Nationalism and Internationalism:
Theory and Practice of Marxist Nationality Policy from Marx and Engels to
Lenin and the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of History
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ABSTRACT:
The dissertation examines the roots of modernity at the turn of the 20th century through the prism of the relationship between nationalism and internationalism. This seemingly incompatible affiliation between the two ideological archenemies has produced one of the most intriguing paradoxes of modern history. While theoretically attempting to reject nationalism as a transient product of capitalism, Marxism has in practice oftentimes exploited its appeal and utilized its extensive institutional repertoire. The study traces the evolution of Marxism’s conceptualization of the nationality question—a slow shift from an outright rejection of nationalism to an acceptance of its progressive features, complexity, varieties and influences. Interweaving intellectual and cultural studies in history with the political and intellectual history of the European Left, the study offers an intricate narrative of the crossroads of two important ideologies in theory and practice. The dissertation’s comparative and transnational approach reveals several important hitherto superficially explored aspects of Marxism’s difficult dialogue with nationalism. Firstly, it re-evaluates Karl Marx and Friedrich’s views on the nationality question, from its outright denial to limited acceptance and application. Secondly, it re-examines the multitude of Social Democratic responses to nationalism before the Great War. The advent of mass politics and the popularization of Marxist ideas produced a range of diverse socialist responses to the national conundrum throughout Europe. A comparison of Western (French and German), East Central and Eastern European (Austrian, Polish and Russian) and Soviet attitudes highlights some of the startling similarities and differences between the various groups’ ideological constellations. Finally, the dissertation uses the case study of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski, KPRP) to reveal certain insights about the cumulative heritage of Marxist thought on nationalism. An analysis of the KPRP reveals a lot not only about a national party’s struggles with nationalism (challenging many historiographical questions), but also about the diverse conceptualizations of Marx and Engels’ thought on nationalism, about European Social Democracy’s debates about the phenomenon, and about the Soviet nationality policy (within and outside the Soviet Union).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The rollercoaster ride of producing an effectively organized, well argued and decisively defended dissertation is often riddled with challenges and mishaps. In the end, it becomes a product not only of individual effort but of collaboration and intellectual exchange, of guidance and direction, and of perseverance and willpower. I was fortunate to have a supervisor, Professor Piotr Wróbel, who recognized in me the potential to make a contribution to academic discourse. His guidance, moral support and insights were invaluable throughout my graduate studies. I would also like to thank Professor J. Kivimae, Professor R. Austin, Professor P.R. Magocsi, Professor M.B. Biskupski and Professor R. Johnson for their comments and counsel. Moreover, I would like to thank the staff of the various archives and libraries where I conducted research and wrote the final draft. Many words of gratitude also go to my friends Michael Newmark, Daniel Sokołowski, Svitlana Frunchak, Olga Ponichtera, and many others who provided so much more than moral sustenance. Lastly, I want to thank my family, especially my wife Gabriela who had to endure the pains and tribulations of this ride with me. Without her determination, encouragement, and intellectual input, none of this would have been possible.
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INTRODUCTION:
RETHINKING THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN MARXISM.

In June of 1919, the newly established Central Committee of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski, KPRP) issued a declaration to the working peoples of Lithuania and Byelorussia. It asked: “For what reason does Your country again flow with the people’s blood, why are Your villages and cities on fire?” It was a response to Poland’s military advances into neighbouring territories, and the Polish government’s suppression of the proletarian revolution that was seemingly erupting everywhere. As the Soviet-Polish War of 1919-1920 encompassed all the borderlands between the two states, the KPRP criticized the imperial expansion of the Second Republic. In stern language, the declaration blamed the Polish landowners for preventing the growth of true freedom in the Kresy (Eastern borderlands). “Comrades!” it continued, “The Lithuanian and Byelorussian peasant and worker will not be free as long as Poland is ruled by the gentry [(szlachta)] and the bourgeoisie. The Lithuanian and Byelorussian landless peasant will not get land, until jointly with the Polish peasant, he overthrows his executioners and oppressors.”1 Freedom in Lithuania and Byelorussia from the oppressive chains of capitalism would only arrive with the liberation of Poland by the Red Army.

Interwar Polish Communists believed in the imminent spread of the October Revolution. They perceived the newly established Poland as an Entente creation, and the pinnacle of the capitalist drive to enslave the worker and the peasant of East Central Europe. But why were the Polish Communists so opposed to Polish statehood? Was the Second Republic nothing more than an expression of bourgeois economic interests? Did the new state offer no benefits to its workers? Were the Polish Communists simply fulfilling Soviet foreign policy directives by subverting order and stability in the young country? Or were they genuine internationalists, fulfilling a long legacy of anti-nationalist rhetoric in Polish Marxism? Not only in Poland, but also across the entire European continent, Communists faced a difficult situation. The realities of wartime fighting, postwar self-determination, and the Soviet experiment came face to face with the Marxist struggle with the national-international dichotomy.

MARXISM—A RESPONSE TO MODERNITY.

Communist, and more broadly speaking Marxist views on nationalism have been troublesome, contradictory, and even paradoxical.2 There is a general consensus on the inadequacy of Marxist thought on nationalism, nation-states, or nationality.3 Perceived as little more than a social phenomenon in the realm of world history—a temporary by-product of capitalism—nationalism was to disappear with the coming of the revolutionary upheaval. Thus, the predominant purpose of nationalism, according to Marxists, was strategic—as a progressive force assisting the revolutionary endgame. Although this has been the accepted Marxist view of nationalism,4 the full story of the nationality question within Marxism is much more complex. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

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1 Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski [hereafter KPRP], “Do ludności pracującej Litwy i Białorusi.” Archiwum Akt Nowych, 158/ VI-2, pt. 6, 12.
3 See, for instance, the introduction to Walicki’s Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom.
struggled with the phenomenon, and left no definitive blueprint for their followers. Yet, by the late 19th century, and especially following the October Revolution, ignoring nationalism was no longer a viable solution for Marxists.

The turn of the 20th century, and especially the Great War and the post-war Peace Settlements, had introduced new realities into the ideological modernity that Communists faced. The period before 1914 had already become a battleground of contending values and ideologies of the various “isms”—a negotiation between multiple responses to modernity. According to Alexander Gerschenkron, the 19th century can be delineated as a struggle between rival formulae for a modern society. Thus, nationalism and Marxism can be perceived as competing theories of industrialization, or as I would argue, of modernization. Both could be reformative and radical, both could build or hinder class solidarity, both could initiate or pacify revolutionary fervour, both could be deviationist, and both promised a genuine liberation to the masses. Roman Szporluk expands this perspective to a more triangular contest between capitalism, Marxism and nationalism, arguing that the interaction between the three shaped the ideological foundations of the 19th century. “Nationalism,” in his words, “was a third party on the battlefield where Marxism met capitalism.” Although the seeds of modernity are still contested today, we can safely conclude that both nationalism and Marxism attempted to define modernity. Each offered a distinct worldview, a set of values and ethics, a purpose, and a course of action. Each had dedicated supporters and uncompromising critics. In the hundred years after the French Revolution, the clash between the two ideologies was fought in mass politics and the birth of young nation-states. Only the Great War and the October Revolution forced the two to confront each other.

The First World War redefined both nationalism and Marxism, albeit in different ways. Nationalism and its accompanying jingoistic shadow contributed to the eruption of the war. The “total war” legitimized the nation and the state as the highest principles—raison d’etre of existence—whose defence was worth any sacrifice. Nationalist rhetoric became the de facto driving force of mobilization and the justification for wartime atrocities. The end of the war reinforced the nationalist ideals at the altar of self-determination with the destruction of four historical empires (Ottoman, Romanov, Hohenzollern and Habsburg) and the establishment of several new states. One of the main prerogatives of the Paris Peace Settlement was the redrawing of borders. “The essence of these [settlements],” Hobsbawn explains, “was the Wilsonian plan to divide Europe into ethnic-linguistic territorial states, a project dangerous as it was impracticable, except at the cost of forcible mass expulsion, coercion and genocide which was subsequently paid.”

The First World War was not only a pivotal moment for nationalism, but for Marxism as well. On the one hand, it caused a breach in the Second International as most socialists abandoned multinational solidarity for their patriotic colours. What Marx and Engels hoped to achieve through the Social Democratic parties and especially through the Second International seemed to be undone at the onset of the war when socialists of all national stripes rushed to support their governments. But not all was lost, as a strong beacon of hope for the diverse followers of

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5 Modernity has been become a victim of both terminology and post-modernism. For a teleological understanding of modernity that I apply here, see William R. Everdell, The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Leszek Kolakowski, Modernity on Endless Trial (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
8 Hobsbawn, “Ethnicity and Nationalism,” 259.
Marxism emerged in the shape of the October Revolution. In light of their victory in Russia, Marxists could once again regroup to carry their message to the oppressed of the world, especially as the revolution would surely spread across the world. These expectations quickly dissipated when the first Communist state had to contend with the realities of isolation and the need to normalize relations with its neighbours. But did the establishment of the Soviet Union mean that Marxist ideals succumbed to nationalist interests of a state? Could the needs of a Communist state surpass those of internationalism? Were interwar Communists really violating their own principles when they appropriated nationalism for their cause? Or was this a culmination of a gradual process that had begun already before the Great War? Marxism’s relationship with nationalism has remained tumultuous, fluctuating between rejection and acceptance.

NATIONALISTS IN DISGUISE: MARXIST USES OF NATIONALISM.

“Marxists profess to be internationalists,” Horace B. Davis asserts, “and yet everywhere we find Marxists acting as Nationalists.” Szporluk would certainly agree with Davis, arguing that “when Communism has defeated rival doctrines, it has owed its victory to the adoption of at least some of the principles of nationalism and to the fact that it has become national, indeed nationalist, itself.” So was internationalism merely a cover for nationalist (and later statist) interests? Can Marxism exist outside the realm of nationalism? Or can Marxism only hope to either appropriate or suppress nationalism’s power? The paradox of Marxism’s approach to nationalism is that it left the door open to both solutions. “The theoretical legacy left by Marx was so rich in content, so vast in its possible implications, and sometimes so obscure in formulation,” as James Gregor explains, “that there really were very few ideas, no matter how curious, that it would be impossible to find within its compass.” Hence, it should be not surprising that the masters’ followers quickly developed theories that justified both the recognition and encouragement as well as denial and condemnation of nationalism.

Richard Pipes argues that Marxism is just another form of nationalism. In his *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, he suggests that force, coercion and a systematic exploitation of nationalism were the only means by which the Communists were able to re-establish control over the Russian imperial territories after the October Revolution. In the post-revolutionary period, Communism and nationalism fused into an uncomfortable marriage of convenience that gave birth to a disfigured child: “socialism in one state.” Wherever the supranational policy failed, the Bolsheviks had to apply ideological propaganda, unscrupulous violence, and relentless coercion in order to quell the aspirations of the various nationalities. As soon as the highly centralized empire showed even the smallest cracks of weakness, the nationalities would break away from Moscow. This is certainly a compelling story, but it does not adequately capture the nuances of Communism’s difficult dialogue with nationalism.

In 1933, Hans Kohn wrote that “by the very process of dragging the peoples of the Soviet Union out of the period of religious medievalism through its work of enlightenment, and leading them to a new trust in themselves and to modern technical product, it awakens in them also the will to self-expression and to cohesion of the nation, and there grows up in them, [...] through nationalism, the opposing force with which Communism has to contend not

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10 Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism*, 5.
only in the Russian people but in the other peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union.” Unknowingly, Kohn foreshadowed the future consequences of Soviet policies toward the various nationalities of the union. When the turbulence of the late 1980s and early 1990s led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent states, many historians attempted to discern the causes of this phenomenon. After all, Marxist-Leninist doctrine assumed that historical progress would lead towards the internationalization of nations. But in the latter half of the 1980s, the seemingly totalitarian system was cracking at the seams, with nationalist aspirations as one of the centrifugal forces. It was clear that the various nationalities wanted to break away from the Soviet framework, and were now afforded such an opportunity. The Soviet nationality policy of both promoting and suppressing nationalist movements contained many contradictions.

The explosion of ethnic nationalism and separatism in the former Soviet Union led to a re-evaluation of multiethnic societies and nation-building (or nation-breaking). The strength of national sentiments within a presumed totalitarian system needed an explanation. Historians have began reaching back to the founding days of Leninist and Stalinist Soviet Union to re-examine the roots of nationality policies that not only nurtured the various national groups, but allowed for their survival throughout the 20th century. Apart from specific scholarly debates within Soviet historiography, the collapse of the Communist superpower also created broader questions about nationalism’s victory over Communism.

The study of Soviet nationality policy has revealed much about the relationship between nationalism and Marxism. However, scholars have rarely placed this focus within the broader context of the heritage of Marxism’s approach to nationalism. To understand Lenin and Stalin’s responses to the nationality conundrum, it is important to reach back into the past and trace the evolution of Marxism from its foundations. Moreover, it is to understand that Marxists have offered diverse solutions to nationalism that have wavered considerably between the two extremes of outright rejection of or support for nationalism.

The contradictions between Communism and nationalism are many, but it would be self-deceiving to claim that Marxism has consistently and in every instance opposed nationalism. Fidel Castro’s Cuba, Mao Zedong’s China and Titoist Yugoslavia reveal much about the multifaceted relationship between the two ideologies. When Josip Broz Tito established his homegrown Communist army within the Balkans during the early 1940s, he did not consult Stalin—the contemporary leader of the Communist world. In the course of the war, Tito was able to claim...

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14 This was part of a trend to revisit the various empires of the 19th century to understand how multinational societies dealt with nationalism. See, for instance, Karen Karkey and Mark von Hagen, eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building; The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).
victory over the Nazis in Yugoslavia and establish a legitimate Communist state with grassroots support. He utilized self-determination effectively through such policies as the recognition of Macedonians as a distinct nationality. But Tito’s national Communism was troublesome for Communism a la Stalin. His defence of Yugoslav political and economic sovereignty from Moscow was heretical in the Kremlin’s eyes. Foremost, how could Tito claim the rightful path to the Communist utopia outside the prescribed Stalinist model? “In declaring his independence from institutional Stalinism,” as A. James Gregor concludes, “Tito demonstrated that the sentiment of nationality might serve as a fulcrum for revolutionary mobilization.” In many ways, the Tito-Stalin split could be interpreted as nothing more than a dispute over diverging state interests, where national aspirations overrode international cooperation. But in a broader sense, nationalism was creating distinct pathways to the Communist utopia.

Walker Connor might be right in asserting that the key to Marxism’s success is the formula for firstly harnessing and then eventually dissolving nationalism. Although this recipe has been attempted on numerous occasions, it has never been fully achieved. Nationalism has caused much trouble and debate (and continues to do so) within Marxist theory and practice. “Marxists not only learned to accommodate themselves to an expediency coexistence with a world filled with nationalisms,” as Connor concludes, “but they also developed a strategy to manipulate nationalism into the service of Marxism.” The latter has created strange anomalies, as exemplified in Hans Kohn’s inclusion of Mao Zedong’s writings in a collection of documents of the most influential ideologues of nationalism (sic!). So how can an ideology defined by proletarian internationalism, where economic determinism and class priorities override all other cultural or psychological (i.e., subjective) criteria tame and even borrow from its nemesis? Can the dialectical framework of Marxism really explain and justify the various ways in which Communism has gained from nationalism or the extent to which nationalism has found a comfortable home within the Communist framework? Although many have attempted to examine the internationalist-nationalist dichotomy in Marxism, no consensus exists in scholarship on the nature of this peculiar relationship.

**METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMAS: STUDYING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARXISM AND NATIONALISM.**

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16 Stalin went as far as to attempt to recognize the government-in-exile as the legitimate heir of interwar Yugoslavia. Only when it became clear that Tito’s policies of national compromise and socialist reforms appealed to the masses, did Stalin reluctantly agree to cooperate with him.  
18 Gregor, Marxism, Fascism & Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism, 7.  
22 See, for example, Nigel Harris, *National Liberation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990) or Anthony Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature between the Wars: A New Pandora’s Box* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003). The former examines the Marxist influence on post-colonial liberation, while the latter deals with the Marxist conceptions of self-determination of African-Americans during the literary Harlem Renaissance.
The overarching objective of the current study is to critically re-evaluate the relationship between Marxism and nationalism. But how does the current study contribute to the existing scholarship? Foremost, it breaks away from the traditional approaches that have been hitherto utilized in the study of Marxism’s theory and practice of the nationality question. Since the early 20th century, this field of study has experienced a compartmentalization.

Firstly, the scholarship that explores the theoretical (or ideological) development of Marxist thought on nationalism gives only a highly superficial exploration of how ideology has shaped certain practices. For instance, Ronaldo Munck, Michael Löwy, or Ephraim Nimni all examine the theoretical origins and evolution of Marxist thought on nationalism but none explores how these ideas were actually applied in practice. For example, their assessment of the Soviets’ marriage of Marxist and nationalist ideas, and especially their applicability in different contexts is highly superficial.

On the other hand, scholars who have examined Communism in practice have done so without adequate understanding of the theoretical underpinnings that informed these practices. For instance, Ronald Grigor Suny, Terry Martin and Robert Conquest have unravelled the different applications of Soviet nationality policy, but unfortunately at the cost of exploring their ideological roots. They focus on the application and consequences of nationality policies without really looking at how Communist ideas were developed and translated into concrete strategies.

Finally, there has been a reluctance to include Marxism within the discourse on nationalism. Since Marxism has defined itself as predominantly anti-nationalistic, it has created a self-imposed isolation from the mainstream scholarship on nationalism. Although there are historians such as Thomas Nairn who apply Marxist theoretical framework to examine nationalism, and non-Marxists theorists of nationalism who have given some thought to Marxist views on the nationality question, such scholarship is negligible.

One of the key aims of the current study is to resolve the above-mentioned disconnections by bridging the gap between the diverse and oftentimes isolated historiographical debates on: Marxism and nationalism; Social Democracy before 1914; a number of Marxist thinkers (Bernstein, Luxemburg, Kelles-Krauz, etc.); Soviet nationality policy; and interwar Polish Communism. It offers a comprehensive examination of the theory of nationalism, the theoretical Marxist responses to the nationality question, and the interaction between Marxist


26 For a typical example, see Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, Nationalism: A Critical Introduction (London: SAGE Publications, 2002). The inadequate treatment of Marxism in the field of theory of nationalism can be exemplified in a sweeping remark by Paul Lawrence who claims that “[t]he earliest Marxist writings on nations and nationalism are contained within The Communist Manifesto.” Paul Lawrence, Nationalism: History and Theory (London: Pearson, 2005), 41. As is shown in this study, Marx had commented much on nationalism already in the early 1840s.

27 Synthesizing these different topics in a single analysis has not been attempted before. The only comparative study which has attempted such a wide scope is Marek Waldenberg, Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej: Dzieje konfliktów i idei (Warszawa: PWN, 2000).
ideology and practices in relations to nationalism. The overall aim is to show the difficult negotiation between internationalism and nationalism within the cumulative Marxist discourse in a comparative context; to borrow from Leszek Kolakowski, it is to “analyse the strange fate of [Marxism] which began in Promethean humanism and culminated in the monstrous tyranny of Stalin.”

The study has four critical aims: The first aim is to re-evaluate the evolution of Marx and Engels’ thought on nationalism from the 1840s to Engels’ death in the mid 1890s. Their writings embodied both acceptance and rejection of nationalism—ingredients for both nation-building and nation-breaking—leaving the gates wide open to the debate on the place of nationalism within Marxism. The second aim is to offer a comparison of pre-Great War socialist views on the nationality question, tracing the growing recognition of nationalist practices in Marxism. Social Democrats before 1914 had much to say about nationalism. At the very least, they tried to understand the phenomenon, attempting to situate it within the Marxist theoretical constellation. Through debates on parliamentarism, revisionism, militarism, and trade unionism, socialists reformulated nationalism’s place within Marxism. The third aim is to examine the evolution of Bolshevik (especially Vladimir Lenin’s) theories and practices of nationality policy from early 20th century to the early Soviet Union. It will be shown that Lenin’s construction of the Soviet state encompassed the dialectics of nation-building and nation-breaking. Most importantly, it will show how this dialectic of nation-building and nation-breaking pushed Bolshevism towards statism and totalitarianism. The final aim is to use the case study of Polish Communism as an example of the struggle between nationalism and internationalism in the cumulative Marxist heritage.

I. MARXIST HERITAGE CONSTRUCTED: MARX AND ENGELS RE-EVALUATED.

The first objective of the study is to examine the ideological evolution of Marx and Engels’ views on nationalism from the early 1840s to the late 19th century. Unlike previous scholarship, the study delineates a three-stage process, beginning with Marx and Engels’ first thoughts on nationalism in the 1840s, and ending with Engels’ evaluations of Social Democratic parties in late 19th century. An examination of this topic entails several difficulties. If we accept the Marxist assertion that the formation of nations or nation-states is a product of capitalism and that “the working men have no country,” it becomes difficult to avoid the pitfalls of analyzing something that might not be there in the first place. Moreover, the Marxist doctrine proposed that the central divisions within society were vertical (i.e., between classes) and not horizontal (i.e., between nation-states). Their post-revolutionary modernity had no room for nationalism. Nationalism was thus labelled a temporary nuisance—a tool of the bourgeoisie to

28 Andrzej Walicki explains the dilemma in explaining the role of ideology within a given historical context: “The Marxist genesis of the Bolshevik totalitarian project does not explain, of course, all features of communist totalitarianism; it explains only the ideological legitimation and utopian goals of Bolshevik rule—that is, its specifically ‘ideocratic’ aspect. I do not wish to diminish, let alone ignore, the role of non-ideological, historical and social, factors in the formation of the Soviet system. Nevertheless, I intend to show that the part played by ideological factors was relatively independent, and for a long time of decisive importance. Interpreting Russia’s communist experiment as the consequence of Russia’s unique political culture amounts in fact to explaining the crucial problem away. It is no doubt the easiest way of exculpating Marxism and putting all blame on factors external to it and absent in the West.” Walicki, Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia, 2-3.


30 Munck, for example, identifies only two critical turning points in Marx and Engels’ thought on nationalism.
present its interests as those of the entire society. Following the socialist revolution, it would quickly disappear.

Even such renowned Marxist historians as Tom Nairn conclude that Marxism has no theory of nationalism. But, as the current study reveals, both Marx and Engels, and especially their followers, had much to say about the influence of nationalism on modern society. Living and writing in the age of nationalism forced the Communist forefathers to deal with its ever-growing, even if irritating, influence and popularity.

So why is it important to revisit Marx’s and Engels’s commentary on nationalism? In the late 19th century, before his death, Karl Marx stated that “The proletariat of each country, must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.” Could this be considered an outright acknowledgement of the necessity for states as a precondition for the growth of class consciousness? Gopal Balakrishnan contends that Marx’s thinking had a twofold complexity: “the claim that all that is solid, nationality included, melts into air is balanced by another: this same capitalism gives rise to the territorially fixed and juridically invariant structure of the modern bourgeois state.” Although the proletarian revolution (and its class orientation) was primary and imminent, nation-states would accompany or contribute to the process. “The argument,” Balakrishnan explains in his shrewd commentary on Marx, “that the proletariat emerged as a political force in modern history only as a national class certainly suggests that nation and class, far from being competing, mutually exclusive bases of organization, are, at the very least, complementary.” As the study reveals, the evolution of Marx and Engels’s thinking on the nationality question was a slow shift from utopia to social science, from an outright rejection of nationalism to an acceptance of some of its progressive features, and from a monolithic perception of nationalism to a subtle differentiation of its varieties and influences.

Contrary to the majority of the existing scholarship, the first period begins in the 1840s when Marx and Engels first confronted nationalism in their critique of Young Hegels, Friedrich List and German nationalism. Marx’s writings show that his initial response to nationalism was guided by three fundamental beliefs: that nationalism was a tool of capitalism—thus, a minor dependent variable; that there was nothing more to national unity than economic relations; and that national liberation stood in the way of a more genuine social liberation. Both Marx and Engels argued that the unit of historical analysis was the whole of human society, not any of its segments divided by geographic, political, or linguistic criteria. Yet, Marx and Engels did pay tribute to what

31 Nairn, The Break-Up of Britain, 329.
32 Such a position has been argued by several historians, such as for instance Szporluk, Connor, Davis, Nimni, or Munck, whose work will be discussed in more detail later.
33 I use the word commentary since there is no single body of scholarship (produced by either of the Communist forefathers) on the nationality question. To call it a body of thought would be simply over-exaggerating.
37 Most of the scholarship on Marxist views on nationalism begins only with the examination of the Revolutions of 1848-49. Szporluk laments that many historians have avoided the examination of Marx’s thought on nationalism in the era before the Spring of Nations. Szporluk, Communism and Nationalism, 1-3.
38 Walicki argues that all aspects of Marxism, including Marx’s perceptions on nationalism, can only be understood in relation to (or can be narrowed down to) his main raison d’être—the drive to reach freedom. Walicki, Marxism.
seemed to be the *progressive* elements of nationalism as they classified states according to their role in history. The Spring of Nations (which marked the beginning of the second stage) transformed the European realities, marking a turning point in Marx and especially Engels. In their analysis of East Central Europe in 1848, they began to distinguish between *historical* and *non-historical* nations.\(^{39}\)

The 1860s marked yet another transformation in their approach to nationalism (the third stage). The Polish, Irish and Russian cases offered new insights on the relationship between class and nation, forcing further modifications to Marx and Engels’ conception of nationalism. Henceforth, the two men not only differentiated between *revolutionary* (historic) and *anti-revolutionary* (non-historic) nations, but also recognized the nationalism of the *oppressed* and that of the *oppressor*.\(^{40}\) They acknowledged the interdependence between the national and social (class) factors in bourgeois-democratic revolutions, and even though the former were still not seen as important in their own right, their fulfillment was perceived to be important for Social Democracy. Moreover, Marx and Engels promoted large and multi-national units, which at the very least, provided a comprehensive framework for capitalist production, thus stimulating the growth of class consciousness of the proletariat.

**II. Marxist Heritage Diversified: Social Democracy Copes with Nationalism.**

The second critical aim of the current study is to examine how Marx and Engels’ ideas on nationalism were interpreted by their followers at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Marx and Engels’ *unwillingness*\(^{41}\) to offer a definitive statement on nationalism planted seeds of confusion amongst their followers, which eventually grew into various strains of interpretations of nationalism. Marx and Engels came a long way from ignoring nationalism to acknowledging its multiple implications. Yet, they steadfastly refused to recognize nationalism’s *independence* in the historical process, leaving a Pandora’s Box for their disciples. Discussions over the *subjective* (or what Benedict Anderson labels as *sacred*)\(^{42}\) dimension of nationalism—encompassing issues such as psychology and culture—stimulated much discord amongst Marxists in late 19\(^{th}\) century.

The First and the Second Internationals provided some direction as to the proper Socialist interpretation of nationalism. But they could not resolve the growing divisions amongst socialist perceptions of the nationality question. Various schools emerged with the hope of offering a definitive socialist solution to nationalism. Connor distinguishes between three such strains of Marxism: Classical Marxists (Rosa Luxemburg, Georgi Plekhanov, Karl Radek), Strategic Marxists (Karl Renner, Otto Bauer) and National Marxists (Edward Berstein).\(^{43}\) Other scholars

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\(^{39}\) Only the former had the capacity to contribute to the revolutionary movement in Europe; the latter had simply no viability or energy to rise—they had played out their role on the stage of world history.


\(^{41}\) Marx and Engels certainly had a considerable knowledge about nationalism, especially as they realized its power during the 1848 Revolution and even more so by the early 1860s. They were more than capable of penning a treatise of nationalism (and Marx even jotted a cursory outline of such a work), but neither ever wrote what would amount to a definitive Marxist piece on nationalism.


\(^{43}\) See Connor, chapter 2.
classify these strains as either reactionary (Luxemburg) or progressive (Bauer). Still others delineate between four or even five diverging ideological currents. Lastly, some divide them according to national groups.

The current study offers a distinct way of looking at how Marxists responded to nationalism, without categorizing them into specific typologies. It shows that even seeming anti-nationalists such as Rosa Luxemburg wanted to understand and explain the nationality question. The diversity and complexity of Marxist responses to nationalism must be understood within three critical processes instead of within the confines of categories. Firstly, as a response to the realities at the turn of the 20th century, specifically parliamentarism, militarism, and imperialism. Secondly, as a consequence of emerging mass politics, where a growing acceptance of nationalist practices in political parties confronted the Second International’s rhetoric of cross-national solidarity. Finally, the evolution of Marxism’s approach to nationalism must be examined in a comparative manner. The realities of Eastern and East Central Europeans, who on a daily basis experienced the hardships of national oppression, produced some highly interesting solutions. Understanding these key dimensions offers a much more comprehensive examination of how the Marxist heritage on nationalism evolved from the mid 19th century.

In the latter half of the 19th century, when socialists began to organize in parties, three key issues defined their response to the nationality question: imperialism; growth of young nation-states (in the era of dying multi-national empires); and the rise of national consciousness amongst workers. This era of ideological pluralism gave birth to various distinct schools of Marxist interpretation of nationalism. But since neither Marx nor Engels left a blueprint for an appropriate response to nationalism, the Golden Age of Socialism—the four decades before 1914—was marked by disagreements that produced serious fissures.

By the end of the 19th century, the Second International called for the right of nations to self-determination. But even though nationalism was inserted into the Marxist discourse, this was done arbitrarily and disingenuously. The International devoted very little attention to the nationality question, never officially including it at any of its congresses. In the era of nation-states, when expanding parliamentarism pushed internationalists into mass parties, compromise with domestic nationalistic currents became a necessity. In responding to parliamentarism, militarism, and imperialism, socialists tried to negotiate between internationalist rhetoric and nationalist practices. Social Democratic parties at the national level began to pay attention to national interests and aspirations. Some, like

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44 Spencer and Wollman, Nationalism.
46 Tyszka, Nacjonalizm w Komuniźmie.
49 See, for instance, the classical interpretations offered by Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917; Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism; or Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. More recent studies have also attempted to explore this topic: Gary P. Steenson, After Marx, Before Lenin: Marxism and Socialist Working-Class Parties in Europe, 1884-1914 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991); Stefan Berger and Angel Smith, eds., Nationalism, Labour and ethnicity, 1870-1939 (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); or Stanley
Eduard Bernstein attempted to reconcile socialism and nationalism. Others though, identified nationalism as contemporary society’s worst disease. Between these two extremes lay a variety of diverging perspectives.

Most interesting of these were Marxists who lived east of Germany. Living and working in much more politically oppressive, and more importantly, pluralistic environments of large multiethnic empires, where national antagonisms continuously erupted, they had much to say in support of or against nationalism. The case studies of Rosa Luxemburg and Austro-Marxists reveal much about the multiple understandings of the nationality question and its potential solutions within the confines of Marxism. Luxemburg, who spearheaded the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (and later of Lithuania) and was active in German socialism, engendered what has become known in Marxism as national nihilism. But hers was no simplistic rejection of nationalism. She opposed national differentiation as it prevented the emergence of large centralized states, which offered the most conducive environment for the promotion of working class consciousness. National antagonisms would be resolved not by granting small ethnic groups statehood, but rather by a genuine socialist revolution. Austro-Marxists, led by Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, believed that national antagonisms could be resolved even before the advent of the socialist revolution. Through personal cultural autonomy, ethnic groups could be granted equality rights, which would eliminate nationalist strife and allow working masses to concentrate on social issues.

III. MARXIST HERITAGE IN PRACTICE: LENIN’S BOLSHEVIK NATIONALITY POLICY.

The third critical goal of the current study is to continue the exploration of the cumulative Marxist heritage on the nationality question by examining how Vladimir Lenin turned certain theories into practices. Unfortunately, most of the contemporary scholarship on the Soviet nationality policy has neglected to explore the roots of Lenin and Stalin’s views on nationalism. Hence, the current study provides a detailed examination of their thought on the nationality question, especially through debates with their contemporaries. Moreover, it delves into a discussion of how these ideas were translated into policies within the various Soviet republics as well as the wider Communist movement in Europe.

The First World War changed the realities of the game, thus forcing Marxists to account for the enormous power of nationalism. When confronted with war, socialists who had hitherto maintained internationalism as their credo, abandoned pacifism and voted for war credits. But the war also created an opportunity in Russia for Marxists to test their theories on the revolutionary battlefield. Lenin’s critique of Karl Kautsky, Luxemburg and Austro-Marxists, and his ideas on imperialism and self-determination echoed in the corridors of Bolshevik politicking before and after the October Revolution. While contending with other Marxist approaches to nationalism, Lenin criticized both the “nationalist deviations” of Austro-Marxists and the leftist denials of “national oppression”
The key was to find a middle ground: to combat nationalism when necessary and to manipulate it in the interests of the international movement whenever possible. The current study synthesizes Lenin’s nationalist thinking and strategy into a three-step process.

