational) corporations is the main feature of global capitalism, but great powers, especially the USA, play the key role in the reproduction of the system. Thus, in globalization, not only purely economic logic (hegemony of transnational corporations), but also political-power realistic logic (hegemony of the US and other Western powers) operates.

Imperial wars of the 21st century (Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.) many geopolitical controversies (e.g. Israel/Palestine, Iran/Saudi Arabia or Russia/Ukraine), serious political decisions (e.g. Brexit), not to mention the rise of world leaders who put emphasis on national protectionism rather than transnational capital (such as Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin) are good examples of the fact that although the economic interest of capital is of paramount importance in great power logic, the great powers often follow geopolitical power logic and do not always obediently fulfil the interests of transnational capital. In this respect, the basic parameters of Lenin's analysis of capitalism continue to apply. This view is close to Alex Callinicos, Immanuel Wallerstein or David Harvey.

According to the second view, "imperialism is no longer about nations," and even the greatest power – United States – is merely fulfilling the interests of transnational capital. The states have virtually no autonomous role, and the whole operational logic of global capitalism has changed. The global capitalism transformed into a global empire where national borders do not fulfil their role, and the dominion of transnational capital is virtually unlimited. Thus, the classic Lenin's definition of imperialism is overcome by this argument, because the powers are far from having such an autonomous role as in the past and basically they only express the interests of transnational (not national) capital. For example, William Robinson, Michael Hardt, and Toni Negri are of such opinion.

Academic disputes about whether global capitalism is dominated by exclusively transnational corporations (capital), or imperial policy of states (including the United States), I do not consider crucial: the operational logic of global capitalism uses both actors, transnational corporations as well as states. My view is therefore closer to Callinicos, Wallerstein, or Harvey, although I do not consider this question to be of the utmost importance.

In my theory I argue that globalization processes undermine abilities of states to operate in economic and social policy, but also that the most powerful states (powers) help national and transnational corporations in which they hold an interest (economic, power, political), in accumulation of capital on global markets either through military force or through economic and diplomatic pressure on weaker states. In globalization they are interconnected processes, as Lenin defined them at the beginning of the 20th century.

Meanwhile, the power has moved from the imperial states to transnational corporations, but the essence of (global) capitalism has not changed. Both main globalization players (economic and political, transnational capital and powers) are complement each other and it is not decisive for my reflections to which of these actors we attach more influence in relation to particular historical decisions.

The trend is that transnational capital is becoming more and more powerful, but at this historic stage it is still not possible to talk about the disappearance of the power logic of international policy.

That's why my reflections are inspired by both radical, global studies and a realistic paradigm of international policy theory. These paradigms are not excluded – on the contrary, they can be complementary. The systemic logic of capitalist globalization presupposes the existence of transnational corporations and transnational institutions as well as powers and geopolitics. This is one of the way for modern Marxims - I think - which can be the most useful and convincing.

The abstract ideals of Enlightenment are extremely valuable and important. But they are not the whole story. They are just a value basis which must be in balance with historical and geographical particularism, respect for otherness and sovereignty of other cultures and nations. The fundament must be a common anti-capitalist ideal – a vision of a new collectivist economics which holder should be a state or other forms of authentic democratic solidarity communities.

To kick away collective identities in the name of empty cosmopolitan globalization may be at first glance attractive for the Left: socialism is ultimately a global alternative that socio-economic issues raise over all cultural or national stereotypes. But Marx himself always came out of historical materialism, and according to it, he has always stated that society sets only such tasks with which the material conditions are met. **In the current phase of history, the abandonment of state, national and other great particular identities is something that undermines the revolutionary movement and increases the power of those whom fit an isolated and individualistic cosmopolitan actor, or a defenceless minority, of which the transnational capital do not need to be afraid.**

The Left, in the actual historical phase, necessarily needs to work with the specific community identities and to develop them creatively, no matter we are speaking about classes, states, nations, or other forms of collective awareness. Otherwise, the Left will never reach its ideals, and in its liberal or postmodern form it will only continue to make useful idiots for transnational capital which want to eliminate all the collective identities, including the nation-states to get rid off the historical actors who can regulate or control it. That's why I call for more realism and classical Marxism in the Left-Wing theory and politics. That's why I call for **Left-Wing Anti-globalism**.