Firstly, that Bolsheviks were to ally themselves with the national aspirations of inhabitants by extending to them the right of national self-determination. Secondly, by seemingly conceding to nationalism, the need for independence within an ethnic group would dissipate. Hence, once all nationalistic suspicions were set aside, economic motivations would win out. During a period of national equality and cultural pluralism, local nationalisms would be promoted. Thirdly, all these concessions would lead to rapprochement or the coming together of nations under the centralized direction of Moscow. All nations (of the former Tsarist Empire) would inevitably be rejoined in the union. Henceforth, all nations within the USSR would be nationalist only in form, while their content would be socialist. Lenin was hoping to use the national question to supersede nationalism, to use nation-building to create the first Soviet state.

The current study explores several historiographical queries that arise from Leninist theoretical ideals and strategies. Firstly, to what extent was the application of self-determination in practice different from theory? Within weeks of the October Revolution, self-determination was fully applied in order to ensure the survival of the Bolshevik government. Yet, slowly the concept would narrow down in meaning and application. For instance, it would only apply to people who desire it or to the proletariat in each national group, rather than to the national group as a whole. The principle of self-determination was quickly subordinated to the exigencies of the ensuing events. But the experiences of War Communism called for both the tightening of nationalist rhetoric and the proliferation of nation-building. By 1923, meaningful debate about self-determination had for all intended purposes ended. Yet, the Bolsheviks were equally adamant about korenizatsiia and the promotion of local languages, territories and elites. The early 1920s revealed that the Bolsheviks manipulated and exploited nationalism, but that they were not always able to control the forces of nationalism that had erupted with the First World War, the October Revolution and the Civil War.

Beyond an examination of the Bolshevik nationality policy, the current study also examines the extent to which the Soviets tried to impose their nationality policy on Communists outside the Soviet Union. The intention is to fill a gap between the studies on Soviet nationality policy and scholarship on individual national Communist

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54 These debates are best explained in Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (New York: St. martin’s Press, 1999).
57 There was much debate about the actual timing of Lenin's understanding of self-determination. In a broader sense, the inability of the Soviets to expand the revolution beyond the borders of Russia led to a re-evaluation of many of the wartime Bolshevik assumptions and strategies.
58 Korenizatsiia (or korenizatsya) roughly translates into “indigenization” or “nativization.” More on this in Chapter 8.
parties. There was considerable discrepancy between the Soviet conceptualization of nationalism and that of the other Communist parties that emerged after 1918. When the Bolsheviks acquired power, they believed this to be only the first step towards the conclusion of the historical chain—a worldwide revolution. Even in the winter of 1919, Lenin reinforced the central aims of the revolution: “Complete and final victory…cannot be achieved in Russia alone; it can be achieved only when the proletariat is victorious in at least all the advanced countries, or, at all events, in some of the largest of the advanced countries. Only then shall we be able to say with absolute confidence that the cause of the proletariat has triumphed.”

One of the tools to spread the revolution outside the Soviet borders was the Communist International (Comintern or the Third International), which was established in March of 1919 with the aim of coordinating the work in national Communist parties throughout the world.

During its lifetime, from 1919 until 1943, the Comintern was assigned many different (oftentimes even contradictory) roles such as the sword of revolutionary internationalism or as the shield of Soviet state interests. “Rather than becoming a fomenter and organiser of world socialist revolution,” Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew explain, “the International turned into a compliant instrument of the Soviet state.” But did Soviets merely use the power of ethnonationalism as a potential Trojan horse in the capitalist states? This has been the traditionally accepted view amongst specialists. However, the connection between Soviet nationality policy and ideology, and its application in the Comintern has been noticeably omitted. This is perhaps due to the fact that the complexity of the Comintern’s role had begun unravelling only in the 1990s. Many questions have arisen. What was the relationship between the Comintern and the national communist parties? Were national sections completely subordinated to Soviet foreign policy? Was strategy defined in Moscow while national parties developed tactics on the ground rooted in indigenous conditions? Finally, to what extent was the Soviet conceptualization of the

59 Only in the last decade have we actually seen this type of scholarship emerge. See, for instance, Norman Laporte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley, eds., Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917-53 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Studies on specific national parties and their relationship with Moscow have received much more attention. See, for example, Emmet O’Connor, Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919-1943 (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004); Fridrikh I. Firsov, Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, The Secret World of American Communism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).


61 This entire period has been divided into five key stages: 1919-23; 1924-28; 1928-33, 1934-39; and 1939-43. Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), xxi.


63 See, for example, Edward Hallett Carr, History of Soviet Russia (London: Macmillan, 1964); Fernando Claudin, The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); or Connor, The National Question. For an opposing view, see Moscow-sponsored interpretations such as P. N. Fedoseyev et al., Lenin and the National Question (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) or A. I. Sobolew et al., Międzynarodówka Komunistyczna 1919-1943: zarys historyczny (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1974); or Western Marxist apologists such as Duncan Hallas, The Comintern (London: Bookmarks, 1985).

64 The historiography of the Comintern has been surprisingly underdeveloped, for the most part, due to the unavailability of archival sources. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, did this area of scholarship begin to flourish. A typical example would be Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, eds., International communism and the Communist International 1919-43 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) or Fridrikh I. Firsov, Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, The Secret World of American Communism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
nationality question carried out in member parties? These questions are answered in the final part of the current study.

IV. MARXIST HERITAGE CONTESTED: COMMUNIST WORKERS’ PARTY OF POLAND BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM.

The fourth objective of the current work is to use the case study of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland (in its early years between 1918 and 1924) to evaluate the cumulative heritage of Marxist thought on nationalism. An analysis of the KPRP reveals a lot not only about a national party’s struggles with nationalism (challenging many historiographical questions), but also about the diverse conceptualizations of Marx and Engels’ thought on nationalism, about European Social Democracy’s debates about the phenomenon, and about the Soviet nationality policy (within and outside the Soviet Union).

Poland presents a distinct and interesting case study of the Marxists’ (and Communists’) reaction to nationalism. Arguments amongst Polish socialists before 1914 on nationalism were a microcosm of the divisions within the broader European Marxism. At the turn of the 20th century, Polish socialists became entrenched in two camps: those who supported the re-establishment of Polish statehood and those who opposed it. Both debated the role of nationalism within Polish socialist discourse, revealing a multitude of interesting perspectives. The aim here is to show how the Poles were shaped by, and in turn informed, the broader Marxist debates about nationalism. The Great War only intensified these discussions, especially as the fighting opened opportunities through which the Poles could express their national aspirations. In 1918, these efforts culminated in the re-establishment of Poland’s independence. But the Second Republic became a multiethnic state marked by regional discord, economic disparities, and partisan divisions. Squeezed between the rightist and federalist conceptions of the nation-state, facing the Red Army’s goal of spreading the proletarian revolution westward, and straining to legitimize vaguely defined borders, the young state faced many insurmountable challenges. Operating in these circumstances, Polish

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65 The three aforementioned questions have constituted some of the main historiographical debates within Soviet studies since the 1970s. For the outline of the debates, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).


Communists had to build a new party, acquire support, and respond to national problems, all while still remaining loyal to their Soviet superiors.

The study highlights how Polish Communists of the interwar years faced tremendous difficulties revising the Luxemburgian traditions (of anti-nationalism), which had become an integral component of their Weltanschauung. They rejected the Paris Peace Settlement depicting Poland as an Entente creation that would be used to attack the first Bolshevik homeland. Their vision of international relations, and of the Second Republic's domestic and foreign policies, were interpreted through the prism of revolutionary utopianism. Obessed with the belief that the socialist revolution was imminent and would be victorious, they dismissed nationalism, which they believed would be swept away with all other archaic elements of capitalism. This revolutionism, combined with unquestionable support for the Soviet state and conspiratorial mindset, prevented them from developing an effective nationality policy towards their compatriots, their national homeland, or minorities that inhabited Poland's territories. Only when it became clear in the early 1920s that the socialist utopia could not be imported from the outside, did they realize that revolution would have to erupt from within, and that allies would be required if this endeavour had any chance of success.

The current study shows how the leaders of the KPRP conceptualized the party’s nationality policy in terms of an alliance with non-Polish minorities. Such an alliance would kill two birds with one stone: it would increase the party's rank-and-file; and it would offer a potential revolutionary trigger in the Kresy (i.e., Eastern Borderlands), which seemed to always be politically unstable and on the brink of armed insurrection. With the assistance of the minorities, the Polish Communists would foment a revolution in the periphery and would bring it to the gates of Warsaw. Moreover, reliance on non-Poles would allow Polish Communists to formulate a nationality policy while still avoiding support for the Second Republic or recognizing Polish national aspirations. Ironically, both remained a necessary ingredient if their work amongst the Polish workers was to bear fruit. Even the turn to minorities required a significant re-evaluation of the Polish Communism's traditional approach to the nationality question. Hence, the first five years of the party's existence were marked by a slow and gradual shift towards acceptance of Lenin's self-determination—never genuinely completed—which involved a fierce battle between those who advocated for a more positive approach to nationalism and those who opposed its acceptance.

Paradoxically, as the current study reveals, Bolsheviks had to convince their Polish counterparts of the necessity of nationalism and to develop a comprehensive nationality policy. The Soviet nationality policy echoed

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70 The notion of "utopian revolutionism" was borrowed from Gabriele Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929: A Study in Political Ideology (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 10.

71 The KPRP was an illegal organization always from the very moment it was established.

72 The minorities constituted more than a third of Poland's population in the interwar years. For details, see: Jerzy Tomaszewski, Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1985); Peter D. Stachura, Poland, 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic (New York: Routledge, 2004), 79-89; Roszkowski, Najnowsza historia Polski 1914-1945, 61-73; Leczyk, Druga Rzeczpospolita 1918-1939, 106-26.
loudly in the corridors of the KPRP. But the Poles of the early 1920s were not passive apparatchiks. They contested and debated Kremlin’s directives. The study shows the intricate interplay between the Poles and the Bolsheviks. The Poles bickered amongst themselves as often as they bickered with the Russians. Moreover, they manipulated Moscow in their domestic quarrels as much as Moscow manipulated them. In the end, even though a nationality policy was developed, Polish Communists continued to remain distrustful of their non-Polish counterparts, of their seemingly chauvinistic Polish masses, of the Second Republic’s ability to provide benefits for her working masses, and of the feasibility of nationalism within the Communist discourse. Luxemburgism of the pre-war era continued to define their resistance to nationalism.

CROSSROADS OF HISTORIOGRAPHIES: A NOTE ON THE SOURCES.

The last objective of the current study is to provide a bridge between Eastern, East Central and Western European Marxist narratives; between the Marxisms of the pre-1914 and the post-war eras; and between Soviet and national communist perspectives of the interwar era. Such a comparative approach requires an extensive review of scholarship on a variety of topics, of primary materials and of archival research. The study of Marx and Engels, as well as Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz and several others, are based not only on a comprehensive review of existing scholarship, but also on a plethora of published primary sources: collected works, collections of letters and writings, memoirs, and newspaper publications. Only a comprehensive review of the literature and primary materials allows for a challenge of the accepted interpretations. The reliance on published materials was critical in obtaining an understanding of the various currents within Marxist thought on the nationality question. Many of the prominent figures of European Marxism have received due attention, as revealed in the usage of relevant scholarship. But in addition to offering a reinterpretation of the ideas of some familiar faces of European Marxism, I also want to introduce some of the less well-known characters who had much to say about nationalism. In order to highlight the latter, the examination of the more obscure but noteworthy personalities was based heavily on published materials. The overarching aim is to provide a novel interpretation of the subject matter. Wherever possible, I have reached for primary materials.

The examination of the KPRP was based on voluminous archival research in Poland at the Archives of New Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych), National Library (Biblioteka Narodowa), Library of the Senate (Biblioteka Sejmowa), and the University of Warsaw Library (Biblioteka Uniwersytecka w Warszawie). In addition, several memoirs, collected papers, published speeches, minutes of congresses, and newspapers from the interwar period (e.g., Czerwony Sztandar) were utilized.

73 For example, while using Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s Collected Works, I explored the following volumes: 5, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 29, 30, and 31.
PART I: THE MARXIST LEGACY ON THE NATIONALITY QUESTION.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO PART I.

“I believe that a little philosophy is needed on the subject of the nation. It was the nation which first led me to question Marxism seriously.” In such a manner, Régis Debray describes the evolution of his own political-ideological outlook. “This was the real breach in the walls which let me make an outside tour of the fortress, rather than go on penetrating farther into it,” he elaborates, “it was what let me get out, and then situate it in a wider framework. In other words, it [i.e., nationalism] first allowed me to see Marxism as a decisive but not ultimate stage in our understanding of history.”74 The relationship between Marxism and nationalism has been tumultuous. And Debray was certainly not an isolated instance as many Marxists have had trouble grappling with nationalism. To a large extent, such difficulties can be traced back to Marx and Engels who neglected to leave a definitive statement on the nationality question.

The first part of the current study—comprising Chapters 1, 2 and 3—offers a re-evaluation of Marx and Engels’ thought on the nationality question. There is no doubt that Marx’s prescription for solving the problems of modern society emphasized class over national affiliation. But neither Marx nor Engels wrote enough on the subject matter, to be cumulatively considered a body of literature. Nonetheless, a review of their ideas throughout the 19th century, allows for a discernment of two critical issues: identification of factors that shaped their perception of the nationality question, and an analysis of the evolution of these attitudes over time.

Firstly, Marx and Engels’ conceptualization of nationalism (as a political phenomenon) was based on five fundamental criteria: liberation or emancipation from all forms of oppression; emphasis on the revolutionary road to socialism; the role of the state; the internationalism of workers’ solidarity; and the model of inevitable historical progression. In addition, as the first part also reveals, Marx and Engels’ theoretical dogmatism was tainted by a desire for activism. After all, they were hoping for a global upheaval to unravel capitalism. Hence, their work as revolutionaries required a degree of strategic flexibility, especially in response to the realities of the 19th century, of which nationalism was a product. Nationalism was dangerous, destructive and exclusive, but perhaps it could be exploited to advance the socialist cause. The goal here is to show that Marx and Engels’ views were not inflexible but rather evolved in response to changing circumstances.

The discourse between theoretical dogmas and strategic necessities in the writings of Marx and Engels can be best understood through three stages. Before 1848, Marx’s attitude towards the nationality question was informed by his reaction to Romantic nationalism, liberalism, industrialization, and the advent of the modern state. His initial rejection of nationalism was based on his refutation of Friedrich Hegel’s statism and of Friedrich List’s protectionism. The nation-state was too exclusive and constraining, and as a response to free trade capitalism, it could never ensure genuine emancipation that class affiliation offered. Class would substitute the nation as a universal agent of history. But the Revolutions of 1848 marked a turning point in Marx and Engels’ attitude towards the nationality question, marking the beginning of the second stage, which lasted for the next two decades.

Witnessing the Spring of Nations, Marx and Engels realized that workers could use state power for their own ends. Furthermore, states ensured the enlargement of the working class and intensified class antagonism. Nationalism had value as an activist phenomenon and as constituting a component of a policy of strategic realism. National movements could be supported in certain circumstances and used as a means to class-related ends. This is what led Engels to distinguish between the historical and non-historical nations. Such typology of nationalisms opened the door to a more refined approach. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, study of the Irish and the Poles pushed Marx and Engels to reevaluate the interplay of social and national issues. Most importantly, they realized that national peculiarities could produce different scenarios for the progression of class struggles.

From the mid 1860s onward—the period that marks the third stage—the prism of national peculiarities, the center-periphery relationship, the constructive value of nation-states, and uneven development further pushed Marx and Engels to reevaluate their understanding of the role of nationalism. This was most evident in their differentiation between oppressed and oppressor nations, and their discussion with Lassalle, Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International. Worried about nationalism’s dangerous tendencies, they remained wary about the balance between the various forms of state-based political activity and the substance of international working-class interests.
CHAPTER 1: TO REJECT OR NOT TO REJECT NATIONALISM: DEBATING MARX AND ENGELS’ STRUGGLES WITH NATIONALISM.

DEFINING THE NATION: (DE)NATIONALIZING NATIONALISM.

Upon encouragement from Lenin, Joseph Stalin penned his views on nationalism, as he understood them in the days before the outbreak of the First World War. He argued that “a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.” He continued: “It must be emphasized that none of the above characteristics taken separately is sufficient to define a nation. More than that, it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation.”

Although formulated in a highly deterministic manner, the definition offers a mixture of subjective and objective criteria that come together to formulate a viable nation-state. Did this somewhat inflexible approach hint at the possibility of “national communism”? Stalin’s attempt at reconciling socialist aims with the realities of national power did receive approval from Lenin and eventually became the cornerstone (at least in theory) of Soviet nationality policy. Yet, would Marx accept such non-materialistic constructs as “language” or “psychological make-up” within the realm of “Marxist” thinking?

Marx has been accused of both underestimating the significance of nationalism and of being a German chauvinist. On the one hand, Michael V. Kryukov, for example, argues that “Marx and Engels repeatedly touched upon national problems but neither gave an explicit definition of nation or any consistent set of related ideas which can be found in their works.” Even renowned Marxist scholars, like Ronaldo Munck, assert that “Marxism has no theory of nationalism.” On the other hand, Liah Greenfeld postulates that Marx was a product of German Romanticism and thus “inherited the nationalistic attitude in toto, that far from being unaware of it…he shared in it fully.” To put simply, “German chauvinism was not foreign to him.” Following the same line, Bertram Wolfe concludes that Marx and Engels were mere revolutionary nationalists. Such contradictory pronouncements have only stimulated debate as to Marx and Engels’ legacy on the national question. To an extent, these diverging positions are a product of the evolution of the theory of nationalism itself, which has defined nation-states, nations, and nationalisms in diverse and conflicting ways.

The idea of what constitutes a nation, what allows a nation to acquire the state, and how nationalism or nationality can be exploited for the mobilization of masses in the name of unity, has been elusive and even contradictory. Setting aside the positive or negative judgments on nationalist endeavours, most scholars agree on the modernist roots of nationalism. Yet, a clear definitive explanation of a nation has been highly contested. Foremost, the idea of a nation as a collective identity has to be differentiated from others such as religion, gender, class, etc. More importantly, its three main dimensions have to be recognized: subjective—such as sentiment, will, memory,
or descent, and objective criteria—such as territory or language; ethnic and political components; and the relationship between nation and state (e.g., is one a prerequisite for the other?). Although a nation does not necessarily need to exhibit all of these traits simultaneously in order to be recognized as such, most of these factors or criteria will intermittently or permanently appear and disappear in the course of a nation’s evolution. A key to understanding the significance of a nation is to comprehend the politicization of these criteria, and thus emergence of nationalism.

To put simply, nationalism politicizes the culture of the nation (or the national culture)—nationalism is what nations do. But how does this process come about? Most recently, and in broad terms, Jonathan Hearn outlines the five fundamental assumptions about what nationalism is: a feeling, an identity, an ideology, a social movement and a historical process. More specifically, Spencer and Wollman define nationalism as “an ideology which imagines the community in a particular way as national, asserts the primacy of this collective identity over others, and seeks political power in its name, ideally (if not exclusively or everywhere) in the form of a state for the nation (or a nation-state).” Although these conceptual frameworks are adequate, they are not comprehensive. Does the nationalism project simply require a manipulation of national sentiments and myths, a distortion of nationalist ideology or language, or perhaps a mobilization of the masses into a specific movement?

An examination of how nations are nationalized is a study of how national identities are shaped by powerful institutions (agencies or agents) using meaningful myths and messages for a specific purpose (e.g., war). Hence, it is important to understand two key processes of this nationalist construction: the relationship between cultural, political and ethnic dimensions of the nation; and the interplay between elites and masses or primary and secondary nationalisms. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2005, for instance, revealed how national culture assigned meaning to a particular color, thus mobilizing the masses and institutions (both domestic and international) around a particular nationalist vision.

Did Marx and Engels understand these complexities of nationalism’s reality? As most of their intellectual contemporaries, they certainly did not. Nonetheless, as will be revealed below, they did realize nationalism’s power. They acknowledged the strength of a state’s multiple institutions and the nation’s mobilizing force for a specific purpose. And although they could not comprehend the relationship between politics and culture—and the drive of nations for statehood—they did witness the interplay between masses and elites, even if through the prism of class

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85 See, for example, Paul Brass, “Elite competition and the origins of ethnic nationalism,” in *Nationalism in Europe Past and Present*, eds. J. Beramendi, R. Maiz, X. Nunez (Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1994).
conflict. Hence, it is not surprising to find Marx and Engels’ views in most introductory monographs on nationalism. So how did Marx and Engels address the issue of nationalism?

CLASS VS. NATION: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MARX’S IDEAS ON NATIONALISM.

Nineteenth century Marxism, to a large extent, was a reaction to (or even rejection of) the nationalization of culture (i.e., the national project). Worshipping of the nation (or nation-state) seemed to become only the latest prison for the masses—the new secular religion.86 New ideologies of utopian internationalism emerged to counter these regional peculiarities and their sentimental charisma.87 This internationalist cosmopolitanism (by no means a unitary movement) promoted universal values that transcended any temporary or regional identification. Its supporters were trying to provide the best solution to the future course of human history. Marx was only one amongst many who wanted to explain the human condition and offer an all-inclusive resolution to the problems of modern society.

In the context of 19th century intellectual debates, Marxism and nationalism are not as contradictory as might initially be assumed. To an extent, it is exactly because socialism and nationalism shared so much in common (in heritage and as a prescription for the future) that each vehemently opposed the other. Roman Szporluk contends that Marx and Engels fiercely struggled to respond to the same problems of industrialization and modernization, and the accompanying social displacement. Stefan Berger and Angel Smith argue that “despite the fact that socialism and nationalism have been widely perceived as standing on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, socialist thinking on the nation undoubtedly had much in common with liberal nationalism.”88 A few examples are warranted: both were rooted in the post-Enlightenment discourse of “progress”; both were responding to the social transformations of the 19th century, giving displaced people a sense of identity and continuity; both shared a sense of essentialism (albeit with different emphasis: nationalist spiritual versus economic); both utilized the universalist rhetoric of freedom, emancipation and political rights (including political participation); and both appealed to the marginalized and overeducated intellectual men.89

In a bid to emphasize his version of the universal solution, Marx emphasized class over national identification, economic over political determinism, and objective over subjective criteria. Marxism (and here I fully agree with Szporluk) was much more than a critique of capitalism.90 It presented an alternative social order, a new definition of authority, and a set of (universally applicable) objectives to those offered by nationalism. Yet, as an advocate of an anti-nationalist ideology, it is surprising that Marx never penned a critique of nationalism. Marx did outline a proposed study of nationalism but never actually moved beyond the table of contents. It seemed that somehow he had feared writing on nationalism would not only acknowledge the growing power of nationalism, but would also denote a struggle between class and national affiliation. Was he simply frustrated by the growing strength of nationalism, which continuously deflated European revolutionary energy and pacified his socialist comrades? Nationalism remained a nemesis that he never confronted in an intellectual forum. Contemporary scholars have been troubled by this conspicuously missing component within Marxism. Marx and Engels’ thoughts

86 Such a position has been advocated by Gellner, Hobsbawm, and especially Szporluk.
89 Berger and Smith, 1-30.
90 Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism*, 14.
on nations, nationalism and nation-states remain a puzzle, only pieced together from random thoughts, anecdotes, letters, and ideological snippets mentioned throughout decades of intellectual, political and journalistic activity. Even their followers and students (Bauer, Renner or Lenin) acknowledged that their mentors never penned a concrete theory or even a set of acceptable definitions on the nationality question.

Both Marxist and non-Marxist (even anti-Marxist) scholars have battled over the key questions, making the historiography of this subject wide-ranging and chaotic, thus difficult to synthesize. Three key predicaments have complicated this scholarship. Firstly, Marxist views on nationalism have become a background to other areas of focus. For instance, some interesting insights on Marx and Engels’ ideas on nationalism have emerged from studies on national groups including the Irish, Polish or Jewish questions; the Habsburg and Russian Empires in late 19th and early 20th centuries; and on Communist nationalism (or national Communism). The same can be observed in post-colonial studies on national liberation.

Secondly, the divisions between Marxist and non-Marxist scholars have clouded this field of study with much bias. Although Marxist scholars have made an enormous contribution to the study of nationalism (see Nairn, Gellner, Habsbawm, or Anderson, to name a few), their examination of Marx and Engels’ views on nationalism has been indirect, selective and sporadic. Those who have looked at the socialist forefathers’ ideas on the subject matter utilize the Marxist prism, but this merely tends to colour their views. Would a Marx interested in nationalism be un-Marxist? Moreover, some of these individuals tend to initiate debates on the appropriateness of conceptual frameworks rather than on concrete historical issues. Some are socialist activists with a political agenda, trying to promote Marxist traditions and their applicability to contemporary contexts.

The non-Marxists and especially the anti-Marxists reveal the politicking dilemma of Cold War polemics. Some like Richard Pipes or Robert C. Tucker highlight Marxism’s inability to deal with nationalism by pointing out the consequences of Soviet legacy. Pipes even labels his most recent history of Communism as an “obituary.” Others simply try to determine the degree of Marx’s culpability for Bolshevism (and its derivative consequences). Walicki and David W. Lovell, for example, have offered two distinct explanations of the connection between Marxism and the ensuing Communist regimes. This creates a confounding effect as subsequent application of Marxist ideas has seemingly shaped the original’s content and motives. There are also several historians and

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91 No single (and comprehensive) historiography of Marxist thought on nationalism has been written henceforth.
93 See, for example, the debates on the impact of Marx on the nationality question in late Habsburg Empire in the Austrian History Yearbook (1973-1974).
95 These usually stem from Lenin’s writings on the subject.
96 See, for example, the work of Ronaldo Munck, Michael Löwy, Ephraim Nimni or Günter Minnerup.
98 Walicki argues that Marx desired the subjugation of individual freedom to some sort of universal or collective liberation. Andrzej Walicki, Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Lovell, on the other hand, “examines whether Soviet authoritarianism was a necessary or inevitable consequence of Lenin’s attempt to fulfill what he understood as Marx’s project by tracing the concept of the transition to socialism through the Marxist tradition, from Marx to Lenin.” More specifically, he looks at concepts of the dictatorship of the proletariat, democracy, and oppositionist thinking. David W. Lovell, From Marx to Lenin: An evaluation of Marx’s responsibility for Soviet authoritarianism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), ix. For a traditionalist account, see Robert Conquest, Where Marx Went Wrong (London: Chaucer Press, 1970).
political scientists in-between these two extremes. They offer more balanced positions, devoid of conceptual rhetoric and hypercritical pronouncements.

Thirdly, there are many important historiographical questions that have surfaced from the debates on Marxist conceptions of the nationality question. Four are relevant to this study. Foremost is the issue of how to characterize Marx and Engels’ unsystematic and arbitrary views on nationalism. Can only some ideas be extrapolated or can we speak of a whole theory? Most scholars (both Marxists and non-Marxists alike), including Traverso, Löwy or Pipes agree that we can only find scattered ideas on nationalism within Marx and Engels’ writings. Certain generalizations can be surmised from these ideas but not an all-embracing theory. Some, like Nimni or Jie-Hyun Lim, however, contend that we can indeed collectively label their ideas as a theory (only if implicitly). The latter is an overstatement and gives Marx and Engels credit for achieving something that was only accomplished by their followers. V.C. Fišera and G. Minnerup captured the heart of the matter, saying that even “if there are no theoretical claims or continuity there is nevertheless a logic and an evolution which reflect the attitudes and the prejudices of the writers themselves in different historical periods.”

The confusion and arbitrary nature of their view on nationalism have persisted, not without justifiable cause. Their writings on Poland serve as an insightful case in point. In the 1840s, Marx and Engels wholeheartedly supported Poland’s struggle for independence. The Polish nation’s historical legacy, revolutionary character, being situated in the heart of the continent, and anti-Russian disposition made it a central player on the European scene. But by the early 1850s, Engels vehemently opposed Poland’s independence, claiming that Poles are hopelessly romantic, that they will never be able to assimilate their neighbours into the nation, and that they are destined to be swallowed by Russia and Germany. In the 1860s, Marx and Engels once again called for Polish independence, especially on the front lines of the International. After Marx’s death, Engels fluctuated between opposition to and support for a Polish state. Such diverging and even contradictory views could only stimulate confusion amongst their students and enemies.

The second historiographical question (mentioned already) deals with Marx and Engels’ orientation within the realities of the 19th century. Were the socialist forefathers just chauvinist nationalists hiding in socialist clothes? Some scholars like Liah Greenfeld wholeheartedly agree with such a conclusion. She argues that both men were a product of the Romantic era, and could never detach themselves from their national roots. Instead, they embraced these values and beliefs, and simply dressed them in socialist rhetoric. In the same vein, Wolfe maintains that “neither in 1848, nor in 1870, nor at any time in their lives, were Marx and Engels antinationalist or ‘defeatist’ for

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99 See, for example, the work of Walker Connor, Szporluk or Horace B. Davis who offer a balanced approach. 100 Jie-Hyun Lim, “Marx’s Theory of Imperialism and the Irish National Question,” Science & Society 56, no.2 (Summer 1992), 163-178. He surmises a theory from the premise that Marx’s ideas on nationalism were abstract in nature. 101 Nimni claims that “The Marxist fetish of making sense of every significant social phenomenon by subsuming it within the logic of the universal development of the forces of production, was the blueprint for ingenious but ultimately inapplicable theories [my emphasis] of the national question.” Moreover, he concludes: “it has been argued that the work of Marx and Engels on the national question can be understood as a coherent corpus of literature, even if the theoretical arguments which sustain their analysis have not been explicitly conceptualized.” Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis (London: Pluto Press, 1991), 3, 41-2. 102 V.C. Fišera and G. Minnerup, “Marx, Engels and the National Question,” in Socialism and Nationalism, Volume One, ed. Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fišera (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978), 6.
Furthermore, their obsession with revolutionary war, wars of unification, wars in the name of civilization, wars against backwardness and reaction, only illustrates their revolutionary nationalist tendencies. After all, for instance, neither ever recanted the notion that Slavs of the Habsburg Empire should be assimilated; both promoted cruel methods if they assisted progress; and both revered German spiritual or philosophical superiority. Although these views are not signs of overt German nationalism, they did reveal the degree to which Marx and Engels were a product of their time.

Horace B. Davis offers a more balanced (if somewhat indecisive) approach, arguing in one instance that Marx and Engels were protected from nationalist inclinations by their exiled existence while later calling them “unconscious nationalists.” He concludes: “Marx and Engels may indeed have both been unconscious, or subconscious, nationalists in that they hoped Germany would take the lead in establishing socialism.” Only in his later work does Davis finally conclude that neither was a nationalist. However, he inadvertently points to another debate: even if they were not nationalists, did Marx and Engels exploit nationalism as a tool? David Felix, for example, sees Marx and Engels’ nationalistic inclinations as nothing more than a means to an end. “It was not extraordinary,” he explains, “that Marx’s international strategy not only tolerated but consciously used nationalism. Any specific decision depended on how he could situate and manage a given aspect of nationalism in the context of his master plan”—internationalist revolution. The two were not nationalists and only exploited nationalism when circumstances forced their hand or when it suited their interests. Did the utilization of nationalism inadvertently make them nationalists?

Most scholars agree that although the two were certainly exposed to nationalism (and its accompanying messages and multiple agents), they consciously attempted to follow an anti-nationalist (or at least an a-nationalist) ideological road. Solomon F. Bloom provides a classical response to all the accusations by asserting that internationalism, humanitarianism and tolerance were much more prominent dimensions of Marxism than some fleeting and random nationalistic outbursts. Similarly, Erica Benner contends that Marx and Engels were not irredeemably hostile to national identities but rather opposed their chauvinistic by-products. Hence, Marx and Engels certainly were affected by nationalism that surrounded their creative reality, and they certainly exploited its energy and ability to mobilize, but to call them nationalists would be an unwarranted overstatement.

In his appraisal of Marx and Engels’ writings on nationalism, Davis was one of the first to note their somewhat diverging approaches and ideas. This highlights the third historiographical debate—did Marx and

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103 Wolfe, One Hundred Years, 24. See especially part 1.
105 Ibid., 50-51.
107 David Felix, Marx as Politician (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 155. See also chapter nine. This is fully explained in his article: “The Dialectic of the First International and Nationalism,” The Review of Politics 45, no 1 (January 1983): 20-44.
110 The notion that Engels was a German nationalist as opposed to the internationalist Marx emerged in the context of the First World War, when German Social-Democrats used Engels’ writings to justify their support for war credits.
Engels have a single vision of the national question? Although he absolves Marx of nationalist! attitude, Davis sees Engels in a different light: “[Engels] was a German nationalist in his youth, and used nationalist jargon on several occasions later, in spite of his efforts to maintain an internationalist point of view.” Davis was not alone in his verdict. Many scholars, including Roman Rosdolsky, Connor or Charles C. Herod assign Engels a more prominent role (albeit devoid of nationalist inclinations) in the development of Marxist ideas on the nation. It was Engels who first introduced some basic notions such as nations with and without history, which later became staples of Marxist debates on the national question. As Connor subtly points out, “[of] the two men, Engels was the more immediately and markedly affected by the upsurge in national movements,” acknowledging that nationalism was a powerful and complex phenomenon. Although racism, prejudice or stereotyping continuously reappeared in Marx and especially Engels’ writings, their final aims (whatever the motivations behind them) were to remove any barriers that institutionalized inequality.

The fourth historiographical discussion surrounds the appropriateness of conceptual frameworks that Marx and Engels applied to their understanding of nationalism. From what theoretical prism or ideological heritage did they derive their views on nationalism? The first dimension of this discussion concerns the Hegelian roots of Marxist ideas on nations and states. Some, like Wolfram W. Swoboda, Herod or Bloom highlight the historical-materialist framework (in essence, emphasizing Marx’s break with Young Hegelians), while others like Hans Mommsen argue that neither Marx nor Engels overcame their Hegelian idealism (especially when it came to nationalism).

In more recent scholarship, another debate has emerged. On the one hand, Nimni claims that Marx and Engels perceived nationalism in an economically deterministic manner—in Eurocentric and evolutionist terms. On the other hand, Löwy and Traverso argue that the “criterion” through which they evaluated nationalism was “not economic, but essentially political” and cosmopolitan. The merits of these diverging conceptual frameworks are difficult to ascertain as each offers some insight into the Marxist discourse on nationalism. The most adequate answer would be to simply differentiate between their political strategies (i.e., pragmatically oriented responses to

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111 Davis, Nationalism & Socialism, 46.
112 It is not surprising that scholars who see both as German nationalists usually point to Engels’ writings.
116 Nimni, Marxism and Nationalism.
117 Enzo Traverso and Michael Löwy, “The Marxist Approach to the National Question: A Critique of Nimni’s Interpretation,” Science & Society 54, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 137. This point of view is further explained in Löwy’s most recent work, Fatherland or Mother Earth?
118 Jie-Hyun Lim has attempted to combine the two approaches into a unified framework that would emphasize both political pragmatism and theoretical underpinnings of Marxist thinking. See “Marx’s Theory of Imperialism and the Irish National Question.”
particular circumstances), and their *economically* deterministic theoretical framework. With the growing realities of nationalism’s power, especially after the 1848 Revolutions, Marx and Engels had to modify their perceptions of and strategy towards nationalism. In essence, they recognized the political dimensions of nationalism’s influence on the working classes and its potential to mobilize the masses. Such a nuanced perspective is most clearly elucidated by Erica Benner.

Benner offers a somewhat novel approach by placing Marx and Engels’ views within an action-guiding strategic theory of politics. She argues that their “explanatory emphasis is on human choice rather than economic determination, on the motives and intentions of nationalists rather than disembodied laws of history.” Hence, they treated nationalism as a form of politics and recognized its tendency to be arrogant and exclusive as soon as it acquired some level of sovereignty; they recognized the multiple dangers of nationalism. Similarly, Timothy Snyder contends that Marx and Engels treated specific national questions—as for instance that of Polish independence—as an issue of international politics.

**Navigating the Historiographical Maze: Methodology.**

This historiographical maze and the lack of consistent and comprehensive theory, requires a somewhat unusual approach to the study of Marx and Engels’ views on the national question. When attempting to understand their ideas and to delineate some cohesive thoughts on the topic, three distinct considerations must be kept in mind.

Firstly, their dogmatic theoretical framework placed political-cultural features of society (including the nation) within the superstructure. To oversimplify, nationalism was a bourgeois concept and was little more than a product of capitalism—a specific stage in the evolution of history. A transient phenomenon, it merely provided the state with a false consciousness to facilitate the exploitation of workers. Yet, to narrow down Marx and Engels’ thought to economic determinism is to ignore not only the complexity of their ideas but the various ideological trends and circumstantial contexts that informed their thought. Their theoretical conception of nationality was guided by five central precepts: the idea of *liberation* or *emancipation* from all forms of oppression; the notion of the *revolutionary* road to socialism; the role of the *state*; the *internationalism* of workers’ solidarity; and the model of inevitable *historical* progression.

Secondly, even though Marx and Engels’ ideas were restricted by dogmatic constraints, they strove to project an image of themselves as revolutionaries, whose work required certain *strategic* flexibility. The 19th century witnessed numerous wars, revolutions, socio-economic and demographic changes, for which all political activists had to account, and to which they had to respond, even if these events seemingly contradicted some of their fundamental beliefs. Marx and Engels’ thoughts on nationalism thus evolved in response to three phenomena: the emerging national questions (especially those involving Germans, Jews, Poles, the Irish, and to an extent the Russians); the debates on the national question with other contemporaries (Lassalle, Bakunin, Plekhanov, etc.); and the compromise between theoretical ideas and strategic necessity due to various political events and transformations (especially those of revolutionary nature).

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119 To a large extent, Erica Benner is able to achieve this by formulating Marx and Engels’ conceptions of the nationality question in terms of class interests. See Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms: A Post-Communist View from Marx and Engels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).


The latter issue—the dichotomy between Marx and Engels as theorists versus Marx and Engels as activists—was especially critical given the Marxist emphasis on revolutionary transformation. Already in *The German Ideology*, Marx proclaims that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Erica Benner contends that Marx and Engels’ writings “on specific national movements were concerned far less with the structural or economic ‘preconditions’ of nationalism than with the complex motivations of nationalist actors”—nationalism’s ability to mobilize. This led the two men to pay attention to contemporary events. Firstly, it directed their attention “towards the present and future rather than back to the past, focusing on the goals of current nationalist activity rather than on the origins of distinct nations or national conflicts.” Secondly, it fostered “a theoretical preoccupation with the programmes, struggles and negotiations that occur within and among national movements.” All of these forced Marx and Engels “to provide action-guiding maps of the complex social terrains in which national aspirations were pursued.”

In essence, they wanted to strategically take advantage of nationalism’s appeal, revolutionary nature, and mobilizing capacity, on the road to socialist utopia.

Thirdly, this evolution—the discourse between theoretical dogmas and strategic necessities—can be best understood through certain stages or phases in Marx and Engels’ thinking. Three distinct periods can be identified: early 1840s to the 1848 Revolutions; the 1850s and the 1860s; and lastly, 1870s to the death of the socialist forefathers. The intention here is to show that their ideas were not inflexible (as commonly is assumed) but rather evolved over time, responding to changing circumstances. One has to be careful not to overemphasize this transformation, as both Marx and Engels frequently refused to give ground on many issues even when faced with conflicting realities. Nonetheless, subtle changes in their attitudes and views emerged throughout their lifetimes.

**LIBERATION, REVOLUTION, STATE, INTERNATIONALISM AND HISTORY: THE FIVE PILLARS OF MARXIST THINKING ON THE NATION.**

Before examining the evolution of their ideas on nationalism, it is important to first understand the theoretical constructs that shaped Marx and Engels’ ideologies and tactical decisions. A comprehensive discussion of all the various Marxist ideas is beyond the scope of this study, and would require a separate volume. Hence, I will limit the discussion to the above listed five theoretical constructs. As mentioned previously, Marx and Engels believed that nations and nationalism are only a product of capitalism and thus fall under the umbrella of the

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124 A great majority of scholars writing on the relationship between Marxism and nationalism opt for a thematic approach, usually examining distinct features or ideological consistencies. For instance, Nimni looks at the role of language and terminological ambiguity. Those who follow a more chronological approach (including, for instance, Löwy and Munck), simply identify specific turning points (such as 1848 and the Irish Question) as watershed events that initiated certain changes in Marxist thinking. Nonetheless, the periodization of Marx and Engels’ ideas on nationalism has been attempted before. For example, Shlomo Avineri defined two periods: the pre-modern paradigm (before 1848), and the post 1848 bourgeois paradigm. Shlomo Avineri, “Marxism and Nationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no.3-4 (1991): 637-657.
superstructure. Modernists would certainly agree with the socialism’s founders in that nations only emerge with the fall of feudalism and the rise of capitalism.

**INEVITABLE HISTORICAL PROGRESSION**

For Marx, this process was seen in light of economic advancement as outlined in an *inevitable historical progression* in a series of transformations through universally defined stages.\(^\text{125}\) Through this prism of historical materialism, an individual’s relationship to society was guided by the constraints (i.e., forces and relations) of capitalist production.\(^\text{126}\) Kołakowski explains: “[Marx] tried to understand how human conflicts, sufferings, lack of understanding, are rooted in the material conditions of life, specifically in the way the human race has to struggle for survival.”\(^\text{127}\) Hence, all historical progress could be reduced to the history of the relations of production, which were represented in a continuous human struggle (or what Marx described as alienation). Marx also believed that classes (and one class in particular) rather than nations had a historical calling to abolish this alienation and conflict.

Eventually, this path of human self-transformation would lead to a socialist (i.e., classless) society—a heaven on earth.\(^\text{128}\) As Debray points out, “mankind’s universalization must bring the liquidation of its particularities,” and so nationalism was assigned a transient role, and was destined to disappear with the advent of worldwide socialism.\(^\text{129}\)

Since this process was derived from objectively constructed scientific principles, its deterministic character and inevitable progression could not be altered. In addition, this conception of history had universal tendencies, and so “communism [could] only be established on a world scale, due to the immense development of productive forces which surpass the narrow framework of nation-states.”\(^\text{130}\) Nimni rightly believes that this outlook was one of the central parameters for Marxist analysis of the national question.\(^\text{131}\) In this vision, great (historic) nations—such as France and Britain (but also, on occasion, including Germany, Italy, Poland and Hungary)—were assigned a special role in a particular moment in the historical narrative. Their main objective was to create a context in which class-consciousness could emerge. Once they played out their role on the stage of world history, they would disappear under the revolutionary avalanche of the working classes.

**INTERNATIONALISM**

\(^{125}\) Ernest Gellner describes this process: “[Under] the impact of philosophic and scientific ideas disseminated by the Enlightenment, religious belief was becoming intellectually ever more difficult to sustain. The conjunction of these two themes—loss of faith in a transcendent and personal God, and the acquisition of faith in a happy earthly destiny—inevitably blended and almost irresistibly pointed to an obvious solution: if God was not available, but pervasive Progress was, could not Progress deputize for God?” *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 1.

\(^{126}\) Debray argues that the idea of uniform and linear historical evolution proceeding via the five main modes of production leads to the “idea of universality as the reduction of differences, as the progressive diminution of ethnic, national and cultural differences.” More concisely, universalism would lead to the eradication of particularities. Hence, Marxist conception of the historical process, as Debray points out, was highly utopian. Debray, “Marxism and the National Question,” 27.


\(^{129}\) Debray, “Marxism and the National Question,” 31.


\(^{131}\) Nimni, *Marxism and Nationalism*, 6-8. His other two parameters were economic determinism and Eurocentrism. Interestingly, it is the latter two, and not historical construction, that Löwy et al criticize as a weakness in Nimni’s analysis.
Indeed, the working class had a special world-historical role in Marx and Engels’ design, as an instrument of international cooperation. “For Marx and Engels,” Löwy clarifies, “only the proletariat, as a universal class which is no longer national and which has common world-historical interests, can lead to the establishment of a universal society where national differences will be overcome.” The promotion of the well-known slogan—“The proletariat has no country,” translated into a theoretical negation of nation-states and a practical strategy of appealing to a wider audience. (This humanitarian and anti-national conception was also known as cosmopolitanism.)

Marx and Engels made a point of promoting tactics and values that were international in content and form. Were they hoping to transcend the chauvinistic and exclusive appeal of national identity, and to bypass the more dangerous aspects of nationalism? According to Benner, this was a central motivation of Marxism: Marx and Engels were not anti-nationalists but rather had realized the potential negative implications of nationalism and tried to warn against them. By opting for the class-based interpretation of historical progress, they had committed to a conceptual framework of internationalism, which precluded them from identifying the significance of the nation (in any meaningful way). Joan Cocks argues that Marx had to dismiss nationalism in order to highlight social issues. This approach had mixed results, especially as socialist parties began to organize along national lines in the latter half of the 19th century. Nonetheless, this mindset of cutting across national lines in the name of proletarian solidarity remained at the heart of their philosophy. Even if initially the working classes had to organize within national boundaries, eventually, their cooperation would produce an international revolution that would sweep across the entire continent.

**Revolution**

Many ideologues and politicians perceived the multiple crises of the 19th century as marking the coming of a new world order. For Marx and Engels, the soon to arrive revolution would erase all forms of capitalist exploitation (including national identification and the accompanying oppression), so there was no need to devote much time to the various secondary and transient by-products of the final stage of history. Both Marx and Engels always maintained that they were revolutionaries first, and intellectuals second, and so the main objective of their work was to prepare the masses for the inevitable revolution that would erupt at any moment. All else was to be subordinated to the interests of the international proletarian revolution.

With such primacy placed on the revolutionary immediacy and necessity, Wolfe rightly argues that Marx was blinded (above all) by the image of the French Revolution floating before his eyes. François Furet elaborates on the same idea: “[Marx] was preoccupied with the notion of inventing a new revolution…which would, in its historical function, go beyond and complete the French emancipation.” The French (1789) and English (1688) revolutions together had marked the advent of a bourgeois-dominated society. Only a revolution—in the name of workers and guided by Communists—could clear the path to socialism. Moreover, it seemed (particularly by the

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132 Löwy, *Fatherland or Mother Earth?*, 7.
133 There is a contentious debate on the meaning of cosmopolitanism as Marx and Engels understood it. Löwy sees it as nothing more than internationalism, while Nimni sees it as disguised Eurocentrism.
latter half of the century) that nationalism appropriated or pacified radical enthusiasm. Nonetheless, widespread revolution remained a cornerstone of Marxist thinking, since it ensured the ultimate universal liberation of society. Even national revolutions (of the democratic, republican kind) could promote the cause. “In demystifying 1789,” Löwy concludes, “its aim was to show the necessity of a new revolution, the social revolution—the one Marx spoke of in 1844 as ‘human emancipation’ (by contrast with merely political emancipation) and in 1846 as the Communist revolution.”

STATE

Although the French Revolution was important in Marx and Engels’ belief system, only the changes it would produce were of utmost significance. The struggle for liberty, equality, and fraternity, or more broadly speaking, the advent of the bourgeoisie only produced an illusion of political emancipation through the birth of the modern state. Yet, for Marx, political liberation was “not the last form of human emancipation, but [was] the last form of human emancipation within the framework of the existing social order.” Marx believed that 19th century states and their administrative machineries (courts, bureaucracy, police, etc.) constrained universal liberation, by prolonging human exploitation and alienation, albeit in a different form. In essence, the bourgeoisie seized state power (i.e., means of production) to promote its own class interests. State and nationalism were bourgeois constructs designed to oppress the masses, especially the working class—which had to cross national boundaries and cooperate along class lines. From this viewpoint, as Kolakowski explains, Marx saw all political and state institutions as little more than producers of human alienation. Total emancipation would only emerge with the abolition of all the multiple forms of oppression, including the national variety. Let’s not forget that Marx and Engels’ livelihood as exiles was a result of censorship and oppression of a particular state—the Prussian state. Was the state then nothing more than a bourgeois instrument?

Marx and Engels were ambivalent on their final verdict. On the one hand, they asserted that the state used its coercive power and agencies (e.g., army) to promote and protect capitalism. The political democracy it offered was little more than a smoke screen. On the other hand, but highlighted to a smaller degree, is the view of “the state as independent from and superior to all social classes, as being the dominant force in society rather than the instrument of a dominant class.” Thus, the state was both a ‘set of institutions whose function is to stabilize and maintain capitalism relations of production,’” and a “vehicle for reform and/or socialist revolution.” (Lest we forget, the nation-state provided a cocoon within which class-consciousness would emerge.) The two men hoped that eventually, amidst revolutionary upheaval, the proletariat could potentially seize the apparatus of the state and begin the road to true emancipation. The state would not necessarily wither away immediately, but would (at least initially) remain under the control of the working classes. Moreover, this final revolution would bring about the full and true emancipation of the working classes, and so nations and states would lose their drive.

139 Kolakowski and Magee, “The Philosophy of Marxism,” 90.
140 Miliband, “Marx and the State,” 277. The same ideas are discussed by Paul Wetherly, Marxism and the State: An Analytical Approach (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). He argues that in examining Marxist conceptions of the state, both approaches must be combined.
141 Wetherly, Marxism and the State, 210.
Universal Emancipation

The bourgeois revolutions (and their main byproduct—the state) only provided the illusion of full democracy. Only a socialist revolution could abolish this exploitive alienation. The end goal of historical progression and of revolutionary zeal was thus the universal emancipation of people, as self-realized individuals: “Communism is the calling of mankind, and therefore that the whole of past history become intelligible only in terms of this final act of liberation.” Löwy argues that Marx and Engels’ conception of the national question as a historical formulation is closely linked to their “belief that they lived in an epoch dominated by bourgeois cosmopolitanism and by the advent, in the near future, of a socialism transcending national conflict.” Communism would eliminate all forms of antagonism between people so that “no mediating devices would be needed between the individual and mankind, which means no state, no laws, and so on.” Walicki claims that this strive for freedom was the “organizing principle of [Marx’s] entire philosophy of history—a philosophy designed to demonstrate the necessity of communism, conceived as the ‘kingdom of freedom’.” Calling it “secularized millenarianism” and “antimarket utopianism,” he concludes that Marx wanted to subjugate the individual under collective freedom. In any case, the ultimate goal of emancipation—the achievement of a Communist society—would denote liberation from national constraints.

Although a comprehensive assessment of all elements of Marx and Engels’ worldview is far beyond the scope of this study, the aforementioned five precepts were key to their understanding of nationalism. These five factors (and their importance) evolved across three time periods of Marx and Engels’ creative and ideological evolution. These ideas were not static and inflexible but rather fluid and versatile.

143 Löwy, Fatherland or Mother Earth?, 19-20.
144 Kołakowski and Magee, “The Philosophy of Marxism,” 92.
145 Walicki, Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom, 1.
146 Although Walicki presents his case comprehensively, his central argument warrants some revision. I tend to agree with Allan Megill in that Walicki’s overemphasis of the connection between Marxism and the Communist authoritarianisms of the 20th century clouds an otherwise rewarding study. Marx certainly intended to achieve full emancipation, regardless of costs, but I doubt that he envisioned (or would endorse) the dictatorship of the proletariat in its Stalinist version. Megill, Karl Marx: The Burden of Reason.
CHAPTER 2: REJECTING OR EXPLOITING NATIONALISM:
The Evolution of Marxist Thinking on Nationalism.

HISTORICIZING THE NATION: EARLY 1840S TO 1848.

Most scholars mark 1848 as a turning point in Marxist ideology, a shift from the idealistic Marx to the scientific Marx. The Spring of Nations or the advent of Liberal Revolutions seemed to usher a new understanding of socio-economic factors in the evolution of world history. This mid-century transformation has been especially highlighted by those interested in Marx and Engels’ conception of the nationality question. Many see the widespread revolutionary activity as a starting point—the first time that the authors of the Communist Manifesto become interested in nationalism. Yet, some, including Szporluk, Löwy, and Benner have shown that Marx and Engels already had certain opinions about nationalism even before the late 1840s. Hence, the first period will deal with their initial thoughts and reactions to Romantic nationalism, liberalism, industrialization, and the advent of the modern state.

When the nation-state emerged on the world stage in early 19th century as a powerful force of historical significance, how could anyone, least of all young intellectuals of German, French or English extraction, ignore this phenomenon? Industrialization, communication and networks of institutions, practices and customs ushered in the state as the epitome of the nation cause. Some devoted their intellectual legacy to the understanding of this emerging marvel. In this milieu of nationalist sentiment, could Marx and Engels’ neglect of the nationality question be considered a deliberate rejection of everything national? Was their theoretical premise a reflection of an anti-nationalist rhetoric?

To understand their approach to the nation, it is essential to draw on their intellectual roots, especially those of the Hegelian heritage on nation, civil society and state. According to Hegel, an individual could only fully realize himself (and his historical role) by belonging to a specific nation and participating in its political life. Common good of any national community was thus embodied in the state—the network of bureaucratic and political institutions. In critiquing this mystified approach, as Z. A. Pelczynski explains, the young Marx wanted to ground his understanding of the modern state in social relations rather than in a philosophical method of the dialectic—hence the centrality of economic aspects of society in Marx’s future work. For him, family and civil society were more basic than the state, as “civil society [was] a more fundamental or prior form of social life than the state.”147 Marx eventually “[rejected] the fact of a highly institutionalized form of government, based on fixed legal and constitutional relations, in favour of an ideal of political life in which people participate directly and spontaneously.”148 An individual could never reach the height of his or her ethical life as a member of a national community. The state did not liberate people but rather placed a different set of shackles on them. This negative approach to the state was compounded by Marx and Engels’ experiences at the oppressive hands of the Prussian government.

Marx and Engels began to see the state as an oppressive mechanism of a particular class rather than a shell within which individual liberation could flourish. Without truly democratic participation—which was undercut by

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148 Pelczynski, 269-70.
every state’s institutional constraints—individuals remained alienated. The civil society and democracy, which stemmed from the modern state that was produced by the French and American revolutions, were not genuine enough for Marx. Only his brand of civil society and democracy—one devoid of egoism, alienation and state controls—would provide authentic human emancipation.149 Henceforth the state was no friend of the civil society, least of all of the hard working proletariat. Although it was a historical necessity assigned a specific role, it certainly had no historical primacy.150 Several Marxist fundamentals on nationalism are drawn from this “dialogue” with Hegel. A few of these are important to mention.

Foremost, Marx rejected the state and its bureaucratic constraints. This did not necessarily denote the abolition of the state. Rather, it pointed to the inadequacy of the state to ensure truly democratic existence of all its members. The state simply failed to establish an ideal of community as too many people were excluded from participating in the nation’s prosperity. Even with this fatalistic view of the state, Marx retained its importance as a framework for the understanding of the national question—the state remained at the forefront of Marx’s thinking.151

Equally important was Marx and Engels’ primacy of economic over other aspects of society, purposely leaving the nation outside of their conceptual framework. The nation was relegated to the superstructure under the materialist conception of history. Many scholars point to this downgrading of everything national as a sign of Marx’s inability or unwillingness to deal with the national question. Yet, as Benner explains, all this meant was that “social and intersocietal particularisms endorsed by Hegel might yet be superseded by more substantial forms of community arising from the interdependence of human needs.”152

Lastly, Marx and Engels emphasized truly democratic (or republican) values as a step towards full emancipation. A refutation of Hegel’s statist conception necessitated an excessive rejection of everything national. Moreover, it highlighted an important fact that “Marx’s commitment to the democratic-revolutionary concept of the nation predated his commitment to communism.”153 The struggle for an anuthentic form of democracy would remain a staple of Marxist conceptualization of a true civil society.

Marx and Engels’ rejection of nationalism, at least in part, can also be explained as a response to its growing power, which all intellectuals of the first half of the 19th century could observe first hand. For many, nationalism seemed to be exclusive to a specific group of people, to institutionalize (in the form of the state) social and political inequalities, and to constrain personal freedom and particularism. In the Prussian state, this was more prominent than in other European countries where democracy had made headway. German political refugees and unemployed intellectuals filled the streets of Paris, Brussels and London. Thus, Marx and Engels’ rejection of nationalism was, in no small part, a product of their experiences under the Prussian monarchy and bureaucracy. “In

149 Pelczynski, 270.
150 Benner explains: “the institutions and workings of the state arise from, and are in effect controlled by, relationships formed in civil society. Marx regarded the modern state as the product of a rift between the individual’s essentially social nature and his monadic life within civil society, not as its antidote. It was not the state which gave society the cohesive character Hegel wanted it to acquire, but the particularism and conflict endemic in civil society that were reflected in the state.” Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 27.
151 John Hoffman and Nxumalo Mzala explain: “Nations are superstructural in character because they cannot be understood in their own terms: they express the form of class struggle but not the content. This means they are part and parcel of the cultural and political superstructure, and cannot be understood except as part of the wider analysis of the state.” Science & Society 54, no. 4 (Winter 1990-1991): 415.
152 Really Existing Nationalisms, 30.
153 Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 20. Perhaps Walicki’s argument has some validity in that Marx’s fundamental premise was democratic (eventually Communist) liberation.
his sharp attacks on the censorship law,” as Kłakowski points out about his early writings, “[the young Marx] spoke out unequivocally for the freedom of the Press, against the leveling effect of government restriction, and also expressed views concerning the whole nature of the state and the essence of freedom.” 154 “The main threat to democratic aspirations in Germany,” as Benner explains, “still came from above, and particularly from the Prussian state’s ruthless suppression of its critics.” 155

Looking through the eyes of youthful and idealistic intellectuals, all European states—including the seemingly democratic ones, and especially the monarchical-conservative brand—were preventing the self-expression (i.e., the will) of the people. The young Marx and eventually Engels as well, did not outright reject the state but rather they criticized its supremacy and repressive nature. Their support for the unification of and democracy in Germany was not, as some claim, a reflection of their chauvinism or nationalistic fervor. They simply believed that a revolution in Germany (against a highly conservative and reactionary state) would have to inadvertently be radical, and would thus thrust the German people into the forefront as the first to achieve true emancipation (both social and political). 156 After all, as Marx believed, Germans had freed themselves from religious chains, they did not necessarily require a prolonged bourgeois phase, and their geo-strategic position always forced them to fight against eastern barbarism. 157 Furet unravels this conceptual modus operandi: “The plus-side of Germany’s radical political backwardness was that she had the best philosophers and the most ‘theoretical’ workers, a combination which was to find its natural finality in the socialist revolution, an equally radical emancipation but of a radically different type—no longer political, but human.” 158

Moreover, he continuously attempted throughout his exiled life to regain German citizenship. Some scholars see all of this as little more than a reflection of German nationalism. Yet, Marx’s belief in Germany as a prototypical revolutionary nation-state was not unfounded, as it seemed to be a powder keg ready for its revolutionary fuse to be lit. It could be said without exaggeration that Germany was Marx and Engels’ door to nationalism. Through national unification (and national independence), statehood (under Prussian leadership), democratization, and the emergence of a national socialist party—to name a few of the many dimensions of the German question—Marx and Engels formulated their disposition towards the nationality question. What must not be forgotten—and this is not meant to justify Marx and Engels’ beliefs, but rather to place them in the appropriate historical context—is that they were a product of 19th century intellectual environment.

Marx’s peculiar relationship with his homeland (and his perspective on the state) throughout the 1840s is best explored through Szporluk’s study 159 of his dialogue with (or rather critique of) Friedrich List. Both intellectuals critically examined the harsh consequence of industrialism and of laissez-faire economics in particular.

155 Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 19.
156 McLellan, Karl Marx, 82-4.
157 McLellan, Karl Marx, 350. For the historiographical discussion of this issue, see chapter 1. A note of interest is that this sense of German superiority has been the main ammunition of scholars who contend that Marx indeed had German nationalistic predisposition. Marek Waldenberg provides a somewhat balanced perspective by providing several instances highlighting Marx’s pro-German motivations. Kwestie Narodowe w Europe Środkowo-Wschodniej. Dzieje. Idee (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1992), 207.
158 Marx and the French Revolution, 7.
159 Gellner provides a very interesting appraisal of Szporluk’s work in the first chapter of his Encounters with Nationalism.
The latter saw nationalism—in the form of protectionism—as a necessary response to free trade capitalism. Marx, on the other hand, believed that Communism was the appropriate response to free trade capitalism. (The two only differed on the means of achieving the same ends!) Marx saw List’s support for free trade within a united Germany and the defense of external tariffs as contradictory.160 How could the bourgeoisie demand protection against external exploitation while promoting domestic extortion of the working class? In essence, “Marx did not admit the possibility of a national road to capitalism, which List was trying to find, and had nothing to say in favour of socialism in one country, because capitalism and communism were worldwide systems and could be treated only in a supranational setting.”161 By the middle of the 1840s, Marx had already opted for classes to play the role of the *dramatis personae* of history.

The *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, the *German Ideology*, and *On the Jewish Question* explicated his position on the growing antagonisms within society and outlined his initial views on the nation.162 Collectively, these writings offered a radical democratic position for emancipation and popular sovereignty, which would reconcile personal freedom with an individual’s desire for community.163 Although by the latter half of the 1840s, class substituted the nation or the bureaucracy (in Hegel’s worldview) as the universal agent of history, Marx did not intend for the nation-state or nationality to disappear from the stage. Benner explains:

Marx insisted that an evaluative distinction ought to be made between definitions of national identity and purpose that are imposed on people from above, and those which reflected the concerns of ordinary people in civil society. Nationality in this second sense could, Marx suggested, acquire substantive social content through an infusion of what he called true democracy.164

In the *German Ideology*, Marx definitively rejected Hegel by suggesting that the state was simply an instrument of the dominant class within society. Bourgeois revolutions produced states which ensured political emancipation only for some people within the nation. The accompanying large-scale industry would erode national barriers by creating a strong proletariat, which would eventually lose its nationalist garb and, through revolutionary upheaval, would proceed to universal emancipation.165

Agency—in the form of revolutionary uproar—remained at the heart of Marx’s (and later Engels’) strategy. After all, their main aim was to teach, stimulate and assist the workers on their road to full emancipation. Revolution was to be the sword of that liberation. Marx persistently returned to the French Revolution as a prototypical model.

“In so doing,” Furet suggests:

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160 Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism*, 32-5. It is important to once again acknowledge that for the rest of his life, Marx believed in the German revolutionary superiority—that the true calling of the German proletariat was to lead a continent-wide revolution. This was evident, for instance, in his work for the First International.

161 Szporluk, 32. In essence, as Paul G. Mitchison concludes: “socialism and nationalism become alternative world views answering many of the same questions with different responses.” “The ‘pig-headed’ Nation: Marxism grapples with the national question,” *East European Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (June 1991): 229.


165 Löwy, *Fatherland or Mother Earth?*, 6.
Marx, in contrast to Hegel, preserved the preeminent historical dignity of the idea of revolution. Indeed, since the forms of the state—for example, the passage from the monarchical to the representative state—are subordinate to actual conditions of social life, revolutions, which function precisely on the level of civil society, are the midwives of history.166

The French Revolution had produced democratic citizenship and all its accompanying illusions—such as la patrie—which the bourgeoisie appropriated to further its special interests.167 The French Revolution ushered in an era of political liberation which only partially fulfilled true human emancipation. It produced an imaginary idea of community and an illusion of democracy.

Marx admired the French Revolution not only for what it had achieved—the genesis of the modern state and the basis of political liberation—but (in the generic sense of revolution) for its historically activist role, its extreme radicalism and its emancipatory potential. This could never be understated, as revolution ensured the path to socialist salvation. Marx believed in the value of revolution (and radicalism) to such an extent, that he even supported the Germans in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870—what was seen by many as nothing short of nationalist rhetoric. Yet, Marx was willing to disregard nationalistic fervor if it was accompanied by the more imperative revolutionary turmoil.

THE SPRING OF NATIONS: THE 1848 REVOLUTIONS AND THE ADVENT OF DEMOCRACY.

A litmus test for all these ideas arrived in the form of an outburst of revolutionary activity throughout Europe in mid century. The Revolutions of 1848 became a battleground between liberalism and nationalism, and nowhere was this more visible than in the German-speaking world of Central Europe. Marx and Engels’ responses to these events were quite telling of their attitude to nationalism.168 Revolutionary optimism and the expectation of the imminent collapse of capitalism guided their perceptions on the pages of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung and in the Communist Manifesto.169 Their responses to this revolutionary wave have stimulated much debate.

The Communist Manifesto—initially an ideological platform for the Communist League but eventually a popular blueprint for the Communist dictum—was published on the eve of the revolution. Interestingly, Szporluk and Laski suggest that although the central motto of the publication was an attack on the bourgeoisie and capitalism, it also served as an anti-nationalist manifesto.170 Szporluk goes as far as to claim that for Marx everything national was premodern (in an anachronistic sense) and therefore was destined for the dustbin of history.171 Marek Waldenberg argues that the manifesto must be read literally as espousing an anti-nationalist position, which was a prerequisite for internationalism and for a successful widespread revolution.172

Benner, on the other hand, sees a much more optimistic approach to nationalism marked by Marx and Engels’ nuanced distinction between states and nations. She argues that previous scholarship has “failed to

166 Furet, Marx and the French Revolution, 14.
167 In essence, Marx was “trying to construct a theory of politics primarily as the emergence of modern alienation.” (Furet, Marx and the French Revolution, 26)
168 Many scholars, such as Munck or Connor, see 1848 as a turning point, when Marx and Engels had to face nationalism within and outside of the theoretical realm.
171 Szporluk, Communism and Nationalism, 62, 66.
172 Marek Waldenberg, Kwestie Narodowe w Europe Środkowo-Wschodniej, 188-189.
distinguish [Marx and Engels’] prescriptive radical democratic concept of the nation from their empirical class-instrumental theory of the state,” as envisioned in their writings around late 1840s.173 The latter were potentially instruments of coercion while the former could be only understood according to their intentions and strategies.

Firstly, let’s look at the role of the state. The Communist Manifesto characterizes the state as a coercive instrument of the dominant capitalist class (i.e., bourgeoisie), which wields its political power to fulfill its own interests. Yet, as Paul Wetherly explains, this does not tell the whole story, as the state might not necessarily “wither away” in a classless society. A state had some utilitarian value as an autonomous entity whose institutions could be controlled by and for the benefit of the working masses.174 Working classes could use state power for their own ends. Moreover, Marx and Engels believed in the historical necessity of large, centralized, capitalist states which served a twofold purpose: they ensured the enlargement of the working class (and the growth of its self-awareness); and their existence intensified class antagonism.175 States had found a somewhat dubious but plausible place in historical progression, but were nations accorded the same treatment?

Marx and Engels’ position on nations and nationalism was far more complex than their instrumental approach to the state. From a cursory reading of their journalistic writings throughout the revolutionary period, it is easy to detect a seeming dislike (or in the case of Engels, even revulsion) towards the smaller Slav nationalities of the Habsburg Empire and the Balkans, marked by promotion of German unification or of Poland’s independence. To an extent, this can be explained by their (sometimes misleading) understanding of the events and their reaction to them. Yet, this does not really explain everything. Roman Rosdolsky has, to a large extent, unpacked this conundrum of speculation and contradictory conclusions.176

When the revolutions broke out across Europe, Marx and Engels wholeheartedly believed that the continent-wide upheaval would either bring about the emergence of proletarian power in the advanced capitalist countries or at the least, would ensure the success of the democratic project in the less developed states, especially Germany. Nations could serve as a medium for democratic-revolutionary aspirations. Yet, when it seemed that national sentiments would paralyze democratic energies—as they were apparently doing in East Central Europe in 1848—the socialist forefathers attempted to understand nationalism’s powerful appeal. This would allow them to downplay those aspects of nationalism that contradicted their own (working-class) objectives. “It necessarily seemed,” as Rosdolsky gives insight into Engels’ mindset, “that either the revolution would come to ruin on the nationalities account or the nationalities would be ‘crushed’ by the revolution.”177 Engels in particular became preoccupied with the nationality question in Germany and the Austrian Empire.

173 Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 50-1. Benner’s interpretation should not be confused with some historiographical debates on the notion of “national class.” I would agree with the consensus that Marx and Engels certainly did not call for national classes.
175 Herod, The Nation in the History of Marxian Thought, 37.
176 Engels and the “Nonhistoric” Peoples
177 Rosdolsky, Engels and the “Nonhistoric” Peoples, 27.
Borrowing heavily from Hegel, Engels differentiated between *historic* and *non-historic* peoples. Only the former—seemingly revolutionary and progressive nations with strong national vitality—had earned the right to play a role in historical progression. Engels’ criterion of progress was imperative: “In it Engels evaluated nations in relation to their real and potential economic and social progress of nations and placed them implicitly into normative categories determined by the degree of progress achieved by their bourgeoisie.” Unfortunately, this evaluative tool blinded Marx and Engels’ understanding of the complexity of 1848 Revolutions (e.g., the relationship between national and social dimensions), as they downplayed internal progress of a nation and overrated a given nation’s contribution to the revolutionary cause. They thus discounted Hungarians’ oppression of minorities (such as Slovaks) and only highlighted their revolutionary zeal. Consequently, only the select few earned the right to exist.

These select nations had achieved this right through their previous struggles for unity and independence. Certain nations would hence have been assigned historical roles (due to their legacy of and future potential for revolution) and would take precedence over smaller nations. This historical process was reduced to a struggle between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces. While the Italians, Hungarians and Poles had earned a place within civilization, others like the Czechs or South Slavs were perceived as counter-revolutionary and were destined for assimilation. Furthermore, the French Revolution had proven that smaller peoples would be assimilated into larger units. Engels wanted to rid Europe of Slav nationalist movements. These Slavs were to be Polonized, Germanized or Magyarized.

This produced a somewhat paradoxical conclusion with which Marx and Engels struggled until the 1860s. If the Germans could not be liberated until they themselves emancipated the Poles, how could the German oppression of Czechs be justified? Historical justification of national oppression (e.g., Magyars over Croats) allowed them to dismiss various ethical questions, but these dilemmas became even more prominent in the latter half of the 19th century (and especially with the advent of New Imperialism). Their anti-Slav approach in 1848 earned Marx and especially Engels the characterization of chauvinistic nationalists. Yet, as Ritter elaborates, theirs “was not a reaction of [German chauvinists,]” but rather a product of “proto-Darwinian, philosophical fanaticism born of an intolerant, positivistic confidence in the existence of an ‘iron reality’ to which mankind must inevitably succumb.” Nonetheless, these broader intellectual currents do not fully explain Marx and Engels’ attack on the Slavs. Why did Engels take such a hard line against these small nationalities?

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178 Although Engels borrowed from Hegel’s conceptual framework, he was not an advocate of the historical principle. Firstly, he considered both the present and the past as key to understanding the future. Secondly, along with Marx, he believed that progress would lead to the abolition of particularism as peoples organized into ever larger units or communities. Rosdolsky, *Engels and the “Nonhistoric” Peoples*, 129-131. Nonetheless, some scholars argue that Engels did freely borrowed from Hegelian idealism. See, for example, Harry R. Ritter, “Friedrich Engels and the East European Nationality Problem,” *East European Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1976): 144.


180 This should not be confused with self-determination. Nations had to prove their right to exist. There was no absolute right to self-determination as espoused by late Marxists. Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue*, 12. Harry R. Ritter shows that “nationality was not an abstract right, but the product of a dialectical historical process in which certain cultural traditions emerge better suited than others for life.” “Friedrich Engels and the East European Nationality Problem,” 142. Marian Bębenek argues that contemporary historians still utilize Engels’ notions of historical and non-historical labels using different terminology of “nation-state” and “ethnic community”. *Studia Filozoficzne* 257, no. 4 (1987), 26.

181 See the first three chapters of Rosdolsky’s study.

182 “Friedrich Engels and the East European Nationality Problem,” 147.
Foremost, Engels saw them as counter-revolutionary in that they seemingly aligned with Austrian absolutism. One of the main goals of the mid-century revolutions was to undermine these conservative, reactionary monarchies. Engels could not understand why some Slavs refused to reject their national goals and support the wider revolutionary struggle. In any case, since they refused to surrender to active historical forces, historical inevitability would force them to be counter-revolutionary and anti-historical, and to act as enemies of revolution, progress and democracy. By refusing to follow history’s progression (and thus assimilate and fight for the broader revolutionary goals), they naturally had to be anti-progressive in order to reinforce their fleeting existence. Engels rejected the notion of national awakening of peoples without history. The emergence of Macedonians or Slovenes, for example, would do no less than create a rift in the historical current. Through their narrow viewpoint, Marx and Engels had erroneously dismissed the more important underpinning social, political, and linguistic issues that fueled national struggles.

Secondly, these nationalities were composed of peasants who, reactionary by disposition, abhorred modernization and further reinforced the status quo. It is not until the 1850s and 1860s, that Engels and Marx realized the connection between the social and national dimensions of national struggles. Thirdly, small peoples lacked national vitality—the historical, geographical, political and industrial conditions—that guaranteed their revolutionary value. It was not enough for a people to feel a sense of belongingness and a desire to be independent. A nation had to be able to create a feasible state with strong boundaries, which would allow for resistance to any foreign intervention or control. Yet, there were other motives at work here as well.

Marx and Engels’ understanding of nationalism’s contribution to the revolutionary cause was affected by their anti-Russian (or more specifically, anti-Tsarist) disposition. They saw the Romanovs’ Empire as a bastion of absolutism—a roadblock on the path to revolutionary victory. A strong Russian Empire seemed to prevent not only the spread of democratic revolutions and ideals but also the national unifications of Germany and Poland. On a

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183 By the outbreak of the revolutions in 1848, the national awakenings of the various peoples of the Habsburg Empire were complete. Immediately before or during the revolution, what initially were cultural program were politicized. When revolution broke out in Vienna, the predominantly German-speaking students and intellectuals called for the introduction of liberalism into the Monarchy. They wanted to acquire basic rights of freedom of the press, gathering, etc. They called for a constitution and a new cabinet. Yet, since most of the students and leaders of the revolt were German nationalists who rejected the interests of other national groups. And all these ethnic groups wanted to achieve certain national right (e.g., equality of language in specific regions). When they realized that the Viennese revolutionaries would not necessarily satisfy their national goals, they removed their support. Moreover, smaller nations (e.g., Croats) aligned with the Habsburgs to avoid national oppression at the hands of the more dominant nationalities (e.g., Magyars).

184 Rosdolsky, *Engels and the “Nonhistoric” Peoples*, 107-111. He explains: “The Slavs of Austria had no right to national existence because they sided with the counter-revolution in 1848; and they necessarily sided with the counter-revolution because they had already proven themselves incapable of national existence in the past and only the reaction left them any hope of preserving their ‘imaginary Slav nationality’. Thus the past history of he Austrian Slavs had already ridden roughshod over their present and future.” (110)

185 Rosdolsky, *Engels and the “Nonhistoric” Peoples*, see Chapter 10 on the peasant question.

186 Benner, on the other hand, insinuates that they were aware of how closely tied the national and social questions were (*Really Existing Nationalisms*, 91). Others, like Herod for example, have shown that Marx and Engels misread the circumstances in East Central Europe (*The Nation in the History of Marxian Thought*, 14). Löwy argues that “Engels did not try to grasp the social causes of the ‘Vendean’ role played by these national movements in 1848, but simply deduced it from their supposed ‘counter-revolutionary’ nature” (*Fatherland or Mother East?*, 25).


broader scale, since the 1848 Revolutions were to model the French revolutionary goals of 1789, the first and most immediate objective of the revolutions was to abolish the three European absolutist monarchies—the Hohenzollerns, the Habsburgs and the Romanovs. Pan-Slavism, which Marx and Engels believed would emerge from the unity of the desperate small Slav nations seeking assistance to preserve their national goals, could create a distraction from the wider revolutionary endeavors across Europe. After all, Russia spearheaded the anti-Napoleonic struggle and later intervened on behalf of the weakened Habsburg Empire during the Spring of Nations. More importantly, Marx and Engels placed all their eggs in one basket—they refused to admit that Europe was not ready for a revolution of their kind. They wanted the revolutions to succeed at any cost. So, what price were they willing to pay to ensure revolution?

Marx and Engels were willing to subjugate the social question—the mainstay of their thought—to the revolutionary cause. Sloboda explains that, for instance, “the Hungarian [or Polish] revolt need not even have been progressive internally to have contributed significantly to the more general revolutionary movement. Any furtherance at all of the general revolution seemed implicitly to bear the stamp of progress.” These nations were not only a bulwark against Eastern barbarism but they potentially could transform into capitalist states and thus produce working classes. Benner argues that it was the political landscape of revolutionary Europe that forced Marx and Engels to give primacy to strategy. To reiterate, Marx and Engels wanted to focus on individual national movements “to provide action-guiding maps of the complex social terrains in which national aspirations were pursued.” Felix goes as far as to say that Marx exploited nationalism as a strategy to achieve his revolutionary ends. It would be more appropriate though (to borrow from Benner) to emphasize Marx and Engels’ preoccupation with human agency. The two intellectuals acknowledged the value of nationalism as an activist phenomenon and as constituting a component of a policy of strategic realism.

190 Directed from Russia, Pan-Slavism could serve as a promoter of Russian absolutism across East Central Europe. That is why Engels consistently rejected Pan-Slavism as Russia’s Trojan Horse into European democracy. Eventually, his unrelenting position became, in part, also a product of his critique of Bakunin (and the latter’s support of Pan-Slavism).
191 Swoboda, “The Changing Views of Marx and Engels about the Nationalities in the Austrian Monarchy, 1845-1855,” 10-11. Ritter argues that “Magyar nationalism, despite its strong aristocratic and chauvinistic character, was aggressively championed by the Neue Rheinische Zeitung. […] Engels defended the Magyars as a nation of ‘historic initiative,’ vital in extending western culture into the east and the southeast, and strove mightily to prove that Magyar society—though in some respects hardly more advanced than that of the subject nationalities of Hungary—was both durable and flexible enough to adjust to the requirement of modern capitalism.” “Engels and the Nationality Problem,” 139. Ritter as well asserts that Engels, “a self-styled military expert, was chiefly interested in the tactical significance of the national movements.” At the expense of objectivity, accuracy and ideological purity, Engels interpreted national aspirations predominantly in terms of their contribution to the revolutionary cause. “Friedrich Engels and the East European Nationality Problem,” 137.
192 Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 50. She explains: “Nations were not seen as the product of impersonal economic forces, or as weapons wielded exclusively by the bourgeoisie in ideological battle. The prescriptive concept implies that the elements of territory, history, culture, and statehood which come to embody a nation’s distinctiveness are reworked and ascribed a certain significance by people, not by the inexorable logic of capitalist development.” (95-6).
194 Felix, Marx as Politician.
195 Connor, The National Question, 11. Connor, however, sees this emphasis on strategy emerging only after the 1848 Revolutions.
196 Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 99, 139. Benner (to an extent) follows Pelczynski’s argument that Marx and Engels’ interest in nationalism was much more practical than theoretical. Pelczynski, “Nation, civil society,
Placing theoretical aspirations aside, the two intellectuals had to clearly outline methods and goals for agents of history (such as leaders of national movements or of classes). They believed themselves to be revolutionaries who should not only observe but also participate in the making of history. This meant that nationalism could be supported in specific circumstances, under strict criteria, and in close proximity to the grand revolutionary strategy. Such flexibility allowed for ideological purity and consistency to be subsumed under more immediate and strategic considerations. This was best exemplified by Marx and Engels’ support of trans-class alliances or coalitions within nations (or more broadly speaking, the link between nation and class).

On the road to the development of class consciousness and the acquisition of control over state institutions and mechanisms, “the proletariat should clearly differentiate its interests from those of other classes while striving, at the same time, to constitute itself the nation by building coalitions around a core set of ecumenical goals.” From this perspective, national ideology assumed the role of a doctrinal battleground for political power. The working classes were to win the national class struggle before joining a wider international movement. “By applying a strategic, politically discriminating analysis to nationalist movements and ideologies,” Benner contends, “Marx (and sometimes Engels) sought to provide action-guiding maps that would help democrats and revolutionaries to decide when to support or oppose a particular national movement.” Hence, national unification movements could be seen as a means to class-related ends. Their utilitarian and instrumental value amidst revolutionary fervor would outweigh any ideological contradictions.

How Should “All the Workers of the World Unite!”?: From the Spring of Nations to the 1860s.

The 1848 upheaval had failed to achieve any of the goals that Marx and Engels had envisioned: neither Italy nor Germany had been unified; the absolutist dynasties remained in power; and democracy was still limited to Western Europe. From the late 1840s onward, they never again devoted as much attention to nationalism as they did in their early scholarship and journalism. Yet, their perspective on the ever-growing phenomenon did not remain static, especially as they struggled with some key unrelenting questions. Was national context a prerequisite for class-consciousness? Could the national and the social spontaneously combine in revolutionary momentum? Was national oppression a justifiable necessity of historical progress?

Throughout the 1850s and especially from 1860s onward, current affairs and the changing nature of the working classes reshaped Marx and Engels’ attitude towards nationalism. Although they recognized the growing complexity of the phenomenon (and here I would agree with Saporluk and Avineri), their approach remained predominantly instrumental—they judged national movements according to their contribution to the revolutionary cause of the proletariat. Interpreting the national question through the prism of its positive or negative contribution to the movement stubbornly persisted. When the Crimean War erupted, Marx and Engels aligned with most of the socialists on the side of the Ottoman Empire’s integrity, seeing the South Slavs’ bid for freedom, at best, as an


197 Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 52.
198 For Marx and Engels, the decisive factors were class identity and political intentions of the nationalists. (Later Marxists like Miroslav Hroch or John Breuilly picked up on this theme.) Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 113, 139.
unfeasible project destined to fail, or at worst, as a Tsarist plot to control the Balkan Peninsula. Nonetheless, already in the latter half of the 1850s, their attitude began to change. Colonialism and the benefits of pressing workers’ demands within existing state structures produced new realities and alternatives. Several issues informed Marx and Engels’ thinking.

Foremost, they slowly came to accept that certain national peculiarities could produce different scenarios for the progression of class struggles. Nowhere was this more prominent than in Marx’s study of the emerging situation in Russia. As previously mentioned, the abolition of the Tsarist Empire would ensure the success of several national unifications and the advent of democracy in the eastern parts of the continent. Moreover, a revolutionary upheaval in the empire could potentially spread across Europe. Furthermore, Russian socialists’ anti-capitalist rhetoric gave credence to a nation of peasants in their struggle for emancipation. Yet, could Russia skip a stage in its historical progress? Could it bypass the bourgeois-capitalist phase and move directly to socialism? Could a reactionary peasant constitute the revolutionary vanguard?

“When a Russian Marxism did emerge,” Szporluk explains, “it was a post-Capital Marxism, that is, a doctrine that recognized individual countries as units of development and did so to a degree that had been lacking in the earlier Marx.” By the early 1880s, “Marx considered the possibility of a direct transition from the obshchina to communism, without going through all the ‘terrible ups and downs’ of capitalism, if a peasant revolution in Russia should fuse together with a socialist revolution in Europe.” This was the root of Marx’s recognition of the multiplicity of paths to socialism, and a far more complex stratification of nationalisms.

The notion of different paths to socialism was also shaped by Marx and Engels’ understanding of colonialism. Their highly paradoxical approach involved a negative criticism of the exploitive nature of imperialism and a positive assessment of its capitalistic (and thus civilizing and progressive) effects. Through this prism, Americans could be praised for taking Texas from “lazy” Mexicans, and the British could be commended for bringing unity to a regionalized and divided India. Although the progressive nature of capitalism (regardless of the costs) remained a staple of their worldview, they subtly began to recognize the more complex connections between center and periphery. By the mid 1850s, Marx began to acknowledge that the freedom of the colonized peoples does not necessarily depend on the revolutionary direction from the center. Marx came to believe that self-emancipation from the periphery is possible. Furthermore, he now asserted that the periphery could trigger a widespread revolution in the center. What was needed was that the people revolting in the periphery offer a program that had international appeal. Although these ideas would only mature under Lenin, what seemed impossible earlier was now becoming a reality. Evolving national questions in Poland and Ireland further informed the same line of thinking.

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200 The Poles and the Hungarians topped the list of those peoples of East Central Europe that would be emancipated with the collapse of the Russian Empire.
201 Szporluk, Communism and Nationalism, 177, 178-180.
The two national case studies became imperative in Marx and Engels’ changing attitudes. As Lim contends, “Marx came to the realization that English colonialism destroyed the indigenous industry of Ireland, contrary to his earlier belief that it provided Ireland with the material basis for capitalist development.” It seemed that capitalism produced economic insecurity which stimulated intra-proletarian resentments. Interestingly, they perceived both case studies from an essentially political not economic standpoint. Hence, even in the early 1880s, Engels still supported Polish independence as a bulwark against the Three Emperors’ Alliance—politics were of primary concern. Two essential conclusions emerged from this new attitude: Firstly, since internationalism (for instance in the form of imperialism or alliances) could be utilized to justify oppression of one state over another, national self-determination began to acquire some validity. And secondly, since nations had proven to be an effective weapon in strengthening class warfare, nationalism could be exploited for the socialist cause. National contexts, even though being pushed forward by a defined historical process, produced complex forces that inadvertently shaped socialism’s evolution.

Firstly, Marx recognized the constructive role of nationalism: the periphery (e.g., Ireland or India) could become a decisive instigator of the revolution in the metropolis (e.g., England). Throughout the 1850s, Marx and Engels believed that revolution would only break out in the advanced countries in Europe. By the late 1860s and especially after the Paris Commune, they accepted that shortcuts to socialism were possible from the periphery in more backward contexts. These underdeveloped peoples in the colonies (especially in China and India) could light the European revolutionary powder keg.

Secondly, the Polish and Irish cases offered distinct conditions where the national and the social dimensions, where nationalism and internationalism became interdependent. In essence, the basic democratic goals were inseparable from (or even impossible without) national independence. The existence of independent nations aware of their distinct identity became a precondition for the growth of class-conscious proletariat and a prerequisite for the development of socialism.

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205 Lim, “Marx’s Theory of Imperialism,” 168.
206 See the collection: Karl Marx, *Ireland and the Irish Question: A Collection of Writings by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (New York: International Publishers, 1972). Especially revealing, for example, is a letter from Engels to Marx after his travels through Ireland in 1856.
207 This is an important dimension of the historiographical debates on Marx and Engels’ views on nationalism. Nimni claims that these views were drawn from their economic determinism, dismissing any subjective criterions. Yet, it seems that their writings on Poland and Ireland, and their support of national aspirations were derived from political assessments of international relations rather than any intrinsic economic factors. As Traverso and Löwy explain: “In this case, the concept of nation was not defined according to objective criteria (economy, language, territory, etc.), but rather was founded on a subjective element: the will of the Irish to liberate themselves from British rule.” “The Marxist Approach to the National Question,” 137.
208 Again, it is important to emphasize that although Engels in the late stages of life seemingly acknowledged the power of nationalism, he never supported the notion of the self-determination of nations. Only Marx and Engels’ followers began to define and utilize the concept as a potential socialist strategy or objective.
209 Marx explained this in a letter to Engels (in the late 1860s): “The way I shall express the matter next Tuesday is: that, quite apart from all ‘international’ and ‘humane’ phrases about Justice for Ireland — which are taken for granted on the International Council — it is in the direct and absolute interests of the English working class to get rid of their present connexion with Ireland. I am fully convinced of this, for reasons that, in part, I cannot tell the English workers themselves. For a long time I believed it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy. I always took this viewpoint in the New-York Tribune. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. This is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general.” In Karl Marx, *Ireland and the Irish Question*. 
“Ireland led Marx to recognize the real weight of the nationalist movement and the need for labour to articulate its progressive aspects,” Munck concludes, “[while] the Polish case demonstrated how democracy was the only way to achieve national independence.” However, this should not be read as approval of self-determination. National demands were still not recognized as universal in their own right. Nonetheless, such a new perspective produced multiple ripples. The prism of national peculiarities, the center-periphery relationship, the constructive value of nation-states, and uneven development forced Marx and Engels to reshape their understanding of the role of nationalism in class struggles.

Marx and Engels began to distinguish between oppressed and oppressor nations. Such an assertion was superficially proclaimed already in 1848, but now it was genuinely accepted. This new dichotomy was entangled (even if apprehensively) with their earlier categorization of historical/progressive/revolutionary and nonhistorical/anti-progressive/anti-revolutionary typologies. They also abandoned the notion that “movements for national independence must work strictly within the bounds of a wider internationalist programme” or that they must adhere to specific social goals. Neither the state nor national interests were willing to wither away. All these conclusions were not only a product of critical observation or of the changing international situation, but also of polemics with other socialist thinkers of the First International, including Mikhail Alexandrovitch Bakunin, Ferdinand Lassalle and Pierre Joseph Proudhon.

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210 Herod, The Nation in the History of Marxian Thought, 36.
211 Munck, The Difficult Dialogue, 22. Once again, the economic-political dichotomy reemerges. Löwy and Traverso see this change as emerging from political (not economic) foundations while Lim argues that such political pragmatism could not emerge without theoretical (i.e., economic materialist) underpinnings.
212 Several historians, including Adam Ciolkosz, postulate that Marx and Engels had distinguished between oppressed and oppressor nations already during the 1848 Revolutions, when they adhered to German oppression over Poles, arguing that “the creation of a democratic Poland was a first condition for the development of a democratic Germany.” “Karl Marx and the Polish Insurrection of 1863,” The Polish Review 10, no. 4 (1965): 13. However, though traces were noticeable in the earlier period, it was not until the 1860s that these ideas matured. See Löwy, “Marxists and the National Question.”
213 Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms, 188. She explains: “If the working classes in the dominant countries were unwilling to liberate themselves by opposing foreign oppression, then the revolutionary impulse had to come from the oppressed nations themselves (China and India were primary candidates). In such circumstances, Marx came to argue, the achievement of national independence might be a prior condition for social reform and progressive international alliances, not just a means of pursuing these broader objectives.”
CHAPTER 3: NATIONALIZING THE INTERNATIONAL: MARX AND ENGELS IN THE ERA OF ORGANIZED SOCIALISM.

DISCUSSION WITH PROUDHON, BAKUNIN AND LASALLE: FROM THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL TO THE 1890S.

The International Working Men’s Association (established in 1864) epitomized Marx and Engels’ ideas and strategies, marking the zenith of socialism during their lifetime. Ironically, it was partly instigated by a highly nationalistic event—the January Uprising in Congress Poland. 214 The Polish question remained one of Marx’s more perplexing eccentricities. 215 It continuously figured on the agenda of the various congresses and conferences, and remained a highly contested issue amongst the emerging factions. But Marx had greater aspirations for the International than ensuring Poland’s independence.

Marx wanted to use the International as a centralized entity that could impose a consistent policy and unitary ideology on all its member sections, and as a revolutionary weapon (directed especially against Russia). 216 Once again, strategy seemed to prevail over ideological purity as the organization followed a relatively flexible doctrinal framework to accommodate the diverging worldviews of its members. 217 “It was a masterpiece of propagandist diplomacy,” as Gerth aptly describes Marx’s inaugural speech, “everybody could find his aspirations satisfactorily embodied in the statement of policies and aims.” 218 Marx would bend back and forth to accommodate the different positions, all while trying to maintain unity within.

The central legacy of the International to the nationality question was Marx’s recognition of the need to focus socialist activity on the local (i.e., national) level. He had recognized the connection between workers’ domestic unity (i.e., nationally organized parties in each country) and cross-national support. Once again, it seemed that strategy—the need to organize the working-class troops along national lines (even if veiled in international slogans)—was prevailing over ideological purity. 219 More than anywhere else, these nationally-inspired schisms were continuously played out in the activities and congresses of the International, thus highlighting the growing factionalism within the socialist camp.

The French Proudhonists (Proudhon had died by 1865) were the first to compete with Marx for the leadership of the International. Foremost, they rejected Marx’s support of Polish independence as an important dimension of the workers’ question across the continent and of his obsessive opposition to Tsardom. Proudhon repudiated national unifications (especially those of Poland, Germany and Italy), statism and internationalism,

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214 More than anything else, it was driven by Marx’s persistent and obsessive Russophobia, with Poland as the key to the destruction of Tsarist despotism. Ciolkosz sees this in more virtuous light, claiming that Marx simply believed in the revolutionary cause of the Poles. Yet, McLellan offers a more evenhanded conclusion, arguing that Marx’s hatred of Russia stemmed from its reactionary and conservative nature, which remained a central obstacle to a European wide revolution.


216 Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Volume One, 244-245; McLellan, Karl Marx, 345-353.

217 Felix explains: “Within two years more than a hundred societies, including many associations besides trade unions, such as mutual aid groups, freethinkers, language reformers, and artisanal guilds, had affiliated themselves to the International.” “The Dialectic of the First International and Nationalism,” 29.


219 For signs of this flexible approach, one needs to look no further than the minutes of the General Council of the First International from the mid 1860s: The General Council of the First International, 1864-1866. The London Conference 1865. Minutes (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1964).
aligning his ideas with French national values and conditions, which could lead to a sort of decentralized, self-sufficient economic unit (devoid of state intervention). He even opposed revolutions and strikes on the grounds that they would only create more class antagonism, despotism, violence and disorder. His disciples believed that nations should be dissolved into small units that would be voluntarily associated—these would serve as a substitute for the state.

Lassalle, on the other hand, was not an anarchist, but rather a patriot, albeit of German colour. Through a Fichtean-Romantic prism of an independent Germany, he discarded the notion of the proletariat as the liberator of the world. Instead, he glorified the state (in its organic unity, as framed by Hegel) as the bulwark of workers’ socialism; he aimed for state socialism. Broad-based cooperation and tactical opportunism—widely perceived as highly pro-Bismarckian policies—earned him a highly negative reputation as a German chauvinist.

Marx rejected both Proudhon and Lassalle in their narrow viewpoints and nationally limiting aspirations. They simply compromised too much at the expense of the international goals. Lassalle sold out to Bismarckian manipulations (i.e., he compromised too much to the state) while Proudhon, an anti-statist anarchist dressed in socialist clothes, could not even recognize the importance of state apparatus (i.e., he did not compromise enough to the state). Neither could understand Marx’s balancing act on the nationalism’s tightrope.

If Proudhon and Lassalle reflected diverging forms of national aspirations of the French and the Germans, Bakunin would occupy the opposite end of this socialist spectrum on the national question. His doctrinal framework, focused on the notion of freedom, abhorred everything national. The state embodied everything evil and was to be completely discarded, lest it would become a machine of despotism even in socialist hands. “It is precisely because the state exists,” Bukunin would argue, “that even the best individuals, emerging from the mass of humanity, become tyrants and executioners.” He refused to see any benefit of operating within the politics of the state.

Kołakowski points out several issues of contention between Marx and Bakunin. Those pertaining to the state are most relevant here. Firstly, Marx believed that the state was an instrument of the bourgeoisie rather than a source of all social inequality. Secondly, Marx’s strategy allowed for political activity within existing states and for class alliances. Finally, Bakunin envisioned a complete destruction of state apparatus while Marx emphasized the


221 Kołakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Volume One, 208-209. Proudhon’s vision of self-sufficiency negated any value of the state as a reforming agency.

222 George Novack, “The First and Second Internationals,” in The First Three Internationals: Their History and Lessons, eds. George Novack, Dave Frankel and Fred Feldman (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), 41. Kołakowski argued that the “Prouhonian federalism was to provide a basis for reconciling the absolute claim to sovereignty of the nation-state and the rival imperialisms of the nation-states. Proudhon sought, not to destroy national communities, but to integrate them in a hierarchy of free groups, so that national egoism would find no scope for expression.” “The Reaction of Two Anarchists to Nationalism: Proudhon and Bakunin on the Polish Question,” 38.


224 George Novack, “The First and Second Internationals,” 42.


necessity of a central economic administration. In terms of the last point, Bakunin was the first to point out the
slippery slope of a minority’s control of the state machinery on behalf of workers, which he assumed would lead to
authoritarian communism.\footnote{Bakunin believed that Marx’s socialism had lost its authenticity by focusing too much on those workers that were relatively well off. He believed that socialists should garner support amongst the poorest workers who had nothing to lose and would therefore join any revolutionary cause. Worst yet in Bakunin’s eyes was Marx’s overreliance on applying scientific socialism to transform the state. Workers could never simply take over the existing state apparatus. Bakunin perceived the state to be a necessary evil, which will disappear in the future. The state destroyed whatever genuine aspects of society remained under capitalism through domination and by upholding privileges. Notions of democracy or a democratic state were for him oxymorons. Since there was absolutely nothing redeemable about the state, its only fate was complete destruction. Retaining any aspects of the existing state apparatus—as Marx was hoping to do in order to manage the economy and social life of the future socialist state—was unacceptable to Bakunin. The latter believed that such an approach would simply lead to new state despotism. Intellectuals could not simply use scientific socialism to reorganize society, least of all any aspects of the state apparatus. State, even if under the control of a minority of socialist intellectuals, could never ensure genuine freedom and equality. By its very nature, the state retained exploitive qualities so that “any state, even the most republican and the most democratic, even the pseudo-popular state imagined by Marx, is essentially nothing but the government of the masses by an educated and therefore privileged minority.” State Communism would become the new form of state tyranny. Workers who would enter such new proletarian governments would seize to be workers and would quickly accustom to the privileged position, to become a new class of tyrants and executioners. Kołakowski, \textit{Main Currents of Marxism, Volume One}, 246-252; Brian Morris, \textit{Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom} (Montreal: Black Press Books, 1993), 96-104, 117-35.}

Even though the anarchist eventually joined the International in the late 1860s, his polemics with Marx
reflected some of the fiercest battles within the organization.\footnote{Karl Marx, \textit{The Civil War in France, March-May 1871} (London: Zodiac & Brian Baggins, 1871).} Throughout the organization’s lifetime, its architects faced not only outside disapproval but also had to contend with the ever-growing schisms that disrupted its unity and vision. Marx’s emphasis on the significance of the state in the evolution of working classes and the need for nationally oriented movements (in pushing forward internationalism) inadvertently forced him, at a minimum, to acknowledge nationalism’s mobilizing ability, and at a maximum, to accept and utilize nationalism (even if only in form). Did Marx finally succumb to nationalism’s allure? Marx and Engels’ reactions to the Franco-Prussian War, the Paris Commune and the Gotha Programme partly answer this question.

When the Franco-Prussian War broke out at the turn of the decade, Marx remained peculiarly silent. Eventually, his earlier aspirations of a German unification, his claims to German superiority, and his predisposition to everything activist got the better of him and he cautiously sided with Prussia. These conclusions of course were accompanied by pronouncements for French and German workingmen’s cooperation.\footnote{James Joll, \textit{The Second International 1889-1914} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 10.} Nonetheless, how can such support be justifiable, when even August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht rejected Prussian domination and abstained from voting in support of war credits?\footnote{McLellan, \textit{Karl Marx}, 363-380.} The benefits of unification seemed to outweigh all implications. Only when the guise of the defensive war thinned out, did Marx realize the folly of Prussian aggression and the danger of destabilizing France.\footnote{McLellan, \textit{Karl Marx}, 363-380.} Was national unification more important than international cooperation? Could German workers be convinced to side with their French counterparts against their homeland? Was France ready for a revolution? None of the above could be answered in the positive.

When revolution engulfed Paris in the early 1870s, Marx initially refused to support it, believing that it was premature. Yet, the experiment of the Paris Commune would become an important turning point for Marx’s...
approach to nationalism and the state. Firstly, Marx changed his perspective on the nation. While writing on the Paris Commune, Marx emphasized that it should not lead to the breakup of the nation. “The unity of the nation,” Marx clarified, “was not to be broken, but, on the contrary to be organized by the Communal Constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence.”\(^{232}\) Knowingly or not, Marx had come closer to Bakunin’s concept of “natural patriotism” a basic sense of solidarity found in all human societies.\(^{233}\) The second ideological shift that Marx experienced, which once again brought him closer to Bakunin’s perspective, was the rejection of the possibility of taking over and using existing state structures.\(^{234}\) Marx recognized that “the ‘working class cannot simply lay hold on the ready-made statemachinery and wield it for their own purpose,’ but that it had to ‘smash’ the bureaucratic-military institutions of the old state, and that after this act the communal constitution as developed by the Commune offered a new type of state in which the transition from capitalism to communism could take place.”\(^{235}\)

Marx admitted the value of retaining certain aspects of state structures but had a hard time accepting any policy that he believed undermined the strength of working class movements (which only hindered the true road to socialism). He maintained that the class struggle is only national in form not substance.\(^{236}\) This was one of Marx’s last and most visible efforts to stem the tide of nationalism that saturated the nationally oriented socialist parties.\(^{237}\) Yet, he was never able to resolve this highly problematic issue. Since 1848, Marx intermittently battled with the notions of form and substance. As previously explained, he believed in the necessity of the democratic movement, which was directed at winning control over state structures. This necessity became a living reality with the advent of socialist parties. Could the *form* of state-based political activity be reconciled with the *substance* of international working-class interests? The 1870s revealed the extent of the growing complexity of the socialist world.

The failure of the Paris Commune struck deep in the heart of the socialist movement across Europe. Externally, it faced repression and persecution from the authorities that exceedingly exaggerated the strength and appeal of socialism across the continent. Internally, the International declined at the spread of autonomous national

\(^{232}\) Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France, March-May 1871.*

\(^{233}\) Bakunin saw patriotism as a “passion of group solidarity” which capitalism was slowly eradicating through the establishment of large states. In its basic natural form, it promoted cooperation between people (Marx was not fully convinced of this). Yet, when utilized by the contemporary bourgeoisie, it justified destruction and domination. Hence, in Bakunin’s time, patriotism had come to represent group interests of the privileged classes. “Patriotism which aims toward unity that is not based upon freedom is bad patriotism,” Bakunin would write in “Class Interests in Modern Patriotism”, “it is shameful from the point of view of the real interests of the people and of the country which it pretends to exalt and serve. Such patriotism becomes, very often against its will, a friend of reaction, an enemy of revolution,—that is, of the emancipation of nations and men.” After a revolution, state patriotism would wither away and would be replaced by proletarian patriotism. Mikhail Bakunin, “Class Interests in Modern Patriotism,” “Patriotism’s Part in Man’s Struggle,” and “Fatherland and Nationality,” in *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, ed. G.P. Maximoff (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953), 232-3, 225-36, 324-26; Morris, Bakunin, 103-4.

\(^{234}\) Fisher correctly argues that the key “is the description and obvious approval of both Marx and Bakunin of the constitutional theory and practice of the Commune, culminating in the idea of the people governing themselves in a process of direct, participatory democracy in a federation of communal councils.” The two man had a fairly similar vision of what would happen to the state. “The state Begins to Wither Away…,” 32.

\(^{235}\) Fischer, “The state Begins to Wither Away…,” 32.


\(^{237}\) Ironically, Bakunin struggled with the same problem, albeit in a different context and in different ways. He kept highlighting the courage and brevity of the Slavs (such as Poles), pointing out the strength of their patriotism.
parties. When decentralization persisted throughout the 1870s, and the socialist hub shifted from France to Germany, Marx still supported these national forces. Nations had paid their dues by sheltering socialism. These nationally organized parties or organizations were acquiring power within existing state structure while promoting growth and unity of workers’ movements. “Only when he became convinced,” Zwick suggests, “that these national forces could no longer be directed toward revolutionary goals, as he defined them, did he condemn them as reactionary.” Somehow, nationalism’s utilization was legitimized if it served the socialist cause and did so in a prescribed manner. As soon as Marx’s brand of socialism seemed to be distorted in some way, reactionary nationalism was assigned all the blame. But he was not blind to the growing strength of national interests within national socialist parties. His criticism of the Gotha Programme reflected (and foreshadowed) all the uncertainties of the changing nature of the socialist movement in the last quarter of the 19th century.

In the mid 1870s, the Eisenach party and the followers of Lassalle decided to unite their political efforts within the young unified Germany. In an attempt at compromise, they assembled and produced a common platform, which eventually became the blueprint for the new Social Democratic Workers’ Party. The fundamental strategy of the party would be to promote state-sponsored workers’ cooperatives, giving emphasis to the ascendancy of domestic politics. This entailed a progressive and gradual, as opposed to revolutionary transformation and involved participation in the political process. Reform rather than revolution would ensure workers’ objectives. Marx harshly criticized what he envisioned as an unacceptable surrender to Lassallean nationalism even though the emerging party was grounded in Marxist theoretical framework.

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240 Two groups comprised what would in the mid 1870s before the SPD. The first to be created in 1863 was Lassalle’s General German Workers’ Association (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein, ADAV). The second to emerge, in 1869 was the Social Democratic Workers’ Party (Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei, SDAP), which was founded in the city of Eisenach (hence the label of Eisenachs). The Lassaleans included, for example, Carl Wilhelm Tölcke, August Perl, and Fritz Mende. The Eisenachs included August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht.
243 Neither Marx nor Engels believed that including Lassaleans within the ranks of the SPD was a good idea. They simply did not trust that Lassaleans would shed their preference for working within the confines of the state. This is highlighted in Engels’ letter to August Bebel in March of 1875: “Our party had so often held out a conciliatory hand to the Lassaleans, or at least proffered co-operation, only to be rebuffed so often and so contemptuously by the Hasenclevers, Hasselmanns and Tolckes as to lead any child to the conclusion that, should these gentlemen now come and themselves proffer conciliation, they must be in a hell of a dilemma. Knowing full well what these people are like, however, it behoves us to make the most of that dilemma and insist on every conceivable guarantee that might prevent these people from restoring, at our party’s expense, their shattered reputation in general working-class opinion. They should be given an exceedingly cool and cautious reception, and union be made dependent on the degree of their readiness to abandon their sectarian slogans and their state aid, and to accept in its essentials the Eisenach Programme of 1869 or an improved edition of it adapted to the present day. Our party has absolutely nothing to learn from the Lassaleans in the theoretical sphere, i.e., the crux of the matter where the programme is concerned, but the Lassaleans doubtless have something to learn from the party; the first prerequisite for union was that they cease to be sectarians, Lassaleans, i.e., that, first and foremost, they should, if not wholly relinquish the universal panacea of state aid, at least admit it to be a secondary provisional measure alongside and amongst many others recognised as possible. The draft programme shows that our people, while infinitely superior to the Lassallean leaders in matters of theory, are far from being a match for them where political guile is concerned; once
Workers’ participation in politics and the question of reform versus revolution became staples of the debates that raged within and outside of socialist circles right up to the outbreak of the First World War. Even Marx was not clear on the appropriate pathway—he refused to modify his revolutionary goals while simultaneously encouraging reform-oriented policies in national contexts. Should working class parties cooperate with bourgeois parties even if only for strategic purposes? And more broadly, could parliamentary political action ensure the same achievements as direct revolutionary action?

By the late 19th century, Marxism emerged as one of the most prominent ideologies offering an advanced, objective and scientific examination of capitalism and outlining a pathway to socialism. Yet, although Marxists preached workers’ solidarity and remained associated with revolutionary seizure of power, with the eventual destruction of state capitalism, and with the development of a new proletarian state, what it meant to be a Marxist (even during Marx’s lifetime) remained a contested issue that only intensified at the turn of the 20th century. In no small measure, nationalism further confounded this dilemma by delineating socialist dogma according to national peculiarities. Throughout his life, Marx tried to dismiss nationalism and highlight social issues. But brushing aside the nationality question produced a confusing legacy, which only fueled debates amongst Marxists. Whether intentionally or not, Marx failed to produce a decisive body of scholarship on the nationality question, thus leaving his disciples with many misgivings and questions about the diverging interpretations of the master’s thoughts on the subject.

**Determining Nationalism: Marx and Engels’ Legacy on the National Question.**

Marx and Engels left behind a highly ambiguous legacy on the national question. As explained in the preceding two chapters, the forefathers of socialism had only made cursory remarks about nationalism and nation-states. If a viable and consistent prescription of nationalism in Marx and Engels is difficult to understand for contemporary scholars, how could we expect 19th century socialists, without access to a compilation of the masters’ lifetime of literary work, to extract an overarching philosophy of the nation? Cocks points out four of Marx and Engels’ unforgivable sins on the nationality question: their supercilious depiction of collective identity, their depiction of nationalism as false consciousness, their instrumental perception of the nation-state as a tool of the bourgeoisie, and their dismissal of the material realities of ethnonational differentiation. Yet, these four broad fault-lines do not fully explain the massive earthquakes of socialism’s squabbling over the national question between 1870 and 1917.

Marxist strategy and theory faced a roller-coaster ride through the tumultuous debates on the appropriate socialist guidelines for the national question. Each time that Marx and Engels touched on this phenomenon, they generated more questions than answers. Further complicating this theoretical maze were their personal phobias and preferences, as well as the evolution of their thought as they attempted to subtly reformulate their ideas to fit changing realities. Also problematic were the many trivial comments that assumed dogmatic status, becoming crucial issues in the multiple wars of words that pervaded Social Democracy and the Second International. Ignoring the nationality question and purposely leaving it outside the mainstream of Marxist thought did not make it disappear, but rather opened the door to a far greater range of interpretations. And it is this ambiguity which allowed again the ‘honest men’ have been cruelly done in the eye by the dishonest.” Engels, “Engels to August Bebel in Zwickau,” March 18-28, 1875.

244 Cocks, Passion and Paradox, 22-3. Although several historians have outlined the problems of Marx and Engels’ legacy on the national question, Cocks’ account was one of the most insightful.
their followers to construe and manipulate the national question in a diversity of ways. Let’s quickly review some of the main issues of contention, which later Marxists utilized to support their widely ranging perspectives on the most proper socialist response to nationalism.

Underpinning the entire vision of nationalism was a perpetually negative view of everything national. Nationalism was chauvinistic, protectionist, elitist, at times racist, to mention only a few of many adverse characteristics that Marx and Engels bestowed upon their ideological archenemy. Yet, this negative stereotyping was juxtaposed with praise, even if sporadic, inconsistent and only strategically motivated. On a number of occasions, they pointed out quite a few positive features of nationalism. If nothing else, for instance, nation-states were a leading force in the advancement of working class consciousness. They provided a niche for the development of strong proletarian movements. At its minimum, capitalism required nation-states as a driving force of progress, which inevitably led to the growth of working class consciousness. Large nation-states provided the best environment for the emergence and expansion of working class movements. Whilst Marx and Engels had some use for nationalism, its position within the superstructure relegated its historical role to the backburner.

There is no doubt that Marx and Engels deliberately downplayed non-economic features as having very little historical force. Human agency (including all its ethical considerations) and politics were relegated to the inevitable progression of history. Unquestionable laws of economics would guide all the psychological and subjective factors. Engels, to a much greater degree than Marx, had accepted the role of subjective aspects such as politics, perhaps because he witnessed the growth of Social Democracy in the latter half of the 1880s and 1890s. Nonetheless, economism—reduction of all social relations to their economic forces—prevailed in Marxism, as class interests would always supersede national issues. Historical materialism emphasized the temporary nature of nation-states as nothing more than a product of a particular stage on the road to socialism. Yet, neither Marx nor Engels could conclusively identify the point at which states would lose their raison d’être and would eventually disappear from the historical stage. Later in life, both seemed to grant more permanency to the role of the state in the transition to socialism. Although they accepted the resilience of nation-states in providing a stable environment for the growth of working-class consciousness, they maintained that the ever-growing immiserization of the proletariat and of the increasing instability of the bourgeois system would eventually trigger an avalanche of mounting crises and lead to capitalism’s collapse. Although revolution and the advent of a new society were inevitable, the timeline of this process seemed to be troublesome. If capitalism was not to implode in the near future, what role should socialists and the proletariat assume in their native nation-states?

On the one hand, according to Marx and Engels, the state was a reactionary product of the capitalist stage. It was utilized by the oppressive elites as a mechanism to control and exploit the masses. On the other hand, it could have progressive and modernizing characteristics. In a democratic society with an extensive franchise, it produced certain benefits for the workers through socio-economic and political reforms. Through political representation, people could slowly take control over a state’s institutions. This situation became more complicated as the state

245 Both the moderate and radical socialists would draw upon Marxist literature to support their distinct perspective. For example, Luxemburg and Lenin utilized the same passages from Marx in order to prove their particular interpretation of self-determination.

246 The degree of Engels’ deviation from Marx is a contentious issue within the historiography of Marxism. At the very beginning of this study, I already made the assumption that Marx and Engels did not have significant theoretical disagreements. Yet, Engels did give more credence to superstructural phenomena. Please see the discussion below.
began to appropriate some of the socialist goals. Could a democratic system remove a certain degree of coercion, enough to stem the tide of revolutionary fervor? Could the revolutionary ends be postponed indefinitely? Was not the revolutionary credo of the proletariat to overthrow the existing order including the state?

The revolutionary call to arms in the name of abolishing capitalism was the final goal of the working masses, but there was also room for reform. Marx called upon workers to carry out the struggle for socialism firstly within their own nation-states. Krzysztof Jaskułowski sees this as one of the greatest contradictions of Marxism.\(^{247}\) Was the proletariat to fight the bourgeoisie of its nation-state before pursuing more internationalist goals? Marx provisionally accepted modifying revolutionary goals in light of the reform oriented and nationally centered means he envisioned the workers to use in their struggles for power.\(^{248}\) After all, the revolutionary moment allowed for some theoretical flexibility. In essence, the socialist, class-oriented content could assume national forms. Neither Marx nor Engels ever considered what would happen if these forms assumed a life of their own.\(^{249}\) Equally important, would this strategic allowance for national forms not diminish the international nature of the working-class movement?

Internationalism was unquestionably the bulwark of Marxism—working classes of all countries were to unite in a common struggle against capitalist exploitation. Class rather than national camaraderie was of importance. If universal emancipation was going to ensure the liberation of peoples from all types of exploitation, including national, why give special credence to any particular form of oppression? In the heyday of national unifications, the lines between the national and the international blurred. Even Marx, for instance, saw no contradiction between the Commune’s internationalism and its role as a truly national government.\(^{250}\) Marx and Engels began to perceive national bonding as a potential precondition for internationalism, at least to some extent and in specific circumstances. Looking at the oppression of minorities in Germany, Marx asserted that the freedom of other nations was a condition for freedom within one’s own. The eventual categorization of the historical and non-historical, of the oppressive and oppressed, of the revolutionary and non-revolutionary, did not amass to constitute a definitive answer. Moreover, these labels were used haphazardly and inconsistently. They were inadequate to explain or contain the nationality question within a neatly construed Marxist vision of the world. Even in the latter stages of their intellectual evolution, Marx and Engels had great reservations about the potential uses of nationalism within the socialist cause.

Were the Irish and Poles not labeled as most internationalistic when they were genuinely nationalistic? This should never be interpreted as denoting Marx and Engels’ support for universal self-determination. Neither of the two men believed in the right of any nation to self-determination. Rather, they assessed each case separately, mostly from the perspective of any national movement’s contribution to socialism’s progress. Michael Forman explains:

> Since Marx and Engels perceived the nation as a society exercising political power, as a nation-state, its political form was of great importance. In practice, this meant that nationalities—that is, nations understood in terms of shared orientations emerging from an organic development out of a common history—had no a priori claims to the support of progressive forces. Working-class

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\(^{248}\) Benner, \textit{Really Existing Nationalisms}, 16.

\(^{249}\) Lenin heavily borrowed from this notion to construct his nationality policy for the young Soviet Union.

\(^{250}\) See the aforementioned \textit{Civil War in France}. 
internationalism did not aim to establish ethnic states. If its goal coincided with those of a
particular national liberation movement, this was due to the democratic tendencies of the latter.²⁵¹

Yet, the mere acknowledgement of nationalism’s constructive power, no matter if random and biased (towards one
nation or another) or dressed in socialist rhetoric, denoted some approval of the usefulness of nation-states. The
strength of these views was evident (to provide a couple of examples), in the continuous reemergence of the Polish
question and persistent Russophobia amongst Socialists before the Great War. These views were eclectic and
inconsistent as the periodical chastisement of the Poles or pronouncements against Tsarist barbarism revealed.²⁵² It
would be a critical overstatement to say that Marx and Engels began to perceive nationalism as a somewhat
important and independent factor, but awkwardly and with reluctance, they did begin to accept the link between
social and national questions.

The socialist discourse that grew everyday in complexity did not allow for a straightforward separation of
the social and national issues, as both national and class struggles evolved side-by-side in many instances. The
evolution of the Polish and the Irish cases, more than anything else, had revealed to Marx and Engels the futility of
artificially separating these two. National unifications undermined reactionary powers, they had revolutionary
potential, and they promised to produce large units (necessary for capitalism and progress).²⁵³ Yet, by the 1860s, the
architects of the First International began to recognize that nationalism was far more multifaceted and that it was
connected to the social cause in numerous intricate ways. Would a socialist revolution be required before national
liberation or would national liberation be necessary before a socialist revolution could take place?²⁵⁴ To what extent
was Irish independence a precondition for the social revolution in England? Even when independence was achieved,
it was difficult to provide a clear-cut assessment of, or even to distinguish between the role of social reforms with
national goals, and national reforms with social goals. For example, did free trade really offer the best context for
the propagation of class-consciousness, or would protectionism ensure stronger solidarity amongst workers?

In the backdrop of growing late 19th century nationalism, other concerns emerged to complicate the
theoretical landscape of Marxism. Imperialism, for example, which Marx and Engels encountered in the 1870s,
stimulated much discussion. Ethics aside, was it a necessity of capitalism—a civilizing and progressive mechanism?
Or was it oppressive and exploitive and only slowed down progress? Was resistance to foreign oppression
justifiable? To what degree could separatist nationalism promote international revolution? The progressive-
reactionary nature of imperialism, the periphery-center relationship, and the possibility of uneven development
created further havoc in the ivory tower of Marxism.

²⁵¹ Michael Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and
²⁵² Engels on many occasions rebuked Poles for their nobility-oriented zeal, even at one time proclaiming that they
do not deserve to be grouped among historical nations. The Polish questions did persist within socialist circles and
even created stirring debates within the Second International when Luxemburg argued against the Polish Socialists’
call to identify Poland’s independence as an essential goal of international socialism. Similarly, Russophobia
persisted in the Marxist heritage, becoming a staple justification for socialist support of war credits in 1914. A war
of civilization against barbarian Russia remained a key pillar of socialist thought.
²⁵³ In the Irish case, the first two criteria were of upmost importance. Marx and Engels were not as concerned with
the actual unification of Irish territories as they were with the activist and revolutionary potential of the Irish
national struggle.
This confusing legacy of diverse ideas was ambiguous at best, and contradictory at worst. Although these varied opinions can be synthesized into a somewhat coherent set of attitudes in early 21st century, the Marxists of late 19th century did not have access to all of Marx and Engels’ writings, and could not be expected to have a clear understanding of nationalism, let alone of their intended response to the phenomenon. Moreover, Marxism was not a static ideology. Like its many counterparts, it naturally evolved in response to changing events. As fissures appeared in Marx and Engels’ seemingly unquestionable dictum, some socialists began to distinguish between Marxism as a general method of thinking, and Marxism as strict guidelines.255 The divergence of theory and practice, especially in the context of the growing power of mass parties, led some to conclude that “Marxism was an insight and not a recipe”.256 Self-criticism stimulated the need for the modernization of Marxist socialism, and called for a response to such superstructural concerns as nationalism. Save for a few instances of revolutionary outbursts, most importantly the 1905 Russian Revolution—which momentarily refreshed the radicalism and militancy within socialism—most Marxists acknowledged the stabilization of capitalism and the need to open a constructive dialogue with nationalism.

ENGELS AFTER MARX: PRESERVING ORTHODOX MARXISM.

More than anything else, the emergence and spread of Social Democracy beginning in the 1870s and 1880s stimulated a need amongst Marxists to develop a more positive response to the national question.257 For reliable advice and direction, they turned to Engels who became the sage of the socialist movement following Marx’s death in 1883. Marx was an opinionated, introverted and reclusive intellectual devoted to theoretical work and only sporadic activism; Engels, whose feet were firmly planted in the reality of late 19th century England, was a much more practical, accessible and patient man. “Engels’ sociality,” as Joshua Muravchik points out, “made him an effective mentor to a generation of acolytes, and it reflected itself in a literary style that reached many more readers than Marx’s forbidding prose.”258 After his partner’s death, Engels focused on two prerogatives: preserving the orthodoxy of Marxism within the various strains of socialism,259 and giving instructions and guidance to emerging Social Democratic parties.260 Both mandates produced highly contentious historiographic debates about Engels after Marx. David McLellan goes as far as to argue that “Engels took the initial steps along the path that was to end with the portrayal of Marxism as a dogmatic metaphysical system embodied in Soviet (and other) textbooks on dialectical materialism.”261 But was Engels obsessed at preserving Marxist dogmatism at any cost? A discussion of Engels’

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255 Kołakowski explains these two diverging positions: “One group took the view that Marxism was a theory of social development and especially of capitalist society and its inevitable collapse, and that this theory could without inconsistency be supplemented and enriched by philosophical doctrines derived from other sources, in particular Kantianism and positivism. […] The orthodox majority, however, maintained that Marxist doctrine itself contained the answers to all or most of the problems of philosophy.” Main Currents of Marxism, Volume Two, 3.


260 Gary P. Steenson maintains that “it was usually Engels who counseled, cajoled, and criticized the developing parties on the continent, and it was he who created, along with the activists themselves, Marxist politics.” Engels was thus much more influential in shaping political Marxism. After Marx, Before Lenin: Marxism and Socialist Working-Class Parties in Europe, 1884-1914 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 5.

261 McLellan, Marxism after Marx, 9-12.
work from the early 1880s until his death reflects the dilemma of the rising divergence between theoretical orthodoxy and practical activism. It was no easy task to juggle the inconsistencies between developing realities and presumably incontestable theoretical predictions.

Although Marx and Engels shared a common vision of socialism, there were some differences between the two theoreticians. Foremost, as many of Engels’ biographers and critics have shown, Engels was somewhat more evolutionistic and deterministic than Marx, particularly in his studies of the relationship between materialism and dialectics. Largely, this was a product of his emphasis on the natural sciences (rather than history) and on Darwinism.\(^{262}\) To put simply, Engels provided a positivistic slant to Marxism. But did Engels go too far in attempting to popularize Marx’s ideas and fit them into the frame of party activism of the 1880s and 1890s? Could he be blamed for unknowingly generating both Bernstenian revisionism and Soviet socialist ideology?\(^{263}\)

The authenticity, applicability and uniformity of Marxism, no matter how inflexible its principles were assumed to be, could not remain unchanged by the internal and external challenges faced by Social Democracy. Steger argues that the party-political context was the single most important influence on Engels’ thought in the last two decades of his life. Engels pushed for ideological consistency within political party platforms, while simultaneously realizing how the daily struggles of the rank and file subtly reformulated the theoretical core.\(^{264}\) His turn to political pragmatism and promotion of parliamentarism was certainly not contradictory or inconsistent with Marx’s tactical flexibility.\(^{265}\) Marxism was not only to be an intellectual exercise, it was a practical and applicable guide to political movements. Violence could be temporarily shelved as benefits of electoral success brought some relief to workers. Yet, preaching about the union of revolutionary goals and gradualist strategy, Engels promoted a failing marriage of the opposites: theory and practice. This union was further complicated with the birth of multiple offspring. Moderate gradualists and radical revolutionaries emerged at each extreme of the spectrum, with countless viewpoints in-between. They all fought over the accurate interpretation of their father’s vision.

The General (as Engels was called in his later years) acknowledged the interdependence of base and superstructure in a reciprocal interaction.\(^{266}\) Nonetheless, even though he granted the latter more weight than had previously been granted, there was no misunderstanding in the ultimate aim of socialism: parliamentary


\(^{263}\) These are highly controversial questions. Some scholars have perceived this positivistic flavouring of Marxism as leading to the socialist ideology espoused by Lenin and Stalin. For the historiographic debate, see Manfred B. Steger and Terrell Carver, “Introduction,” in *Engels After Marx*, ed. Manfred B. Steger and Terrell Carver (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 1-13. An interesting discussion of these issues is offered by Walicki, who goes as far as to argue that for later Marxists like Sartre, Colletti, Athusser or Marcuse, “it was necessary to rescue Marxist philosophy from becoming monopolized by Soviet philosophers who, relying heavily on Engels [my emphasis], transformed it into a hopelessly schematic and philosophically obsolete ‘dialectical materialism.’” *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, 113, 111-124.


\(^{266}\) McLellan maintains that Engels gave much more credence to the superstructure: “In general, Engels’ statements amounted to this: that the superstructure had evolved out of, and occasionally alongside, the economic basis; that the superstructure could have a relative autonomy and a structure and laws peculiar to itself; that there was reciprocal interaction between superstructure and basis; and even that, in some circumstances and for a limited period, the superstructure could determine the evolution of the basis; but that nevertheless, in the long term, the superstructure was determined by the basis.” *Marxism after Marx*, 14.
achievements were limited and only a revolution could bring about a new society. An armed uprising could be delayed but it was simply unavoidable. “[Engels] contended,” Steenson elucidates, “that revolution was the political process of clarifying class conflicts through the formation of increasingly leftist bourgeois governments until the entire bourgeoisie ruled in its most extreme leftist garb; in this highest or classical form, then, was the final battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the fought out.”267 Like Marx, Engels never stopped hoping for a revolutionary outbreak, most likely in Germany or Russia. Once all strategies were exhausted—and Engels believed that they would be—revolution would ensure a birth by fire of a socialist utopia. Yet, an expert on military matters, Engels also realized that growing professional armies at the service of the state could easily suppress a premature revolt. Hence, as Lawrence Wilde contends, Engels sought a “via media between revolutionary insurrectionism and eternal reformism, which amounted to a strategy of ‘revolutionary electoralism.’”268 In essence, he wanted to resolve the tension and contradictions between reform and revolution, between nationalism and internationalism, between party bureaucratization (and ossification) and revolutionary spirit. Moreover, witnessing the expansion of party politics and of modern society’s complexity, he realized that these issues could not be straightforwardly compartmentalized.

Of the two founders of socialism, Engels certainly had a better grasp of the national question. His youthful flirtations with German patriotism aside, he acknowledged both the positive and negative dimensions of nationalism. “The point, for Engels,” as Michael Forman explains, “was never to establish states in the name of human groupings defined around descent, language, race, or any other such characteristic. Rather, it was to institute democratic republics where workers could best pursue their struggles.”269 Although he did not outwardly reject all the psychological ascriptions of nations, he perceived the nation-state strictly as a political phenomenon. And he asserted: “an international movement of the proletariat is possible only as [sic] between independent nations.”270 Engels “assumed that it was historically impossible for a large nation to discuss its internal problems seriously as long as that nation lacked political independence, and that the existence of an international proletarian movement was predicated upon the existence of independent nations.”271 In the last years of his life, “Engels claimed that Socialists should show more general support for national self-determination. Only when this demand was met, could the Socialist movement flourish.”272 In a letter to Bebel, he asserted that “the democratic republic today is nothing other than the place of battle in which the decisive blow between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat will be struck.”273

A democratic republic promoted workers’ solidarity, which, in the continental system of states, ensured international cooperation. Since a revolutionary outburst without the support of a nation’s majority was doomed to fail, tactical gradualism dictated that the principle duty of Marxists “was to keep the growth of the Social Democratic electorate in being until it became too much for the existing system of government.”274 But what would

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267 Steenson, After Marx, Before Lenin, 31.
272 Howell, A Lost Left, 5.
273 Steenson, After Marx, Before Lenin, 38.
happen if Social Democracy slowly took over the existing system of government and acquired a significant stake in the nation-state? Engels purposely left this question unanswered, primarily because he believed that regardless of the number of liberties a state bestowed on its citizens, it could never ensure the full emancipation of the working class.

The General died in 1895, leaving his pupils without a clear answer to the nationality question. Keeping unity within Marxism was taxing enough without trying to deal with potentially explosive problems. Accordingly, he never fully clarified the base-superstructure reciprocity within the national framework, to explain how political and economic developments interact. Moreover, the successes of Social Democracy continued to blur the class lines of socialism. Capitalists granted socialist concessions to workers, gradually improving their working and living conditions. Simultaneously, socialists everywhere were steadily acquiring a political voice and participating in the ruling of the state, sometimes at the expense of ideological integrity. Revolution was not only becoming an unrealistic line of attack, but even an undesirable solution that was being relegated to the pantheon of other Marxist slogans and catchphrases that seemed viable only in theory but not in practice.
CONCLUDING REMARKS TO PART I: MARX AND ENGELS’ UNRESOLVED LEGACY ON THE NATIONALITY QUESTION.

In the late 1960s, Régis Debray shared the jungles of Latin America with Che Guevara. For his revolutionary sentiments, he was even imprisoned. But by the early 1980s, he entered President Francois Mitterrand’s government as an adviser on foreign affairs. Had his youthful Marxist idealism given way to realpolitik? Did he believe that he could achieve more within the confines of the French nation-state? Did French national interests substitute his internationalism? Debray was not the first Marxist who came to realize that much could be achieved using national political institutions, or from within the confines of the state. Marx and Engels had also recognized this in the latter stages of their lives, especially as socialist parties emerged on the national level across Europe. Chauvinistic nationalism posed many dangers to class solidarity but there was much that it could offer to the class struggle if used in the right circumstances and in appropriate ways. Furthermore, the realities of revolutionary work dictated that all means should be used to achieve socialism. Although Marx and Engels have often been accused of national nihilism, their attitude towards nationalism was far more complex. They wavered between its rejection and acceptance. They tried to categorize it as historical, revolutionary and progressive or non-historical, conservative and backward. Nationalism even revised their view of the class struggle. National peculiarities allowed for uneven development, for different pathways to socialism, and for the periphery to affect change in the center. Nonetheless, neither Marx nor Engels was willing to provide a definitive statement. An outright rejection or acceptance of nationalism was simply not feasible.

Retrospectively, it is possible to identify the fundamentals of Marx and Engels’ views on nationalism, and the gradual refinement of these ideas over time. But in the decades that followed, their followers did not have access to all of their writings or the liberty to evaluate them objectively. For the contemporaries, delineating a Marxist theory of nationalism based on the writings of its founders was challenging. The biggest dilemma was that Marx and Engels did not provide a simplistic rejection of everything national, as is often argued. Within their writings were the germs of both a Marxist refutation and acceptance of nationalism. Ironically, their disciples on both ends of the spectrum could reach for Marx and Engels’ words to support their respective claims. And it could be argued that both were right. But it is the mere existence of these diverging views that allowed Marxists of the pre-Great War period to argue in support or denunciation of nationalism. The second part of this study will thus evaluate how the cumulative Marxist heritage on the nationality question continued to evolve before 1914.
PART II:
MARX AND ENGELS REINTERPRETED: SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE
NATIONAL QUESTION.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO PART II.

In 1897, Eduard Bernstein argued that “[there] is no evident reason why the great nations which history has produced should not, in the future, continue to constitute administrative units. The complete amalgamation of nation-states is neither likely nor desirable.” Simultaneously, Rosa Luxemburg claimed that only the introduction of a socialist system would eliminate all forms of oppression, including national. She forcefully asserted that “even if as socialists we recognized the immediate right of all nations to independence, the fates of nations would not change an iota because of this. The ‘right’ of a nation to freedom as well as the ‘right’ of the worker to economic independence are, under existing social conditions, only worth as much as the ‘right’ of each man to eat off gold plates.” These diverging, even contradictory attitudes, reveal how nationalism and internationalism were fighting for the soul of Social Democracy at the turn of the 20th century. Only the outbreak of the Great War forced these socialists to make a choice between international proletarian solidarity and national interests.

At the meeting of the International Socialist Bureau held on 29 July 1914 at the Maison du Peuple in Brussels, before the cannons fired to mark the beginning of the Great War, Victor Adler described the position of Austrian Social Democracy in the following manner: “The party is defenseless. To say anything else would mean deceiving the Bureau. […] Demonstrations in support of the war are taking place in the streets.” He lamented that “We cannot ward off the threat. [Socialist anti-war] demonstrations have become impossible. One risks one’s life in the process and must expect to be imprisoned.” He feared that socialist anti-governmental strikes would put the “whole [party] organization and our press at risk. We run the danger of destroying thirty years’ work without any political result.” Finally, he concluded with the resounding: “We want to save the party.” According to Adler, the preservation of the national socialist party superseded the goals of the Second International, national defence replaced defeatism, and national aspirations replaced international cooperation. Social Democrats from across Europe did not rush to support the anti-war rhetoric or to mount a collective effort to halt the increasing tensions following the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Instead, they rushed to support their governments in the war.

Socialists abandoned their internationalism. But was this an aberration? Did some Marxists rightly assess their brothers-in-arms’ decision to be a result of manipulation by chauvinistic propaganda? Were socialists unexpectedly backed into a corner and forced to choose between nationalism and internationalism? Only a study of the evolution of Social Democracy in the four decades prior to the outbreak of the First World War can begin to

answer these questions. The *grand betrayal* was not a capitalist manipulation or a surprising deviation from Marxist doctrine. It was rather a culmination of a gradual process that directed Social Democracy’s evolution in the decades before 1914. The advent of the war simply accelerated the victory of nationalism over socialist cosmopolitanism in the first direct confrontation between the two ideologies.

Socialists across Europe struggled with the national question, producing a diverse array of ideas and attitudes. The corridors of socialist thought in the Golden Era echoed the inconsistent and even contradictory versions of Marxist theory and strategy. The second part of the current study will show how the debates within national Social Democratic parties and the Second International revealed the growing burden of existing within capitalism that was not faltering but rather stabilizing and reforming. The incorporation of socialism in the form of mass party into the nation-state, gradually and decisively pushed socialism away from internationalism, even if most Marxists continued to cling to the revolutionary-cosmopolitan rhetoric. The next three chapters examine this process by looking at the evolution of socialism in Western and East Central Europe, and in the Second International. The argument here is twofold: to show that nationalism had *de facto* been incorporated into the practices of Social Democratic parties even if there was a reluctance to offer theoretical acceptance of nationalism within the Marxist discourse; and to reveal the diversification of Marxist attitudes towards nationality question, which defies any clear-cut categorization.

The advent of modern mass politics gave socialists a voice in the political process. But it led to many changes within Marxist theories and practices. Socialism experienced a process of ideological diversification, as parties and ideologues became preoccupied with parliamentary successes, and with regional and national interests. Consequently, tensions emerged between Marxist theory that emphasized revolutionary ends and practices that were growing more reformative. The preservation of the party was becoming an end in itself especially as they acquired influence to affect change within the confines of the nation-state. Winning elections was now more important than preparing for revolution. To truly understand the events that took place at the outbreak of the First World War, it is critical to understand several factors that shaped socialism.

Foremost, at the turn of the 20th century, urbanization and democratization of society, growing franchise, and strengthening of parliamentary systems allowed socialists to enter into national politics. The state was no longer simply a mechanism for the oppression of the masses, but rather it became something accessible, even valuable. As socialists were organized in legal and recognized parties, the day-to-day party struggles and piecemeal victories for the workers’ living and working conditions slowly replaced the prophecies of a distant utopia. Most importantly, it produced acceptance of nationally-oriented practices.

The insertion of national practices into Marxism was no easy feat. Some ideologues began to provide theoretical justifications for policies that seemed to counter some of the most important Marxist fundamentals. Some, like Kautsky attempted to control and minimize the rising power of nationalism in the rank and file. Others tried to bring it into the fold of Marxism. Such Reformism, spearheaded by Eduard Bernstein, must be understood as an attempt to modernize Marxism. Bernstein’s main aim was to reconcile socialism with nationalism, to make the nationality question a formidable weapon within the Marxist arsenal, and to promote socialists as the guardians of the most genuine form of patriotism. Although the Second International remained conspicuously silent on the nationality question, a divide was brewing. On the one hand were the pragmatists and reformers who recognized the fruits of operating with the legal framework of the state and in cooperation with nationalism. On the other hand were
the radicals who believed in direct action against capitalism and hoped to eventually launch a revolution that would destroy the existing order (including nation-states). These divergent attitudes echoed in debates over proper tactics, militarism, imperialism, mass strike, and national defence. Amidst these debates, more and more socialists emerged who were not only interested in bringing the national questions into Marxist discourse but also wanted to use Marxism to resolve national antagonisms. Most prominent of these voices emerged in Eastern and East Central Europe, where the realities of national oppression and multiethnic environments forced Marxists to confront the nationality question head-on. It is in these eastern regions of the continent where a genuine and multifaceted attempt was made to reshape the cumulative Marxist heritage on nationalism. Rosa Luxemburg, Otto Bauer and Karl Renner were only a few of those who wanted to offer a definitive Marxist statement on the nationality question.
CHAPTER 4: NATION-STATE AND MARXISM: HOW TO RECONCILE THE IRRECONCILABLE.

BATTLE FOR LOYALTY: CLASS AND NATIONALISM AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

Socialism’s attitude towards nationalism at the turn of the 20th century was marked by many contradictory and perplexing approaches. In vain, loyal pupils of all ideological colours looked to the founders of socialist materialism for practical and theoretical guidance. In the Golden Age of socialism in the four decades preceding the outbreak of the First World War, socialists incessantly struggled with the appropriate response to the nation-state. The landscape of their diverging views was rugged and harsh, ranging from absolute denial of nationalism to its acceptance and approval.

While encountering the emerging interpretations of his own (and continuously evolving) ideological scaffold, Marx, before his death in the early 1880s, had declared that he certainly was not a Marxist. As every “ism” of the 19th century, Marxism would not be immune from interpretation and misinterpretation, of simplification and modification, of self-criticism and apologetics, and of evolution and revision. Socialism became a popular and widely attractive creed not only among unemployed intellectuals and the emerging working classes, but also for many others affected by the industrialization. The widespread appeal of equality, emancipation, rights, and democracy, as well as an all-encompassing answer to contemporary problems brought legions into the fold of Marxism. Socialists everywhere had sprung up from the fertile soil of socio-economic and political exclusion and dissatisfaction. Marx and Engels’ deterministic and orthodox materialism could not be unaffected by these rapidly changing times. Yet, under the spell of incontestable historical inevitability, the two men found it difficult to bend their dogma to the realities of the circumstances. They left the Herculean task of modernizing Marxism to their followers.

Young up-and-coming socialists came from all walks of life and they brought with them a diversity of beliefs, values and visions of what Marxism should entail or how it should be utilized. Their contending ideas and experiences clashed on tactical policies and theoretical formulations. Moreover, the urbanization and democratization of society, the expansion of the franchise and the growth of parliamentary politics across Europe, the increasing tensions in international relations, and the growing number of rank-and-file followers and their organization into associations, trade unions and mass parties, only complicated the formulation of strategically

viable and theoretically consistent responses.\textsuperscript{280} Currents of change left no ideology unaltered, no matter how dogmatic or unquestionable its principles. Marxism’s historical inevitability was continuously tested by the evolution of capitalism. In addition, the landscape of European politics at the turn of the century forced Marxism to actively compete for the loyalty of followers. The prescribed black-and-white pathway to socialism progressively acquired shades of grey—more than any other “ism”, nationalism seemed to dye an otherwise monochrome Marxism. Nationalism bended the boundaries of Marxism in all directions.

Although many “isms” questioned Marxism’s explanations and prophecies, nationalism seemed to emerge as socialism’s nemesis \textit{per excellence}. Even though Marxists everywhere purported to struggle against capitalism and its contiguous credo of liberalism as the workers’ main enemy, in reality, they were fighting nationalism, which had quickly conquered the hearts and minds of many. In the age of enormous technological, economic and demographic transformations, nation-states competed for grandeur, territory, resources, and influence, either trying to achieve or maintain Great Power status. Imperialism and militarism only fueled the drive for the survival of the fittest.\textsuperscript{281} Nationalism became a heavy appendage to all other “isms,” and no ideology could ignore its rising capacity to mobilize and manipulate peoples.\textsuperscript{282} By late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, some attempted to deconstruct the nationalistic discourse, to understand its multiple roots, pervasive appeal and ceaseless dynamism.\textsuperscript{283}

Marxists of all colors and stripes, even those Orthodox believers who refused to bend to the realities of nationalism’s power, could not overlook this phenomenon. Many had realized that they could not afford to ignore a force that significantly affected the theory and practice of their parties. The perception of its assumed transient nature increasingly gave way to a view that nationalism was a fundamental building block of social organization. Nation-states were certainly not going to \textit{wither away} in the near future. Most perplexing was that nationalism lent a hand to some of the socialist causes. The state could no longer be solely perceived as an overpowering tool of the elites to oppress and exploit the masses, especially as the expanding franchise gave a political voice to the underrepresented.\textsuperscript{284} Even in the stifling atmosphere of anti-socialist reaction in the 1870s and 1880s, Social Democracy took root and flourished throughout Europe. The state had somehow become accessible and could even be utilized for the benefit of the underprivileged classes and their socialist representatives.

\textsuperscript{280} For a comprehensive assessment of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century political and economic context, see the introduction to Steenon, \textit{After Marx, Before Lenin}, or the first chapter of the second volume of Kołakowski’s \textit{Main Currents of Marxism}.
This became ever more important as the immediate demands of day-to-day party politics slowly replaced grand theoretical prophecies of a distant utopian destiny. The bureaucratization of Social Democracy shifted strategies and objectives towards more immediate endeavors that could produce piecemeal benefits on the local level. During this classical age of blossoming, Marxism was marked by three general tensions, which persistently shaped the debates amongst socialists. Firstly, the means-ends dilemma promoted democratic and humanitarian work, while simultaneously calling for revolutionary class struggle. If only an uncompromising class struggle could bring about a new society, then, was democratically oriented work acceptable and justifiable? Secondly, the determinism-activism dichotomy of progression to a socialist utopia questioned the role of planning. If a new society was going to arrive—a product of a predetermined path of evolution—should party leaders and class-conscious workers still struggle and sacrifice in the name of the socialist cause? Thirdly, once the socialist heaven was achieved, all contemporary problems and tensions would magically disappear. But the road to that paradise required a proper and effective strategy. Could evolutionary, socially directed democratic work replace revolutionary confrontation as working class’ élan? If social democrats had trouble with the most fundamental premises of Marxism, how could they be expected to answer the perplexing questions about nationalism? Moreover, for a Marxist to approach the national question in a way other than negation was equivalent to playing with fire. At best, it denoted a questionable temporary strategic necessity, and at worst, deviational opportunism. Since the founders of scientific socialism penned no concrete treatise or systematic assessment of the national question, navigating through the maze of nationalism became that much more difficult for their followers.

The Rise of Social Democracy: Workers of the World Unite… Within Your Nation-States!

Towards the end of the 19th century, socialist parties began to emerge on the political landscape of most European nations. In the absence of a world economic crisis and the impending collapse of capitalism, many socialists realized that a non-revolutionary period would last longer than Marx predicted. Moreover, the growing complexity of society forced the state to respond to the needs of its citizens with socio-economic and political legislation. With the expansion of the franchise and the acquisition of political representation, underprivileged classes obtained a voice within the national body politic. Rising democracy and the accompanying reforms, rights and representation gave birth to political (labour) parties and trade unions as expressions of socialist ideals. Eley sheds some light on this process:

Between the 1860s and the First World War, socialist parties became the torchbearers of democracy in Europe. Country by country, they provided the strongest and most consistent democratic advocacy. They did so by defeating two of the Left’s earlier traditions—radical

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285 See, for example, Eric Hobsbawm, *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); the third chapter is most insightful.
287 For details about this process, see Acemoglu and Robinson, “Why Did the West Extend the Franchise?” They argue that the elites in European states (beginning with England) were forced to extend the franchise as a result of a threat of unrest and revolution. They contend that “extending the franchise acted as a commitment to future redistribution [of wealth] and prevented social unrest. […] Rising inequality often associated with industrialization increases social unrest and induces democratization. Democratization in turn opens the way for redistribution and mass education, and reduces inequality.” To put simply, extending the franchise initiated the parallel processes of democratization and redistribution, which continued to grow into the 20th century. See also Eley, *Forging Democracy*, especially chapters 3 and 4.
democracy focused exclusively on the franchise and frequently allied with liberalism and the utopian socialisms and other communitarian experiments of the earlier nineteenth century.288

“Practically every independent [and even many oppressed nations],” Howell asserts, “that experienced capitalist industrialization down to the 1920s developed such a party.”289 All of a sudden, democratization and socialist constitutionalism became a viable alternative. Socialists found themselves with power, however limited, to affect decision-making of the entire nation-state apparatus. And this power gradually expanded as Socialism became an appealing response to industrialization and political exclusion.

A central question accompanying these transformations concerned the workers’ relationship to their nation-state. Should the state still be perceived as a coercive tool of the elites to exploit the impoverished masses? As governments became more willing to share power, new options opened up to the workers. They would no longer have to climb barricades and shed blood in order to extract concessions from the government. As the workers’ parties quickly matured in the last couple of decades of the century, they realized the benefits of compromising and negotiating within a legal constitutional framework. Simultaneously, they learned the importance of maintaining party unity, not necessarily through ideological purity—although this certainly was an important component—but through organizational discipline and strong management. The advent of the modern mass organization reflected in the expansion and bureaucratization of party politics had several complex implications for the role of Marxism within Social Democracy.

As the parties grew in rank-and-file, they experienced a process of ideological and political diversification. Such a new outlook “predisposed them to exhaust the possibilities for internal reform before seriously considering revolutionary action. It conditioned them, to a great extent, to measure their own success in terms of achievement within the existing political system, that is, by the number of votes received and representatives elected.”290 These organizational and parliamentary successes tested socialism’s tactical and theoretical flexibility. To an extent, their achievements became their undoing. “Paradoxically,” Steenson concludes, “the more mass participation was encouraged, the less party actions were shaped by highly conscious theoretical analysis.”291 Yet, the complete dominance of policy over theory is not fully convincing, as the theory-practice relationship was a two-way street. Practice certainly shaped theoretical constructs, but fidelity to Marxist principles was still assumed to be a critical component of socialists’ parliamentary victories. Furthermore, socialism was far from an ideologically homogeneous movement as commitment to Marxism varied depending on local conditions. By late 19th century, socialism would become a far broader movement than Marxism. Simultaneously, when responding to local particularities, socialism oftentimes produced diverging forms and content. Nowhere was this more visible than in their responses to the nationality question. In the years before the outbreak of the Great War, Social Democrats everywhere struggled with three important considerations while trying to resolve the fundamental tension between theory and practice.

Firstly, misgivings roused between “the desire to form an highly organized party based on political clubs with well-defined standards of membership and the theoretical commitment to represent the entire working class.” To a large extent, Social Democracy’s parliamentary success was a result of broad appeal to socialist values within nation-states. A question of viable alliances pervaded all political platforms: should Social Democrats strictly represent workers’ needs or should they appeal to a wider socially-conscious audience? What were the acceptable boundaries of socialism? Who was a credible socialist and who could socialists really trust? Could peasants or radical bourgeois be considered allies of the proletariat? Questions of belongingness or exclusion involved incessant negotiation and compromise. Mocking and derogatory taunts like “radical utopians” or “reformative opportunists” rang through the corridors of socialism, as ideologues accused each other of minimizing or exaggerating aspects of Marxism.

Secondly, radical theory came against the realities of gradualist practice. Party programs attempted to negotiate the growing chasm between revolutionary ends and reformative means. The task of developing effective tactics for a mass party within the nation-state and the wider socialist community posed several concerns. How best to synchronize the activities of the mass party and the trade unions? More important, how far could or should the party cooperate with the state? To what extent could reforms secure workers’ needs? Was a large-scale revolution necessary to defeat capitalism? One of the key disputes on strategy revolved around the value of political mass strike. Was it a radical and unnecessary act of provocation or a viable tool in the socialist repertoire? Discussions over tactics drew a sharp line between radical and moderate wings of every socialist democratic party, culminating in the Revisionist Debate at the turn of the century. To what degree should revolutionary Marxism be modified to fit the realities of early 20th century reformative action? Was theory simply lagging behind the progressive nature of politics? The tale of the classical era of Marxism can, to some extent, be reduced to the vicious and exasperating struggle between the moderates and the radicals within Social Democracy.

Thirdly, national diversification and local particularisms produced divisions within Social Democracy, especially in the Central and Eastern parts of Europe (e.g., Poland, Austria or Russia). These socialist parties or labour movements experienced discord (or even rupture) along ethnic or regional lines. Some parties split along national lines, as was the case in Austria, where the Czechs eventually broke away to form their own party. Others split along diverging theoretical conceptions of the nationality question, as was the case in Poland between the PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and the SDKPiL (Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania). Some parties, as the SPD, experienced the centrifugal forces of regionalism, when the Baden wing of the party attempted to break national ranks to secure local advantages.

Throughout the 19th century, as industrialization reached the most isolated parts of Europe, workers began to organize themselves. Various strains of socialism became popular among the masses. Marxism became attractive to many: “It was a theory that offered a coherent explanation of the difficulties in which the capitalist system found itself in those years, and that furthermore showed capitalism as inexorably preparing the advent of socialism.” The initial response of authorities was to suppress all the currents that called for social change. Yet, hostility of politicians to working-class organization of the 1860s and 1870s slowly gave way to governments responding with

gradual social reforms. The economic depression of the 1870s only stimulated the unity and growth of socialism across the continent, and forced the hand of politicians to introduce reforms that would alleviate workers’ plight, especially in Germany and Britain where economic development was most mature. Berger aptly explains: “If the Churches, the schools, the army and the legal system were all part of the stick within which to beat the organized working class, social reform was the carrot to lure the workers away from Social Democratic promises of emancipation.”

Socialist agitation finally bore fruit, as governments had no choice but to introduce reforms, extend the franchise and accept the entrance of workers’ representatives into the body politic. This newfound voice produced schizophrenia amongst socialists. “[Labour] movements felt alienated from the nation state,” as Berger clarifies, “and yet, at the same time, [socialists] increasingly felt that they had a stake in the nation, that they belonged to and even best represented the community of people making up the nation.” In the era of oppression and exclusion (of the 1850s to the 1870s), socialists could afford strong anti-nationalist rhetoric and promotion of international solidarity. But by the 1880s and 1890s, Marxism’s revolutionary garb needed a stylistic upgrade, especially as socialists realized that they had fatherlands. But replacing conspiratorial and semi-legal activity, which had thickened the skin of Marxist activists throughout the years of suppression, was no easy task. Foremost, they had to reconcile their revolutionary élan with their growing power within nation-states. The storyline of Social Democracy’s evolution in the quarter of a century before 1914 is a tale of how the ivory tower of Marxism was being repainted, subtly and decisively, in patriotic colours. As Gerhart Niemeyer aptly elucidates: “The more successful [Social Democracy] became, the greater its interest in perpetuating itself, the prerequisite for which was the preservation of the society that enabled it to function.”

The process of self-perpetuation of Social Democratic parties was one of the key reasons why socialism experienced unprecedented expansion in the years before 1914 while simultaneously facing ever-growing paralysis by the constraining forces of each party’s national framework. Julius Braunthal, using the case of the German Socialists, provides an insightful depiction of the influence of party politics on socialism:

The German Socialist movement had developed its own elaborate bureaucratic superstructure. Its assets ran into millions, and it controlled a huge number of subsidiary organizations. It owned vast newspapers and publishing houses and great printing works. It had innumerable offices and halls and was often involved in administering building societies and both consumers’ and producers’ co-operatives. A staff of thousands of secretaries, editors, employees, workers and officials was required to operate this huge Labour movement and administer its manifold enterprises. Together with this enormous growth, the movement had acquired a considerable influence in the state and society. The vast bureaucratic organizations had spawned their own political and trade union elites among the party members, M.P.’s, district representatives, local administrators and trade-union general secretaries.

\[294\] For a detailed description of this process, see Lindemann, *A History of European Socialism*, especially chapter 4.

\[295\] Berger, “British and German Socialists between class and national solidarity,” 36.

\[296\] Berger, “British and German Socialists between class and national solidarity,” 32.


This growth, reflected in the accompanying electoral successes, produced two significant consequences within socialism. Firstly, as more and more intellectuals and workers staked their livelihood on the party, their sense of self-preservation stimulated an attitude of the movement as an end in itself.

Secondly, as it became more attached to the apparatus of the state and became smitten by its newfound political influence, the party turned away from revolutionary solutions. James Joll explains: “The younger Social Democratic leaders were very different from their predecessors. They had grown up in the political machine instead of creating it; they had become accustomed, especially in the State Diets, to a day-to-day political life which was revisionist in practice, if not in theory, they were increasingly ready to compromise with the existing regime.”

Hard-acquired gains could no longer be sacrificed to unpredictable revolutionary naiveté and passion. The complete destruction of the existing order no longer seemed to be the most viable response to capitalism. A clash with the power of the state was gradually replaced with the race for state power. Socialism’s evolution in the decades before the outbreak of the Great War is, to a great extent, a story of the nationalization of an ideology—a phenomenon which produced two general strains of thought: on the one hand, a genuine and multi-faceted attempt to produce a credible socialist response to the nationality question; and, on the other hand, a traditional denial of everything national.

**Reconciling Theory and Practice: Social Democrats Enter Parliaments.**

Germany’s SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, Social Democratic Party of Germany) became the flagship of socialism before 1914, revealing many of the problems of functioning within, and integrating into, the legal parliamentary framework. After uniting in 1875 under the Gotha Program, the Lassallean and Eisenacher branches of German socialism put aside their differences to become a single mouthpiece of workers’ interests in the newly established nation-state. However, only a few years later, their early success was overshadowed by Otto von Bismarck’s plan to eradicate the growing threat of socialism in Germany. Antisocialist legislation was swift and severe, systematically attacking the various mechanisms of the party and its members. Yet, during the outlaw period from 1878 to 1890, socialism prevailed. The SPD recovered from the initial suppression to establish an almost mythological legacy of activism, based on Marxist principles, campaigns for Reichstag and state diet seats, and promotion of trade unions. Vernon L. Lidtke identifies some of the characteristics of the SPD, which became its trademarks after achieving legal status. Most important of these was SPD’s emphasis on electoral activities as the most effective socialist weapon, as well as obsession with preserving party unity and hard fought legal status.

When the antisocialist laws expired after twelve years, the party emerged proud and confident. It had not only survived, but also thrived with 1.4 million votes and thirty-five mandates in 1890. The return to legality

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301 This was an important loophole within the anti-Socialist laws, allowing the socialists to actually participate in parliamentary activity. Although socialist parties were outlawed, their representatives could still participate in elections. This experience, to a large extent, shaped the German socialists’ belief in elections (and more generally speaking, in parliamentary work) as the best weapon in the fight against capitalism. For the initial history of the SPD, see Pierson, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Working-Class Mentality in Germany, 1887-1912*; Steenson’s chapter on Germany in *After Marx, Before Lenin*; or Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party*, chapters seven and eight.
302 A mandate denoted a seat in the German Reichstag (parliament). In almost all elections, the SPD managed to get more of the popular vote than was actually reflected in the number of seats it obtained in parliament.
demanded a revision of the old party program that no longer fit the new constitutional realities. As the rank and file of the party grew, so did the diversity of conceptual models of what correct socialist theory and strategy should be. German socialists of various stripes and colours put forward their ideas. A party program would have to promote a unifying ideology with enough flexibility to satisfy a wide range of promises and ambitions. This tightrope act was no easy task. The ensuing Erfurt Program only foreshadowed the tension between theory and practice, revealing how the enduring impact of nationalist waves chipped away at the Marxist bedrock.

When the German socialists gathered in Erfurt in 1891, they unanimously declared Marxism as the gospel of their party. The various traditions of socialism (including Lassalleanism) were certainly not dead and regional tensions were not resolved, but all agreed to compromise. The main problem lay in reconciling “the revolutionary rancor engendered in the Social Democratic rank and file during the persecution” with the “reformist tactic in a fundamentally non-revolutionary period” of late 19th century. The program’s theoretical component (written by Karl Kautsky), which “enshrined the Marxist doctrine of class struggle with its inevitable socialist telos,” was balanced with a plan of action (penned by Eduard Bernstein) that consisted of concrete demands for reformative work within the capitalist system. Essentially, the new approach encouraged tactical reformism on the way to revolution. The precarious theory-practice paradox combined a strategy of piecemeal reforms with radical ideology of world-shattering and irrevocable change. More than anything else, the program revealed the growing gap between the radicals and Praktiker (pragmatists). Carl E. Schorske argues that “the distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference in the evaluation of reality, rather than a difference in the realm of action.” It is true that most of the SPD’s leaders realized (even if implicitly) the need for new strategy and had agreed to a formulation of reformative action. However, their disagreements moved far beyond petty personality squabbles, into quarrels over the most fundamental theoretical and tactical tenets of Marxism. Some began to believe that policy changes demanded a reformulation of theoretical tenets.

Throughout the 1890s, reformism was sweeping across Europe, reflecting many undercurrents that had been stewing within the Social Democratic core. Many complex questions surfaced in socialist circles. Most strikingly: how could the credo of immiserization and capitalism’s deterioration really account for the growing prosperity and power of the workers? The elders of the SPD (including Engels and his lieutenants, August Bebel and Kautsky) realized the growing tensions—“pitting science against politics, theory against practice, determinism against voluntarism, empiricism against speculative metaphysics, and necessity against freedom.” Kautsky, the embodiment of the middle ground (often labeled as Orthodoxy) within Social Democracy, according to Kołakowski,

303 Steenson, After Marx, Before Lenin, 72. Peter Gay explains why Germany was quickly becoming a socialist success story in the 1870s and 1880s: firstly, Germany’s prosperity involved state intervention and growth of industry which produced social policies; secondly, Germany was a latecomer to the industrial game denoting a young, innovative and vibrant economy; and Germany was ready for massive expansion. This context provided a rich soil for socialist activity. However, the growing prosperity of the working class in Germany posed many difficulties for socialists. The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism, 120-127.


305 Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism, 64. For all the SPD’s national party programs (including the Erfurt program and organizational statutes of 1891), see Gary P. Steenson, “Not One Man! Not One Penny!” German Social Democracy, 1863-1914 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 242-250.


307 Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism, 90.
“opposed all attempts to enrich or supplement Marxist theory by elements from any other source, except Darwinism.”

Yet, such a misleading interpretation does not give enough credit to “the pope of Marxism’s” (as Kautsky has been often labelled) flexibility in the difficult task of defending Marxism against attacks from leftist radicals and even more threatening, from rightist reformers.

Even as an Orthodox Marxist, who on occasion held to his teachers’ views devoutly and mechanically, Kautsky had quite a few positive words to say about nationalism’s role within Marxism. Foremost, he rejected Marx’s negation of the state, insisting that the state would be necessary to complete the revolution. Although this was a small step for Kautsky, it was a large step for Marxism. The general recognition of the state as an important forum marked a considerable break with Marx and Engels, who remained highly skeptical about the value of the nation-state. Although Marx and Engels accepted the importance of parliamentary activity, they refused to make a connection between legislature and the need of a national framework necessary for such activity. But Kautsky by no means wanted to rock the boat. As most other socialists, Kautsky remained silent on the future socialist utopia, merely emphasizing that the state would have a role within the transition period. As one of the main bosses of the SPD, he supported socialists’ parliamentary activities within the state framework, which had proven to forward the workers’ cause. He went a few steps further than Engels in assigning value to reformatory work without resorting to extra-legal means. Although Kautsky steadfastly held on to economism, especially Marx and Engels’ drive towards ever-larger territorial units, he perceived language to be the most important determinant of any nationality. Commerce and manufacturing most easily consolidated into nations those groups that spoke a common language. Although language assumed the most critical role, other factors were also important: common territory, as well as written language and national literature.

309 Gary P. Steenson aptly describes Kautsky’s political activity within the SPD between 1890 and 1914 as involving a challenge from the right and a challenge from the left. *Karl Kautsky 1854-1938: Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), chapters four and five.
311 Georges Haupt and Munck argue that “Kautsky’s approach was more intuitive than analytical. He certainly did confront the empirical manifestations of the national questions as they became more evident as the end of the 19th Century. He distinguished more clearly between nation and nationality, words which entered the Marxist vocabulary along with that of ethnic group. Yet the ‘national question’ was still largely considered only in relation to the problems presented by the multi-national empires.” Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue*, 33; Georges Haupt, *Aspects of International Socialism 1871-1914: Essays by Georges Haupt*, trans. Peter Fawcett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), see especially chapter 1.
312 Kautsky upheld the Marxist belief in the class-based nature of socialism, the doctrine of workers’ alienation, and the inevitability of the capitalist crisis. However, Kautsky also expanded Marx and Engels’ take on economism. For example, one of his main contributions was the study of the role of imperialism. (Dick Geary argues that Kautsky was the first to provide a significant examination of imperialism from a Marxist perspective.) He saw imperialism as a modern phenomenon closely related to the mature stage of capitalism (even if he disagreed with Lenin that it was not the last stage of capitalism). Through this prism, Kautsky perceived both nationalism (in the form of hostility of countries to one another) and imperialism as mainly bourgeois-capitalist phenomena. Both were used by the German government to weaken the solidarity of the working masses and their opposition to the government, and to consolidate an alliance between the Junkers and the middle class. Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 15-32, 46-59; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky 1854-1938*, 174-180.
By the end of the 19th century, he went as far as to claim that even those, whom Engels labeled as non-historical, such as the Czechs, had shown vitality. Yet, this positive approach must be qualified; according to Kautsky, the Czechs’ situation was dire: on the one hand, lingual separation of the Czechs from the Germans would result in the impoverishment of the former, but, on the other hand, improvement of the Czechs’ economic lot would require abandoning their identity and assimilating into the German-speaking world. Similarly, Kautsky advocated a federal model for the Habsburg Monarchy—territorial separation of Germans and Czechs based on language—but maintained that the small peoples would face extreme difficulty existing outside a larger territorial unit.314 This somewhat unrealistic prescription for the Dual Monarchy stimulated much debate with the Austromarxists. Whilst he acknowledged the viability of small nation-states, he did not really believe in the resolution of the national question under capitalism. What nourished Kautsky and other socialists who faced the dilemma of nationally oriented tactics was the pervasive faith in the eventual victory: conquest of state power or the growing strength of nationalist tendencies could be subsumed under historical inevitability.315 However, the national question, as Marek Waldenberg points out, did lead Kautsky and many other socialists away from economic determinism, even if in a reserved and guarded manner.316 Marx and Engels were cautious about nationalism, and did not leave a definitive prescription for their followers on how to approach the phenomenon. Yet, their followers did not feel the same ideological and political constraints. Even if they shared their masters’ cautious attitude, they were more willing to engage the nationality question.

By late 19th century, nationalism had become a reality which no socialist, however orthodox, could any longer ignore. Many socialist intellectuals and party bureaucrats delved into the national question, digging trenches in a war over the workers’ role within the nation-state. As one of the main executives and ideologues of the SPD, Kautsky unfortunately stood in the crossfire, continuously fighting against overt nationalism of the revisionists, and against the anti-nationalism of the radicals. Yet, it was the attack from the former that seemed most threatening, not only because it reflected a more practical strategy aligned with German realities, but also because it was a genuine attempt to settle the differences between seemingly contradictory theories of internationalism and nationalism. The revisionist debate, which dominated the closing years of the 19th century, with reverberations well into the interwar period, was a futile task of reconciling the irreconcilable. A genuine socialist response to nationalism would require some modernization of unquestionable Marxist tenets. But how far could the revision of a dated ideology proceed before it irreversibly transformed into something else? Many were not willing to test the theoretical flexibility of

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315 Julius Braunthal explains this peculiar faith: “Over and above the tedious detail of day-to-day politics, Bebel [and Kautsky as well] insisted, the party must not lose sight of its ultimate aim, its historic mission which gave purpose and dignity to its existence. In this lay the essential difference between the Social Democrats and all other parties, and since the party pointed to the future, it embodied in itself the values of the future and in this spirit rallied ever-increasing numbers round its standard. It was unthinkable that the party should abandon its own roots or, to change the metaphor, abandon the path that was manifestly leading it to the heights,” *History of the International 1864-1914*, trans. Henry Collins and Kenneth Mitchell (London: Nelson, 1966), 276.
316 Waldenberg determines three roots of nationalism within Kautsky’s thought by the late 1890s: primary was still the bourgeoisie’s interest in securing a domestic market and promoting international expansion—the nation simply provided the best environment for capitalist growth; but he also allowed for the people’s need for political freedom, for democracy, and rejection of oppression by another nation; lastly, he acknowledged how the spread of national culture and literature increased a feeling of lingual affinity and national separation. Waldenberg, *Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 229.
Marxism, even if their practice had been moving in another direction. They were content with the artificial compartmentalization of theory and practice. Yet, there were many who, pressured by circumstances or out of conviction, felt a need to speak against or in support of nationalism. The battle between the radicals and the revisionists unwittingly drew attention to the inconsistencies within Marxism, especially Marx and Engels’ inadequate treatment of the nationality question. These discussions only foreshadowed nationalism’s victory over socialism in 1914 and the eventual splintering of Social Democracy, which Kautsky and other generals of the party worked so arduously to prevent.
CHAPTER 5: THE NOT SO GOLDEN AGE OF SOCIALISM:
HOW THE NATIONAL QUESTION DESTROYED SOCIAL DEMOCRACY.

MODERNIZING MARXISM: EDUARD BERNSTEIN’S ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM.

James Joll argues that reformism was nothing more than “the reaction of experienced practical politicians to the situation caused by the growth of a mass party.”317 But to truly understand the impact of the Revisionism Debate on socialist thought, it is important to briefly pause on Eduard Bernstein, whose ideas have become synonymous with reformism. Peter Gay claims that “[i]f there had been no Bernstein, it would have been necessary to invent him.”318 Bernstein was not an isolated case of a pupil rebelling against his mentors.319 Quite the contrary, witnessing the contradictions between theory and reality, he wanted to save Marxism by modernizing it—by reconciling socialism with nationalism. In his attempt to update his teachers’ philosophy, he moved away from economic determinism and made room for human volition, morality and historical contingency. In identifying the sources that informed his ideological shift, scholars have pointed to many different factors.320 Some scholars, like Kołakowski, contend that there is a direct correlation between Engels’ implicit turn towards reformative work (and parliamentary activity) and Bernstein’s shift in the same direction.321 Although Bernstein, to an extent, did vocalize what Engels was afraid to openly admit, reformism certainly cannot be laid at the latter’s feet.

The root of Bernstein’s revisionism lay in his questioning of Marx’s underlying prediction of the perpetual crises and ever-growing workers’ misery. By the mid 1890s, after witnessing years of capitalism’s consolidation and stabilization, he abandoned the belief in the system’s inevitable and sudden implosion. Bernstein claimed that capitalism created certain countertrends, which vitiated most of the distressing consequences associated with fluctuating profits, disproportion, or underconsumption.322 In seeking a theoretical revision that would once again reunite Marxist theory and German realities, he triggered a domino effect. Most fundamentally, Bernstein rejected several elementary Marxist principles: prediction of immanently unfolding objective forces and inevitability of socialist victory; the passive attitude of simply awaiting the collapse of capitalism; the immiserization of workers and disappearance of the middle class; and reliance on revolution and violence.323 Infused with ethics, his dialectical materialism was replaced by progressive idealism. Bernstein argued that “the realization of ultimate socialist values was not simply dictated by economic necessity, but was also a matter of active imagination, moral will, and

318 Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism, 111.
319 Bernstein was highly regarded as one of the central apostles of Marxism. He was selected as the executor of Engels’ intellectual heritage, and was even asked to reproduce Volume IV of the Capital. Muravchik, Heaven on Earth, 95.
320 Most historians agree on the main factors that contributed to Bernstein’s conversion: impact of his English experience—rights-based political language, primacy of individual self-realization, personal liberty as a key to a democratic order, and contact with the Fabians; the long period of European economic prosperity; debates on the agrarian question in the SPD in mid 1890s; the disappointment with the publication of Volume III of the Capital; Social Darwinism; and the revival of neo-Kantian ideas. See, for example: Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism, 7-8, 61-76; Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism, 69-73.
321 Kołakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Volume Two, see chapter IV. For an even more definitive pronouncement see Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society (London: NLB, 1972), 45-72. These scholars point especially to Engels’ “political testament” where he allegedly intended to acknowledge and promote revisionism as a proper direction for socialism.
323 Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917, 16-22; Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism, 101-113; Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism, chapter 6.
conscious choice.” If workers had a choice in directing the course of achieving a new society, they might not necessarily await the seemingly inevitable revolutionary transformation. “The essential question,” as Kolakowski explains, “was not whether to accept or reject revolutionary violence, but whether processes of socialization within the capitalist economy were ‘already’ part of the building of socialism.” By theorizing that the road to socialism might not necessarily lead through revolution, Bernstein had nailed his theses to the gates of Marxism, thus initiating a reformation within the socialist gospel.

By discarding utopianism and the necessity of revolution, and by inserting politics back into Marxism, he raised reform from a merely strategic means to the pedestal of the final goal. Hence his famous declaration: “I have extraordinarily little interest or taste for what is generally called the ‘final goal of Socialism.’ This aim, whatever it be, is nothing to me, the movement everything.” Superstructural features suddenly acquired power hitherto unthinkable within Marxism. State, politics, law and democratization assumed a central role within his conceptual model. Democratization became the primary driving force of progress. “The advance of democracy in most industrialized countries,” as Henry Tudor explicates the context of Bernstein’s thinking, “had enabled working-class parties to enter the political arena, and there was a real prospect that significant progress could be achieved by parliamentary means.” If democracy and parliaments offered the best course of action for socialists, the road to socialist utopia would not be a quick path of destruction and rebuilding but rather a road of slow transition.

It is important to emphasize that Bernstein envisioned the transition to socialism as a lengthy period characterized by rational planning, rather than instability and violence. Nationalization (what he termed socialization) would be achieved gradually and would be based on utilitarian standards. Democracy, law and parliamentary representation allowed for genuine participation of people in a civil society and acquisition of control over economic institutions. “Democracy,” Kolakowski asserts, “was not merely a weapon in the political struggle but an end it itself, the form in which socialism was to become a reality.” Political rights and material advancement became the sword and shield of socialism’s main aim: “to seize power in the state.” The state would become the “appointed guardian of the common good” and would serve as a “potentially ‘autonomous’ arena which regulated the ‘common affairs’ of individuals.” Nation-state had finally achieved a status and permanence that Marx and Engels refused to grant it.

Unlike Marx and Engels, Bernstein did not see nationalism as an ideology invented by the bourgeoisie. Already in 1883, he wrote: “We are struggling, not with the state as an image which haunts the minds of certain

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324 Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism*, 113. Gay even argues that in Bernstein’s vision socialism could no longer be scientifically predicated as it only became ethically desirable by the proletariat. *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, 150. See also Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, 72-74.
331 Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism*, 132.
Idealists, but with the state as it has come into being historically and as it confronts us in reality.”332 Hence, “enemy of the working class was not capitalism itself, not the capitalist state, but the small group of private interests which stubbornly refused to see the light of reason and social justice.”333 With a naturalist flare, Bernstein emphasized the progressive sociological function of modern nationalism, which could lead to higher forms of social complexity. When properly directed, it would promote the advancement of human freedom. “As the highest expression of the civic impulse,” as Steger highlights, it “would ultimately connect all groups of society [within a state] under the leadership of the working class.”334 If “the total disintegration of nations is not an attractive prospect and is, in any case, not to be expected in the foreseeable future,”335 then “[Social Democracy] must strive to make the proletariat, the working class, the ruling power in the state and to make the state machinery serve their ends.”336 Unlike the elites, the workers were not solely interested on filling up their coffers. They represented the masses and promoted a nationalism that was inclusive. The nationalism of the left, which Bernstein and others espoused, depicted the workers and socialists as the genuine patriots.337 Socialism could be national, and nationalism could flow from socialism as long as the working class was leading the way. The key ingredients that would sustain this relationship were industrial progress, democratic institutions, and workers’ solidarity.338

In the tradition of Marx and Engels, Bernstein abhorred all manifestations of chauvinistic, racial and xenophobic nationalism. But how could the rise of excessive ethnic nationalism be prevented? Bernstein naively believed that as soon as “the logic of representative democracy was reflected in political institutions, the proletariat [would gradually begin] to acquire legitimate ‘national interests’ in the form of ‘national rights and duties.”339 While striving for the common good of the entire nation, workers would willingly choose to incorporate universal ideals into “noble patriotism,” if only they could be granted full political liberty. Noble patriotism, he reasoned, “seeks for its own people a respected position in the republic of the peoples without ever losing sight of the idea of

333 Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917, 18.
334 Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism, 198.
335 Eduard Bernstein, The Preconditions of Socialism, 164.
337 J. J. Schwarzmantel explains: “[workers and socialists] speak for the nation, while the property-owning classes are only patriots when it suits their economic interests. […] Socialists were the only genuine patriots, concerned with the well-being of the nation, since they spoke for the interests of the masses, the workers who formed the majority of the national community.” “Class and Nation: Problems of Socialist Nationalism,” Political Studies 35, (1987): 249.
338 Nationalism assumed an important role in Berstein’s worldview. Already in 1884, he would write that: “The history and institutions of France combine to develop national feeling in the French worker, and this will continue to be the case for a considerable time, indeed, for as long as there are nations at all. Moreover, national consciousness does not exclude internationalism in thought and deed, any more than internationalism prohibits the defence of national interests.” Elsewhere, he outlined the link between three key ingredients that would allow for nationalism to promote the interests of the working masses: “What Social Democracy should be doing, and doing for a long time to come, is organize the working class politically, train it for democracy, and fight for any and all reforms in the state which are designed to raise the working class and make the state more democratic.” He believed that socialists should not oppose the expansion of markets since “the expansion of markes and of international trade relations has been one of the most powerful levers of social progress.” Eduard Bernstein, “German Social Democracy and the Turkish Troubles,” Neue Zeit, 14 October 1896, in Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898, 55; “The Struggle of Social Democracy and the Social Revolution: 2. The Theory of Collapse and Colonial Policy,” in Neue Zeit, 19 January 1898, in Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898, 169.
339 Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism, 198.
this wider policy and its unity.”340 Fletcher contends that for Bernstein, “proletarian nationalism allegedly prized the nation-state as the basic unit of civilization […] and derived its progressiveness from this and its international-cosmopolitan, pacific, and democratic character.”341 Once again, this shows that Bernstein (and he certainly was not alone) believed that workers embodied healthy nationalism which could guide nation-states to socialism. Such a workers’ utopian nation-state would be free of internal antagonisms and external chauvinism.

So would all nations be afforded this opportunity? Following his teachers once again, Bernstein rejected any universal rights to sovereignty. Roger Fletcher argues that although Bernstein “treated the question of national self-determination more from a cultural, humanitarian vantage-point, as an ethically desirable, generally valid principle,” he “granted the ‘right of nationality’ exclusively to peoples with demonstrated ability to develop and maintain a civilized national life.”342 Bernstein clarified his position in 1896:

> The freedom of an insignificant people in a non-European or semi-European region does not carry the same weight as the free development of the great and highly civilized nations of Europe. If, then, the struggle of such a people poses a serious threat to the interests of this development, it is entirely appropriate that we should adopt a negative attitude towards it. […] We will not condemn the idea that savages be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of a higher civilization.343

Like Marx and Engels, albeit to a much smaller degree, Bernstein still measured the value of nationalism according to its contribution to the advancement of the socialist cause. After 1907, even when he gradually shifted his support away from nationalism (and especially chauvinistic expansionism), rightly dreading that its more fervent forms will lead to a global conflict, he still hoped that the healthier form of nationalism would prevail.

Although Bernstein’s was a genuine attempt to insert nationalism into socialism, his noble patriotism did not provide definitive guidelines on the nationality question. Moreover, he preferred to respond to individual situations, oftentimes in an inconsistent manner. He was a pacifist, but supported conscription and national defence. War against barbarism and in the name of civilization was always justifiable. He perceived parliamentary democracy as the best tool for progress, but often pointed out SPD’s impotent position in German politics. He lamented that the strongest socialist party in Europe could barely affect the course of German domestic or foreign policy. He called for workers to use any means to acquire privileges from the oppressive state, but encouraged restraint in attacking the policies of the government. He supported German imperialism as a national right and as a civilizing tool (even a moral duty), but warned against its excesses, which could jeopardize international security and economic stability. He emphasized the class orientation of the socialist movement, but promoted alliances with...

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341 Fletcher, “Revisionism and Nationalism,” 107.
342 Fletcher, “Revisionism and Nationalism,” 104.
343 The non-European or semi-European region to which Bernstein refers included all the peoples of the Balkans and the Armenians. He distinguished these peoples’ struggles for liberation from those of “barbaric and semi-barbaric races” that “are hostile to or incapable of civilization [and so they] cannot claim our [(i.e., socialist)] sympathy when they revolt against civilization.” Hence, “any people which has shown itself capable of developing and maintaining a national civilization has the right of nationality.” Yet, even the non-Europeans or semi-Europeans were categorized according to “significance.” Bernstein explained that really small groups—which he did not directly identify—must avoid falling into “intolerable egoism,” and becoming a reactionary force for the sake of national interests. Only the larger groups, like the Poles (who he mentioned directly) would be allowed emancipation. Eduard Bernstein, “German Social Democracy and the Turkish Troubles, Neue Zeit, 14 October 1896,” in Marxism and Social Democracy, 52-53.
leftist liberals. Such incompatible views galvanized much condemnation from his many critics (both from the Right and the Left). Nonetheless, he steadfastly maintained that the movement and its reformative strategy were decisive, rather than the final goal of some distant and indeterminate socialist paradise. The nation-state rather than revolution would become the midwife of socialist paradise. What remained striking amongst socialists like Bernstein was that their strategic-practical approach of operating within the confines of nation-states was far ahead of their theorizing on nationalism.

DIVIDED LOYALTIES: SOCIAL DEMOCRACY DEALS WITH PARLIAMENTARISM, MILITARISM, AND IMPERIALISM.

By the turn of the 20th century, the Orthodox leaders of the SPD managed to sweep the nationality question under the carpet, hoping (like Marx and Engels) that the problem would simply go away. The SPD’s chronicle following the Revisionist Debate reveals how the “failed modernization of Marxist theory had come back to haunt the party, only this time, nationalism was dictating the direction of change.” What had begun as the party’s revisionist debate had turned into the nationalist controversy of German Social Democracy. Yet, the German case was not exceptional—it was symptomatic of nationalism’s impact on the entire European Social Democracy.

Socialists everywhere struggled with the emerging nationalist discourses of their homelands.

Two events within French socialism revealed the pervasive influence of nationalism on socialism. The Dreyfus Affair in 1897-8 inserted socialists into the nationalist discourse of France. Some, like Jean Jaurès, believed that the affair reflected a struggle for basic human rights and the inclusion of all citizens within the nation-state. He equated the defence of Dreyfus with the preservation of the democratic principles of the Republic and of civil liberties. Yet, many socialists like Jules Guesde questioned Dreyfus’ innocence and especially the socialists’ need to intervene on his behalf in what seemed to be a quarrel between two groups of nationalists. Jaurès maintained that “victory for the anti-Dreyfusards would threaten the survival of the republic and thus the general franchise and other

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345 The Revisionist Debate was never fully resolved within the SPD or within the broader European socialist movement. Polemics on the transition to socialism—whether reformative or revolutionary—began right after Engels’ death in 1895. They intensified in the late 1890s and culminated at the Stuttgard Conference in the autumn of 1898. After a lengthy debate amongst delegates, the party leaders decided to side with the leftist radicals to oppose Bernstein’s revision of Marxism. But the story did not end there. Rather, it continued right up to the end of the First World War (and beyond), flaring up periodically.

346 Steger, The quest for evolutionary socialism, 192.

347 At the center of all the socialist debates on Dreyfus lay the attitude towards nationalism. The La Havre party congress of 1880 claimed to have resolved the issue of French socialists’ approach to nationalism. It was accepted that self-defence was justified (especially when a popular militia could be established for that purpose). Yet, this did not resolve the discussions on the nationality question. The Guesdist Parti Ouvrier, the moderate Possibilites, anarchists and Allemanists continued to promote internationalism rather than French patriotism. Nonetheless, by the latter half of the 1880s, it was difficult for socialists (even Guesde) to reject national interests given the growing nationalism of the French working masses. By the late 1890s, when nationalism had penetrated deeply into French socialism, siding with Dreyfus was challenging for almost every socialist. Rightist socialists such as Henri Rochefort promoted a steady anti-Dreyfusard campaign by exploiting anti-semitism and xenophobia. Even socialists active in the French parliament found it equally impossible to speak against anti-semitism or the growing nationalism. Eric Cahm, “Socialism and the Nationalist Movement in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair,” in Socialism and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe (1848-1945), Volume Two, ed. Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fišera (Nottingham: Russell Press Ltd., 1979), 55-60.
institutions deemed valuable to the workers in their political and economic struggles. In his eyes, the preservation of the state and the prevention of a nationalist turn to the extreme right could even justify dubious alliances. Eventually, most French socialists, even if reluctantly, joined Jaurès’ side in support of Dreyfus. But the wider question of the socialists’ role within the French nation-state and their cooperative flexibility (in pursuit of specific and immediate aims) culminated only a year later, in the form of the Millerand Affair.

Alexandre Millerand, a radical socialist, accepted a ministerial post in the French government. This act solicited both denunciation and approval amongst French socialists. Left socialists of Guesdist and Blanquist colours rejected the act as dangerously opportunistic and in violation of the sacred class orientation of the movement. More centrist and right-wing socialists—including Possibilists, Independents and Jaurès—perceived it as a natural extension of the growing power of the workers, who deserved a larger role in directing the policies of the state.

The immediate result of Millerand’s decision led the Comité d’entente socialiste to call a General Congress of French Socialism to arbitrate between the different positions. Jaurès argued that “state power could be utilized here and now to obtain progressive legislation, and it was only that many Socialists still held to the ‘false notion’ of the state as the impenetrable bulwark of capitalism that prevented them from grasping that significant fact.” Marx’s eclectic son in law, Paul Lafargue, contended that accepting a ministerial post was nothing more than falling into a devious scheme used by the bourgeoisie for its own hidden interests. The question of the socialists’ attitude to the government intensified the strains amongst French socialists and delayed the process of unifying them into a single party. But the repercussions of ministerialism were profound and far-reaching, and not exclusively a French malady. After a sizable victory of the SPD in 1903, Bernstein suggested that the party should ask for the post of the first vice-president of the Reichstag. He believed that workers had earned the right to gain more control over the state apparatus. Although the Second International eventually discarded ministerialism as an acceptable strategy, many socialists found such intimate collaboration with the state reasonable.

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348 Steenson, *After Marx, Before Lenin*, 136. Jaurès felt that if Dreyfus was rehabilitated “opportunism would revive; if he were crushed, clerical reaction [along with anti-Semitic nationalism] would exult and triumph.” In essence, both sides in the quarrel over Dreyfus were seen as factions of the bourgeoisie”: on the one hand, there were Jewish capitalists who wanted to penetrate the French nation, and on the other hand, there were reactionaries who wanted to turn back the clock. Cahm, “Socialism and the Nationalist Movement in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair,” 53-55; see also Aaron Noland, *The Founding of the French Socialist Party (1893-1905)* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970), see especially chapter three.

349 Millerand was favorably disposed and eventually accepted a ministerial portfolio within the Waldeck-Rousseau government. Along with the parliamentary bloc of socialists (including Jaurès), he believed that the growing reactionary forces within the government were ready to strike at French rights and liberties and that socialists could not remain indifferent. Noland, *The Founding of the French Socialist Party*, chapter four; Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, 85.


That parliamentary participation should expand and that socialists should enter cabinet were undoubtedly
the backbone of the pragmatists’ mindset. Closest to these were firstly questions of voting for budget issues, where
immediate and tangible local reforms directly benefiting workers took precedence over the national party’s
ideological aspirations, and secondly, of cross-class alliances. Both created schisms within the SPD. The disparity in
the reformative tactics and goals on the national and state levels showed that “in spite of official condemnation by
the party congresses of 1907, 1908 and 1910, [voting in support of budgets] continued, particularly in Baden, and
was defended on the grounds that local budgets often contained measures of benefit to the workers.”353 The South
Germans had all but officially broken the national party line. The SPD’s leaders had no choice but to fiercely
reprimand their subordinates. Yet, above all, this situation merely highlighted two significant paradoxes within
German Social Democracy.

Firstly, “nearly all German social democrats accepted the distinction between engaging in [reformative
work] on the state level and rejecting it on the national level.”354 Modifying employment laws or introducing
alternations to the mining laws (that sustained the loyalty of workers at the local level) was juxtaposed against the
seemingly more important national work of combating capitalism. What seemed suitable at state (i.e., local) level
was certainly not appropriate at the national level. But the problem was much more profound: “Kautsky knew very
well that behind this practical behaviour lay an entirely different political strategy and analysis of social reality.”355
The underlying justification for intimately cooperating with the government went far beyond acceptable socialist
directives.

Secondly, reforms were desirable but how the South Germans achieved their goal drew the harsh
reprimands. All reformative work was acceptable and all tactics were allowed but both had to adhere to the class
principles of the party. These principles were carved in stone and no one was allowed to question them, regardless of
how extensive the gap grew between theory and practice. This only revealed the degree to which party leaders
refused to acknowledge the ideological costs of electoral success: “the SPD accepted the legitimacy and occasional
utility of parliamentary reforms, but rejected the compromise that is usually seen as a necessary part of this
process.”356 Steenson argues that this was one of the central problems of Social Democracy before 1914:

Other European parties were to have considerably more trouble than the Germans in their dealing
with parliamentary representatives elected as socialists, especially the French and Italian. The
problem arose, of course, because the several electorates involved were not identical with party
members, and thus these representatives had, in theory, divided loyalties—to the party and its
principles and discipline, on the one hand, and to the voters of their particular districts on the
other.357

Hence, the Badenese were attacked not on the grounds of supporting reforms, which all Social Democrats had to
pursue as political representatives of specific electoral districts (with distinct local interests), but rather for overtly
aligning with liberals. The dispute was not over the “need to struggle for reforms, which was undisputed, but over

353 Joll, The Second International 1889-1914, 92. These policies were first laid down at the Congresses of Lübeck
(in 1901) and Dresden (in 1903). The question of voting in favour of the state budgets was a problem not only in
Baden, but also in Bavaria and Württemberg. Salvadori, Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 124-127.
354 Steenson, After Marx, Before Lenin, 101.
356 Steenson, After Marx, Before Lenin, 106.
357 Steenson, After Marx, Before Lenin, 90.
the spirit in which this was done.” If only the South Germans had justified their actions in Marxist concepts rather than tangible benefits to the workers, the differences would not have been as visible. The unwillingness of some regional parties of dressing their reforms in Marxist rhetoric (regardless of how pragmatic their aims) simply moved too far outside the prescribed rules.

French socialists who imitatively tried to follow the footsteps of their German counterparts faced similar ideological divisions on questions of theory versus practice. A few years before the outbreak of the Great War, socialists debated the issue of supporting a bill that would establish workers’ pensions. Jaurès advocated the law, which he perceived as the first step towards a wider system of social insurance. As a centrist, he believed that gradual transformation in France was possible. However, many socialists, with the leading voice of the leftist Guesde, rejected the bill. They saw the proposed income deductions as merely a new form of exploitation. Although a middle ground was reached, the tensions between the two viewpoints persisted. Malleability of socialist tactics and aims—the degree to which strategy could be bent before irreversibly violating ideological principles—remained a highly contentious issue, which only intensified during the decade prior to the outbreak of the Great War. Three specific concerns preoccupied socialists before 1914: the tactic of mass strike; militarism and national defence; and the colonial question.

The outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1905, the Ruhr strikes of the same year, and growing militancy amongst workers stimulated debates over the nature of uprisings and tactics of seizing power. Yet, more than anything else, the Russian situation revealed the “contrast between the law-abiding, respectable, bourgeois nature of social democracy in Germany and other western countries, compared with a real revolutionary movement forced by circumstances into a desperate outbreak, as in Russia.” The ensuing discussions revolved around the viability of using mass strike, which for all intended purposes denoted a debate over the potential for revolution. The insurrectionary turmoil in the East revitalized the (leftist) radicals, who advocated for the mass strike. The moderates of the SPD claimed that agitation for the mass strike would only “destroy the achievements of today for the dubious speculations of tomorrow.” Although a cautious turn to the left was tolerated, Bebel and Kautsky regarded the mass strike as merely a defensive weapon to protect already acquired rights and privileges. But the pragmatists and reformers perceived, even this guarded turn to the left, as a dangerous and unnecessary ideological flirtation.

More importantly, fearing that idealistic rhetoric could seriously threaten their hard-won gains, the trade unions—the real locus of power outside of the political movement—declared a war on the radicals. The unions were simply not willing to subjugate economic gains to political (even worse—unrealistic and impractical theoretical) constraints imposed by the party. As the German socialist movement was trade-unionized, more and more often practice and immediate realities dictated theoretical decrees. Eventually, the party “capitulated to the unions, committing itself to trying to prevent a mass strike with all its might and, in the event that such a strike erupted

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anyway, to assuming responsibility for leading it, with the unions playing a purely supporting role.” By 1910, talk of mass strike and of using radical or extra-parliamentary means was an inconsequential debate that only rang within the ivory tower of the upper echelons of the party. The discussion over the mass strike pressured the party to come to terms with its revolutionary discourse, but it was the elections of 1907 that forced the party to reevaluate its relationship with the nation-state.

The elections were an overwhelming defeat for the SPD, with the party losing half of its Reichstag seats. Some historians suggest that the electoral defeat marked a critical crossroads. At the risk of overstating its significance, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that the debacle at the ballot box forced German socialists to choose between two directions for socialism. The Radicals perceived the elections as a sign of nationalist chauvinism (reflected in imperial jingoism) and a sharpening of the class struggle, which would lead at any moment to revolution. Since nationalism was seemingly destroying socialism, the best strategy was to strike back and launch an offensive against it. The revisionists and moderates, on the other hand, interpreted the electoral fiasco as a result of excessive radicalism. Socialists could no longer afford to isolate themselves and badmouth the nation-state in the name of empty revolutionary rhetoric. In order to breathe life into ossifying Marxism, socialists needed to downplay the class orientation of the movement. Many concluded that the labour movement’s mouthpiece (i.e., Social Democrats) could not advance politically if they did not sell themselves as a people’s party and gained support in the new middle class. Disciples of revisionism like Max Schippel or Richard Calwer reasoned that Social Democrats must “judge working-class interests not simply from the standpoint of the consumer but in terms of production and employment, the vitality of the nation’s industry, and its capacity to compete for international markets.”

Promotion of imperialism and of national defence, and an attack on free trade became the trademarks of the Praktiker (i.e., practical moderates).

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364 The 1903 elections were a great victory for the SPD with the party acquiring 81 seats in the parliament. However, after 1903, German foreign policy experienced major setbacks. Especially damaging was the Moroccan incident which further isolated Germany and hindered her colonial aspirations. When the Reichstag was dissolved in 1906, Germany’s poor performance in the international arena was blamed on all the elements that were reluctant about Germany’s foreign policy, especially her expansionism. The SPD was labelled as non- and anti-national group. The elections of 1907 thus became a plebiscite on the national aspirations of the German state. Under direction of Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, a formidable bloc of middle and upper classes effectively branded the SPD as an element that did not care about Germany’s honour and welfare, least of all, about Germany’s rightful place in the sun. It was clear that when national interests were at stake, no party could sit on the fence. A party could either support or oppose German imperialism. The anti-SPD campaign was so successful that the socialists dropped from 81 to 43 seats. Most of their losses became a gain of the Progressives and the Center. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*, 59-63.


367 The 1907 elections brought to the forefront a key question in the ranks of the SPD: the party’s relationship to state, nation, and its imperial policy. Up to 1907, the SPD had remained a critic of German foreign policy, especially its imperial ventures. The party believed that such aspirations merely led to further exploitation and the growing wealth of the upper classes. The Socialist faction within the Reichstag “sought simply to freeze the international status quo against the unsettling dynamic of world imperialism.” Yet, beyond general calls for peace and against imperial exploitation, the SPD’s interest in German foreign policy was non-committal. They preferred to focus on theory, organization and domestic political action. In the aftermath of the 1907 elections, disunity amongst the various factions of the SPD became visible on the questions of nation, state, national defence, chauvinism, militarism and imperialism. These issues had been rising to the surface of party politics since 1905, but the elections rapidly pushed them into the forefront. The radicals concluded that the party had followed the right policy and the
As militarism and imperialism intensified, as international crises deepened and the specter of conflict loomed over Europe, socialists were confronted with a new set of questions. Could socialists ever prevent war through pacifism and by not voting for war credits? Was national defense ever justifiable? Could socialists formulate their own foreign policy and affect international relations? Once again, there emerged an underlying tension in each country between socialists’ commitment to the workers of their nation-state and their responsibility to the international credo of Marxism.

The radicals, especially Karl Liebknecht, vehemently opposed militarism, calling for the establishment of a citizen army or militia as the best policy to prevent war. Anti-militaristic agitation was to constitute the central weapon of international socialism. The abolition of professional armies would somehow eradicate nationalist chauvinism and need for expansion. Some of the more radical element maintained that there was nothing worth protecting in the existing order and so national defence would constitute an empty sacrifice. Jaurès, though in support of popular militia, represented a more moderate view, maintaining that defence of the state was critical, as “nations were the framework of class struggle, and the repository of the culture which the working-class movement had to appropriate.” He supported national defence while simultaneously believing that international action could prevent war. In his optimistic outlook, the two were flawlessly compatible. But Jaurès was not alone in betraying an amazing optimism, as many others “assumed that the disciplined mass parties of the workers would act as a check against a European conflagration.”

After several crises in the decade before 1914, skepticism arose about international solidarity’s ability to override national interests. Even Guesde was doubtful about the mobilizing potential of international action by the entire working-class movement. Already in 1907 he concluded that few socialists would want to “risk their own nation and allow the working-class army (which they have had so much difficulty organizing) to be decimated as long as one does not know and one cannot know if this combined insurrectional organization [i.e., support for the Second International] will be the same on both sides or if it would simply mean the opening of the frontier to foreign right tactics, merely exposing elements that had never been genuinely socialist. Supporters of this line, such as Karl Liebknecht, wanted the SPD to agitate vigorously against militarism. The revisionists blamed everything on the excessive radicalism of the Left, arguing that the empty revolutionary rhetoric alienated the lower strata of the middle classes. Kautsky took a more conciliatory road, maintaining that the party had followed the right policy but the wrong tactics. He assumed that the reactionary forces in Germany would lead the country towards further isolation, more international crises, and even war. Hence, Kautsky called upon the SPD to become a champion against chauvinism and war. He hoped that international problems would place pressures on the reactionary Reichstag, forcing the workers and the lower middle class to turn back to Social Democracy. But many members of the SPD wanted a more definitive statement on the party’s stance towards the German state. Bebel took it upon himself to defend the SPD’s pro-national position in the Reichstag. During discussions on German militarism, he “[justified] the militia system on grounds of military efficiency and of national interest [in order] to indicate that Social Democracy had both a material stake and an ideal interesting a powerful, reformed army.” Elsewhere, Bebel asserted that Social Democrats would certainly defend Germany if it were attacked. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*, 67, 77, 63-87.


369 Jaurès explicates this position at the party congress in Nancy in 1907. In essence, he argued against the army as an institution rather than against national defence per se. Cahm, “Socialism and the Nationalist Movement in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair,” 69, 75.


invasion.”372 Ironically, Bernstein, Kautsky and Bebel all feared that any action against the government on the outbreak of war would be futile, as the military would take control over law and order.373 Besides, a premature revolutionary outbreak without proper conditions and preparation would only result in the devastation of the working-class movement. The party and its achievements had to be protected even at the cost of ideological integrity. Believing that the best course of action was to affect the direction of militarism in Germany, Bebel called for reforms in order to create a “militia system on grounds of military efficiency and of national interest and to indicate that Social Democracy had both a material stake and an ideal interest in a powerful, reformed army.”374 Almost all socialists paid lip service to the notion of introducing a militia but most restricted their activities to educational propaganda amongst the troops in fear of a government’s reprisal if a more direct approach was taken. In any case, the formulation of a radical policy against militarism and national defence was contrary to what most socialists accepted as the state’s right to defend itself.

In order to justify self-defence, some socialists began to distinguish between defensive and aggressive wars. While the latter definitely had to be rejected, the former were understandable. In any case, defeatism of workers in one country would only strengthen the bourgeoisie of another. This could have horrendous consequences especially for a state with a well-developed workers’ movement, where defeatism towards a bourgeois government could potentially be a step backward. The one point of the socialist foreign policy on which all could agree, and which was inherited from their forefathers, was a shared hatred of Tsarist Russia.375 National defence or even aggression against “eastern barbarism” was always acceptable, even admirable. But in the tense international states system of the early 20th century, socialists faced a precarious position vis-à-vis their fatherlands. As Social Democratic parties of various states strengthened, their opposition to national defence dwindled. More and more often, proletarian internationalism was falling on deaf ears. Imperialism further complicated the discussion of a state’s right to survive and expand. Would colonial possession not improve the workers’ lot at home and bring progress to a foreign land?

In the socialist mindset, the nature and function of imperialism gradually became associated with capitalism. Yet, while trying to understand the roots and place of imperialism in the Marxist ideological constellation, socialists also pondered about the appropriate attitude to the colonial question? Like many of his reformative-minded colleagues, Gerhard Hildebrand insisted that “colonization was justified by its release of economic forces, and its promotion of the most advantageous utilization of the soil and other resources.”376 Along the same lines, Bernstein claimed that “we can recognize only a conditional right of savages to the land they occupy. Higher civilizations have ultimately a higher right. It is not conquest but the cultivation of the land that confers an historical right to its use.” Hence, he lumped anti-imperial rhetoric with other of Marx’s outdated ideas which

373 Already in 1905 Kautsky “rejected as impossible the stopping of a war by means of a mass strike. He argued that after war had begun the best that socialists could hope for was that a minority elite of the organized workers would respond to a call for such a strike.” (Steenson, Karl Kautsky 1854-1938, 178.) When the Noske case exploded in Germany, even Bebel defended the right of a country to defend itself. Salvadori, Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 122-123. See also Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917, 72-75.
374 Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917, 77.
375 This explains partly why the German Social Democrats justified their support for war credits as a defence against the impending threat of Russian despotism.
376 Pierson, Marxist Intellectuals and the Working-Class Mentality in Germany, 1887-1912, 216.
needed revision: “The notion that colonial expansion will delay the realization of socialism rests at bottom on the completely out-dated idea that the realization of socialism depends on an increasingly rapid reduction in the number of the very rich and on the growing impoverishment of the masses.” He concluded that imperialism’s progressive and civilizing qualities would ensure “German Social Democracy would have nothing whatsoever to fear from the colonial policy of the German Reich.”

Similarly, in the Listian tradition, protectionism crept into the socialist vocabulary on the premise of strengthening working-class interests. Colonial possessions and protectionism would improve workers’ lives and would translate into a strengthening of the labour movement. Karl Leuthner went as far as to claim that colonialism assisted in the overcoming of the class struggle and integrating workers into the nation. If Social Democrats opposed expansion, they would be playing into the hands of Russian and British bourgeois conservatives, and would be diminishing the potential growth of the German working-class movement. Leuthner certainly stood on the far right on the socialist spectrum but many socialists fluctuated between visions of imperialism as democratic, progressive and civilizing, and as reactionary, cruel and risky. Bernstein personified this paradox: his “simultaneous acknowledgment of Germany’s ‘cultural right’ to pull even with other colonial powers and his ethical criticism of the connection between Germany’s aggressive foreign policy and its colonial policy” were emblematic.

Overall, most socialists firmly stood, at least ideologically, against colonialism, which the right-wing elements supported. Kautsky saw “hostility to other countries, and imperialism as primarily bourgeois capitalist phenomena which were used by the German government to strengthen itself vis-à-vis worker opposition, to undermine the solidarity of the working class, and to draw the middle classes into an alliance with conservative Junkers.” He believed that a class-conscious proletarian is an internationalist whose healthy patriotism was devoid of aggressive expansionist thinking. Yet, in the four years before the outbreak of the Great War, every astute socialist observer, including Kautsky, recognized the volatile European situation. His centrist position revealed not only how far Orthodox Marxists had moved rightward, but also how isolated the radicals were becoming in their anti-nationalist rhetoric. After the SPD’s electoral successes of 1912, and in a polemic with Anton Pannekoek, Kautsky argued against spontaneous and unorganized mass action, all while defending conscious planning by disciplined and organized masses waged on the parliamentary arena. Once again, he betrayed great optimism, becoming convinced that increasing the party’s power in parliament, giving credence to national interests, and even aligning with non-socialist elements would democratize German foreign policy while curtailing chauvinism, militarism and expansionism. He wanted to use the Social Democracy’s growing power in the Reichstag to control the content and direction of German nationalism. Kautsky now supported an approach for which he previously attacked revisionists. “The objective of a mass strike,” he preached, “cannot be to destroy state power, but only to compel the government to yield on a particular question, or to replace a government hostile to the proletariat with a government favourable to the proletariat.” Mass action, Kautsky continued, cannot aim at “the destruction of state power, but always only at a shift in the relationship of forces within state power.”

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379 Steger, *The quest for evolutionary socialism*, 211.
381 Kautsky quoted by Steenson, *Karl Kautsky 1854-1938*, 161-162, see also 146-9, 159-164.
parliamentary action. More importantly, Kautsky was coming around to the attitude of “social imperialists,” who believed that workers’ interests lay in supporting the state and its imperial objectives. These right-wing revisionists also supported nationalism “on the grounds that Germany, as the most advanced capitalist country with the greatest socialist movement, was the power most ripe for socialism.”

By 1910, and even earlier, a thick line had been drawn in the socialist world between the radicals and the reformers, with the center now dangerously leaning rightward. The ensuing war merely completed the gradual splintering of Social Democracy. Voting for war credits was not a spontaneous aberration of circumstances—a victory of chauvinistic propaganda perpetrated by reactionary governments or a grand betrayal by the leaders of workers’ parties—but rather a final and natural step in the process of nationalizing socialism, which began in the 1870s with Social Democracy’s arrival on the parliamentary arena. The Great War certainly did not settle the debate, which continued into the interwar years and beyond. But how did national interests trump international goals of socialism so wholeheartedly defended in the Second International?

**WAR AGAINST WAR: SECOND INTERNATIONAL COPIES WITH NATIONALISM.**

If Social Democratic parties were the shield of Marxism, the Second International was its intended sword. As society was splitting into two hostile camps (i.e., the proletariat and the bourgeoisie), the class-conscious workers, armed with Marx’s slogan of “Workingmen of all countries, unite!” were to abandon their obsolete particularisms for the superior class-based brotherhood to bring forth a new truth of human existence. The new supranational organization—a united force of workers, would not only protect the growing achievements of Social Democracy, but would also serve to arrest the multiple tribulations of contemporary international relations, and eventually lead the working masses to the socialist heaven. The rising hopes and desires of socialists who gathered at Salle Petrelle in 1889 revealed great optimism of internationalism’s ability to rise above all of socialism’s barriers. Its fundamental assumption was “that the national components conceive of themselves ultimately as parts of a higher community, acknowledge this higher and wider community as a source of obligation overshadowing the obligation to the national community.” As Marx intended and Engels applauded, it was to become a League of Socialist Nations, a force to be reckoned with. It was to be the ultimate weapon within the Marxist arsenal. But could this bastion of cosmopolitan and humanistic Marxism withstand the multiple burdens of nationalism? Could class solidarity supplant bonds of blood and belonging?

Unlike the First International, the Second International was in many ways a more idealistic and much less structured organization. A broad amorphous movement, it was a loose federation of national sections rather than a tightly centralized hub of planning and decision-making. It became a formidable house of cards, looking impressive to an outsider but always at the brink of collapse by the gentlest of pressures. Three central problems affected Second International’s twenty-five years of existence. The first, with which its predecessor struggled intensely, was the anarchist strain. But this time, Marxism prevailed, systematically and definitively (but never completely)

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382 Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*, 263.
383 The International Socialist Workers Congress met for the first time in mid July of 1889 in Paris. The meeting began at Salle Petrelle but soon had to be moved to a larger venue to accommodate the growing number of arriving delegates.
eliminating anarchist influence within the International. Anarchists were expelled at the congresses in 1891, 1893 and 1896, and ceased to be troublesome.385

The second problem involved structural deficiencies, which defined and limited the International’s functioning and influence.386 Much more than anarchism, these organizational shortcomings considerably impaired any consistent and effective development and implementation of policies among the members. The most significant dilemma was that nation-states became the building blocks of the International. The fundamental principle, even if never publicly pronounced, was that the aspirations of the working-class rested in each nation rather than in the international organization. Gerhart Niemeyer astutely describes this paradox of two contradictory pretenses:

that of a solidarity that could substitute for the mutual bond of countrymen, and that of a class struggle so irreconcilable that nothing but a completely different social system could eventually command the workers’ political loyalty. It created two corresponding conflicts: supranational solidarity versus national interest, and revolutionary intransigence versus adjustment to national political systems.387

Fulfillment of national interests within the national political system came against supranational solidarity based on revolutionary intransigence. Such attitudes and institutional framework inadvertently granted primacy to national sections, opening a door to the notion that internationalism started at home (i.e., that national parties had to aspire to be internationalist) and that it might not necessarily be the highest form of socialism. Members of the organization—and their numbers grew rapidly—began to question whether socialism should first be international. Nations—more specifically, the national Social Democratic parties—predominated, and most demanded autonomy, at least in pursuing their own strategy as befitting the local conditions. And they definitely guarded their autonomy with utmost vigilance.

Equally important was the “fetish of party unity.”388 This was a burdensome heritage of socialism’s illegal and conspiratorial days, which had instilled a preponderance of party unity at all costs. At the sixth congress, a resolution was passed to reassert this approach: “in order that the working class may develop its full strength in the struggle against capitalism”, each country must have its own socialist party “just as there is but one proletariat in each country.” Moreover, the resolution emphasized the essential need to “bring about party unity.”389 In the spirit of

385 Joll, The Second International, see chapter three; Braunthal, History of the International, 249-254. Anarchist influences were alive amongst many socialists, and were revived with the advent of syndicalism. Nonetheless, at least officially, the disruptive nature of anarchism (which did produce havoc in the First International) was formally subdued within the Second International. In most simple terms, they were expelled on the basis of refusing to accept political activity.

386 Most historians of the subject matter, including Haupt, Niemeyer or Braunthal point to the various institutional weaknesses as the main factor that contributed to the ineffectiveness of the Second International. More Marxist interpretations, such as those offered by William Z. Foster, George Novak et al. or Igor Krivoguz, point out the strengths of the “opportunistic reformatory Right wing” tendencies within the International. William Z. Foster, History of the Three Internationals: The World Socialist and Communist Movements from 1848 to the Present (New York: International Publishers, 1955); Igor Krivoguz, The Second International 1889-1914: The History and Heritage (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989); Gerge Novack, Dave Frankel and Fred Feldman, The First Three Internationals: Their History and Lessons (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974).

387 Niemeyer, “The Second International,” 120. Niemeyer labels this dichotomy as one of the most important weaknesses of the Second International, and I would wholeheartedly agree. More than any other problem which the organization faced its struggle with the structural deficiencies and the primacy given to national wings was its Achilles’ heel.


internationalism and working class solidarity, all socialists of a country should belong to a single Social Democratic party. Once the socialists of a state were amalgamated under the umbrella of a party, this unity was maintained at all costs. All deviations from the Left and the Right—and these constituted many conflicting tendencies—were downplayed and minimized in fear of potential divisions. Once the anarchists were removed, the expelling of radicals and revisionists was rarely supported at either the international or national levels. No matter how extreme their deviation, members were rarely punished.

Moreover, the International would recognize only one representative socialist party from each nation, thus excluding viable voices from the forum. This became especially problematic as Social Democratic parties of larger states split according to national or ideological lines. All of them wanted a voice within the Second International. These national or ideological divisions became a prominent dilemma especially after the turn of the 20th century. The Czechs demanded separate representation from the German-speaking world, both in the party and the trade unions. The Poles were split between the internationalists (SDKPiL) and the nationally oriented socialists (PPS). The Russians were bitterly divided between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The Second International attempted to periodically interfere in these affairs but socialists were quite territorial, and resented any intervention from the center, which they felt did not understand their local needs and desires.

What further hindered the unified coordination of socialist goals—constituting the third weakness of the International—was the lack of coordination and effective mechanisms of implementation. The Secretariat and the International Socialist Bureau (ISB) were established only eleven years after the inception of the organization, while the Inter-parliamentary Socialist Commission was founded only in 1904. The final institutional shape of the International was only achieved in the decade before the outbreak of the Great War. The President of the organization, Emile Vandervelde, described it as “primarily a linking, not a leading organ.”

These weaknesses became most evident when the Second International issued resolutions. According to a leading French socialist, “the only issue [at the international congress] must be to discover how, given the conditions prevailing in the various countries, they can best co-ordinate their activities.” Lofty proclamations in the name of the proletariat, drawn in an atmosphere of excitement stimulated by a grandiose congregation of socialists at congresses, gave off an impressive illusion of force, but the enforcement of resolutions was no easy task. “Lack of a cohesive organization and the absence of an institutional structure,” as Georges Haupt explains, failed to “ensure continued international action or any co-ordination in the activities of the affiliated parties.” National conditions mandated the creation of such general formulations and guidelines that they became useless or ineffective as soon as they left the doorsteps of the International. Such rhetorical internationalism provided an image of outward unity. On

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Foster argues that “not to establish any center at all was to understress greatly internationalism and to overstress heavily national organization and action.” He explains the implications of such an approach: “This was the failure of the delegates to set up an international center to carry on the work between congresses. As the course of events was to show, the new International for a dozen years had no international leading committee, no world headquarters, no international journal, no regular constitution, no definite political program, no disciplined carrying out of decisions, and not even a formal name.” *History of the Three Internationals*, 144-145. The initial steps to add more organizational permanence to the Second International were only taken at the London Congress in 1896 and were not finalized until the 1900 Paris Congress.


the inside, the organization rotted from nationally oriented practices. Socialism’s international policy was always viewed through the prism of national interests.

The Second International accepted that socialists were real members of nation-states and that each nation faced a distinct set of circumstances. “Voting was by nations, each nation having two votes,” as Niemeyer explains, with “each national party [insisting] on the right to decide what had to be done under its particular circumstances.” The organization’s leading ideologues “insisted that all practical decisions had to be made within the framework of life as organized in concrete societies under concrete governments.” Each national party was hence allowed to determine its own tactics. This freedom of action in the application of the International’s resolutions cannot be understated. The ISB was powerless in directing coordinated and effective action from all its members. The virtual autonomy of national parties in essence hindered not only the application of resolutions but also the development of strict and uncompromising policies that cut across national or ideological lines. “Theoretical issues,” as Janet L. Polasky clarifies, “were resolved at the Congresses by general pronouncements that left the definition of praxis to the national parties.” More importantly, this “incompetence in matter of theory,” as Haupt argues, was most evident “when it had to draw up a long-term programme of international policy, it was unable to get beyond formulations so general as to make them useless as practical guide-lines.” Every decisive resolution was vague enough to satisfy all, opening it to multiple interpretations that would fit into any context. And national interests almost always led to diverging interpretations of the appropriate application of a resolution to local conditions. Three brief examples will highlight the implications of this loophole.

Firstly, one of the first resolutions to be passed by the Second International was the inauguration of the 1 May demonstrations as the most visible sign of workers’ solidarity. Yet, each national party followed its own schedule: some postponed the demonstrations to the first Sunday of May, while others delayed the actual mass gatherings until evening or limited them to symbolic gestures of protest. Secondly, Ministerialism (and more broadly speaking, cooperation with bourgeois elements) stimulated much debate, and at the Paris Congress in 1900, the overwhelming majority voted against it. Nonetheless, each socialist party had the option of participating in a government under unspecified “exceptional conditions,” and many did after the turn of the 20th century. In the fall of 1911, the right-wing Italian socialists supported the government in the Tripolitanian War in return for promised reforms. The Italians were criticized for not following the line of the Second International, to which they retorted that it was merely an issue of a nation’s right to act in response to local conditions.

In the above and many other circumstances, socialists claimed that they did not differ on questions of principles but merely on tactics, as Bebel would always claim. Yet, as James Joll aptly concludes, “the moderate vision prevailed” in the Second International, with every succeeding resolution “containing something for everyone,

397 Haupt, Socialism and the Great War, 31.
399 Braunthal, History of the International, 257-258. Such cooperation did periodically take place in the various member nations.
400 Georges Haupt, Socialism and the Great War, 64-66.
while committing nobody to anything.” National interests prevailed in the functioning of socialist internationalism. Ironically, as Michael Forman and Stephen E. Bronner point out, “it is clear that Second International thinkers did not undertheorize nationalism, or nationhood […]. they undertheorized internationalism.” And this led to an overestimation of the power of socialism and an underestimation of nationalism. Socialists’ ruptures along national lines were further exhausted by the division between its two leading members.

Although equality of members was a central tenet of the Second International, the organization was certainly not free from the domination of certain voices, with the French and German socialists leading the way. The SPD, which became a prototype for a strong and disciplined Social Democratic party, became a model for all to admire and emulate. Haupt argues that “the SPD had many political and ideological means at its disposal to ensure its supremacy and uphold its international authority. The very fact that Germany was a powerful focal point for the spread of Marxism and an active center for propagating socialist ideas was to play a primordial role.” For example, as Hiemeyer aptly shows, “the question of reformism was settled for the International within the framework of German Social Democratic politics.” In many instances, French and especially German party’s tactics were internationalized. Haupt and Howorth even argue that the French-German rivalry in the International revealed deep ideological and political divisions based on diverging national interests and viewpoints. As each became more entrenched in the struggle for national respectability and power, they tried to extrapolate international policies from their distinct national perspectives. Each accused the other of trying to impose national historical traditions on the International. There were also powerful voices in the International, coming predominantly from France (e.g., Guesde), which “asserted that it was possible to formulate a single line of Socialist tactics for all capitalist countries,” regardless of their institutional traditions. However, the debates over these universal aspirations were, to borrow from Howorth’s apt description, a “dialogue of the deaf.”

Marx and Engels tried to control the role of nationalism in the workers’ movement, but remained reluctant to directly confront it. Their disciples in the International followed a similar approach: there was never a congress or conference devoted specifically to nationalism even if the ideology pervasively informed many of the organization’s doctrines and policies. Were the members of the Second International blind to the threat of nationalism and the ever-growing shift in their constituents’ modus operandi towards the nation-state? “The

403 See, for instance, Haupt, Aspects of International Socialism 1871-1914, 62. Throughout chapter 3, Haupt shows the degree to which South-East European socialists followed SPD’s lead in formulating their attitudes and tactics towards specific events or resolutions. Niemeyer argues that the selection of the SPD as the leading force within the Second International was intentional. Engels wanted to make sure that the leading party of the International be a definitively Marxist entity. Since Marxism remained weak amongst the French and was practically nonexistent amongst the English, Engels believed that the SPD should become the center of gravity within the emerging International. Niemeyer, “The Second International: 1889-1914,” 96-7.
407 Howorth, “The Left in France and Germany”.
compromise [between international rhetoric and national practice] was tolerable,” as Merle Fainsod claims, “because the Second International never attempted to settle fundamental questions of principle.”\textsuperscript{408} There was a powerful and blinding belief within the organization that internationalism and class-consciousness would “safeguard against all attempts to use the proletariat of one country to exterminate that of another.”\textsuperscript{409} As the discussion above has shown, Social Democracy on the national level was integrating nationalist practice and even developing theoretical justifications for these policies. The same tendency of a growing contradiction between theoretical formulations (i.e., radical rhetorical internationalism) and their interpretations at the national level (i.e., reformative application) fueled by national rivalries were visible on the international arena of socialism, as evident in the Second International’s struggle with the national question, tactics, imperialism and militarism.

Socialism continued to evade the national question and the Second International was no exception. Self-determination, a slippery issue that Marx and Engels vaguely accepted and only in specific circumstances, revealed the peculiar difficulties that socialists faced when directly confronted with the nationality question. In broader terms—similarly to the socialist understanding of colonialism—it spoke to the “principle of the basic equality of all peoples and races in the sense that all had an equal right to dignity and respect, to freedom and national independence,” and to the solidarity of all the oppressed peoples.\textsuperscript{410} Marx and Engels had applauded the liberation movements in Poland and Ireland, but they were unwilling to acknowledge any universal right especially to the non-historic peoples. Hence, socialists continuously made grandiose pronouncements about self-determination of oppressed people, paying lip service to an abstract idea. “The broader revolutionary perspectives of the era of revolution and national awakening,” as David Kirby explains, “tended to give way to notions of justice, and national self-determination came to be detached as a separate issue in itself in the deliberations of the Second International.”\textsuperscript{411} National liberation was fashionable in socialist circles (as a democratic principle) as long as no concrete policies were demanded. Only the socialists of the multi-ethnic empires of the east could not remain silent on an issue that mattered so much to their constituents. The debates within the Second International revealed the conflicting attitudes and the socialists’ inability to deal with self-determination in a consistent and effective manner.

Luxemburg, realizing the incompatibility between national and class interests, continuously spoke against giving into what she perceived to be a bourgeois ideal. Liberation movements had nothing to contribute to the revolutionary cause, especially in Europe, where capitalist advancement had reached the final stages of the class struggle. The upcoming revolution would eliminate oppression in all its forms and so devoting attention to national liberation was merely a waste of revolutionary energy. On an issue closer to her heart, Luxemburg claimed that Poland should renounce claims to independence and continue to exist within the Russian Empire—a framework of a large territorial unit, which provided economic progress, growth of class consciousness and a breeding ground for revolutionary fervor. She was certainly not alone in rejecting everything national. Hervé Gustave’s rhetoric against patriotism of any sort became legendary in the International.\textsuperscript{412} But the prevailing view within the Second International was that neutrality was the best course of action, lest socialists would lose support amongst some of the

\textsuperscript{409} Haupt, \textit{Socialism and the Great War}, 12.
\textsuperscript{410} Braithwal, \textit{History of the International}, 305.
\textsuperscript{412} Braithwal, \textit{History of the International}, 332.
oppressed peoples. At the end of the 19th century, Luxemburg managed to halt the Poles’ attempt to rouse support within the Second International for an explicit declaration promoting Polish independence.\(^{413}\) Eventually, Kautsky reached a compromise at the London Congress of 1896, with a broad and vague statement in support of self-determination for all oppressed peoples, without any specific reference to the Poles.\(^{414}\) Yet, as Haupt concludes, “it sought more to close a debate which was judged inopportune, than a conscious effort to clarify positions of principle.”\(^{415}\) The issue of nationalism or self-determination was simply too explosive to be debated openly without producing significant fissures within the International.

Although the nationality question was a touchy subject that produced uneasy silence, powerful advocates on behalf of self-determination arouse within the International. Marx and Engels had called for the restoration and unification of only historic peoples in Europe. Yet, by the end of the 19th century, the non-historic groups also showed vitality. The Russian, Austrian, Polish, Czech or Balkan socialists, operating in conditions where the social and national issues were entangled, could not afford to neglect nationalism. Within the Second International, for example, Lenin and Austromarxists offered distinct versions of the proper Marxist solution to national liberation. (These will be discussed in more detail in the proceeding chapters.) Lenin argued that “it was the duty of the proletariat in the advanced countries, where the national question was no longer an issue, to support the demands for political independence from the oppressed colonial peoples, whilst in eastern Europe, the tasks of the proletariat could only be fulfilled once the right of nations to determine their own future had been won.”\(^{416}\) Austromarxists, on the other hand, called for national cultural autonomy within existing multi-national empires.\(^{417}\) Socialists of Eastern Europe did debate the national question in a variety of ways but the Second International was afraid to directly deal with an issue that caused so much dissension.

Socialists of Eastern Europe were divided on the ways in which they should treat the national question. Some of them shared the view that if any progress was to be made for the socialist movement in the region, the national question would have to be resolved first, but there were many who still maintained that national problems could only be resolved in a larger revolutionary upheaval. Hence, many socialists of these oppressed national groups experienced factionalism along two orientations: the national and the international. The Second International called for reconciliation and integration of the two in the name of Social Democracy’s unity—a single party for each country. Although this solidarity was maintained in the 19th century, the advent of the 20th century witnessed the rise of intellectual independence amongst the socialists of smaller nations who no longer felt a need to follow their Western brethren. Living in an atmosphere of oppression, they questioned internationalism as a substitute for self-determination. The national question triggered fissures in several European parties.

\(^{413}\) More on this in the last part of the study.
\(^{416}\) Kirby, *War, Peace and Revolution*, 12. Moreover, article 7 of the Draft Program of the Russian Social Democratic Party called for a right of all nations within the Russian Empire to self-determination.
Polish socialists split over the need for independence and right to self-determination.\textsuperscript{418} In 1896, Józef Piłsudski, who eventually formed his own wing of socialism (separate from Luxemburg), explained his national orientation: “We cannot, like they [Western Socialists], demand the establishment or abolishment of laws, when we cannot participate in legislation, or even speak publicly about our needs and desires.”\textsuperscript{419} The bitter ideological struggle between the PPS and SDKPiL continued for many years. But the Poles were not an exception. The tensions in Austria between the Germans and the Czechs eventually erupted into open conflict. Even when the International rejected the Czech demand for separate recognition at the Copenhagen Congress, the majority of Czech socialists detached to create a Czech party and trade unions.\textsuperscript{420} The Eastern Question offers an especially interesting case study, revealing the intricacies of the nationality problem, the growing divisions between national and international orientations, between Western and Eastern European interpretations of socialism as well as the ambiguous and inconsistent responses from the Second International.

The Balkan and Western European socialists continuously disagreed on a solution to the Eastern Question. The Southeastern Europeans asked the Second International on numerous occasions for comprehensive guidelines. Most Balkan socialists opted for a federative solution to the regional problems. But the International’s inability and unwillingness to understand and deal with the complex nationality question in the peninsula produced contradictory policies. For instance, in “1904 the ISB declared itself in favour of autonomy for the oppressed minorities of the Ottoman Empire.”\textsuperscript{421} However, Western European socialists perceived the Balkan Question in a broader context, always trying to keep the issue on ice lest it explode into a European wide conflict. In abstract principle, they supported a Balkan federation, eventually even producing a slogan “the Balkans for the Balkan peoples,” but they wanted to maintain the status quo in the region. “For Europe,” as one Balkan socialist lamented to the International, “the best solution of the Balkan question is to leave it unresolved.”\textsuperscript{422} Loud rhetorical support was followed with shrewd and expedient indifference, even though the status quo denoted oppression for the local peoples. “The difference between the western socialists and the those of the Balkans was not one of tactics,” as Haupt explains, “it arose from two fundamentally different views of nationalities issue, of the national question, and of the imperialist phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{423} These differences in outlook produced uneasiness and contradictions, which only intensified after the Habsburg annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908.

Ironically, in the debates within the Second International about the Balkan Wars, Luxemburg acknowledged the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan peoples’ need for liberation. Meanwhile, supporters of nationalism like Jaurés argued that “sympathy for the cause of liberation of the oppressed nationalities of the Ottoman Empire could not be allowed to overshadow political considerations” and achievements of Social Democracy in the West.\textsuperscript{424} Radical leftist anti-nationalists supported self-determination while reformative pro-

\textsuperscript{418} For a discussion, see Jan Tomicki, ed., \textit{Wizje socjalizmu w polsce do roku 1948} (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1987).
\textsuperscript{421} Haupt, \textit{Socialism and the Great War}, 69.
\textsuperscript{422} Quoted by Haupt, \textit{Socialism and the Great War}, 72.
\textsuperscript{423} Haupt, \textit{Socialism and the Great War}, 72.
\textsuperscript{424} Haupt, \textit{Socialism and the Great War}, 72.
nationalists denied it. Throughout the Balkan crisis, and this could be generalized to other instances, no consistent and overarching guidelines were ever produced by the International. In the tradition of Marx, socialists feared that directly debating nationalism within the ISB or individual congresses would open a Pandora’s box. Such discussion would not only give credence to nationalism as an independent factor of importance—thus giving more recognition to the superstructure—but might be misconstrued as acceptance of nationally-oriented practices within member parties. Keeping this issue at bay was simply easier than dealing with fallout from what would have certainly been fierce deliberation. Nonetheless, nationalism remained the underlying current of many discussions within the Second International.

Throughout the decade before the outbreak of the Great War, the explosive issue of nationalism and nationalist rivalries intensified in both international relations and within the Second International. Most important was the question of proper tactics in response to all the pressing issues of the day. The two Congresses in Amsterdam (1904) and in Stuttgart (1907) marked not only the pinnacle of the International but revealed the contradictory tendencies which eventually translated into a betrayal of socialist internationalism in the Summer of 1914. The organization became a battleground between two distinct worldviews: On the one end, were the pragmatists and reformers who recognized the need for activity and the fruits of operating within the legal framework. They wanted to win the vote, promote the expansion of mass parties, and utilize parliaments as a means of pushing forward the socialist cause. On the other end were radicals who preferred direct action that would either intimidate the elites into taking notice of their demands or could eventually lead to their overthrow.425

The question of tactics exploded at the Amsterdam Congress in 1904 over revisionism. Most socialists (especially those of the leftist persuasion, led by the French Guesdists) wanted the International to adapt the SPD’s Dresden resolution which vehemently rejected reformative work.426 In a flare of rhetorical brilliance, Jaurés argued against the internationalization of SPD’s tactics. He distinguished between the institutional differences of the French Republic and the German military autocracy. More importantly, he pointed to the SPD’s lack of political effectiveness:

If, in Europe and throughout the world, the questions of peace, of political freedom and of the possibility of Socialist advance are now trembling in the balance, this is not through the alleged compromises or the daring innovations of the French Socialists who have allied themselves with the other democratic forces to safeguard freedom, progress and world peace, but, because of the political weaknesses of German Social Democracy.

And answering directly to Bebel’s accusations of cooperation with the French government, he harshly responded:

Even if you had a majority in the Reichstag, your country would be the only one in which you—the Socialists—would not be masters despite that majority, because your parliament is only half a parliament. It does not control the executive and hence has no political power. Its decisions are no more than requests, which the real powers in the State can brush aside whenever they feel inclined.427

Jaurés argued that the Germans could afford to openly reject reformative activity because their political system limited their power, regardless of their numerical strength. In France, on the other hand, where the Republican

425 Joll, The Second International 1889-1914, 47.
structure did offer access to real power, the socialists could use it to gradually take over and affect the state apparatus. Moreover, he abhorred the Germans’ double standard of continuing reformatory work on the home front while voting for a radical leftist ideology. Such an approach (witnessed repeatedly in the SPD) became prevalent in the International: radical rhetoric and resolutions in the name of doctrinal unity acquired conservative undertones as soon as they were translated into practice on the national level.

The main corollary to the question of tactics was the issues of militarism. Again, there was widespread disagreement on the most appropriate strategies in pushing forward the socialist cause or in preventing war. The possibility of war was an especially thorny problem for socialists. On the one hand, socialists of the reformative and conservative strain wanted to maintain peace to preserve their acquired power within the respective states. A massive conflict would spoil the fruits of decades of their labour in politics and trade unions. On the other hand, as the radicals hoped, a war could trigger the working masses into a long-awaited revolution and bring about the advent of a new society. Many questions emerged: Could war be averted or prevented? Was there a difference between defensive and offensive wars? What would be the best way to oppose war once it broke out?

The Stuttgart Congress marked an important turning point for the Second International as the decisions made in 1907 solidified the organization’s response to the escalating arms race, imperial entanglements and war. First of all, the majority agreed that colonialism was cruel and exploitive, and contributed to international instability. Resolution after resolution was passed in each congress following Stuttgart, always paying lip service to the leftist criticism of colonialism. Nonetheless, following the German defeat at the polls in 1907, a much more moderate practice was adopted despite the International’s continued anti-imperial rhetoric. Member nations simply pursued their own, virtually autonomous policies. The Germans or the Italians, for example, gradually came to defend their country’s colonial policies. Moreover, it seemed that circumstances at home would supersede the International’s directives. Yet, militarism and attitude towards war further revealed the divisions between the right and the left, and between the national interests of the various members.

Socialists did have concrete solutions to diminish international tension: abolition of secret diplomacy, promotion of disarmament, replacement of standing armies with popular militias, and the establishment of an international tribunal to deal with grievances. Nonetheless, they greatly differed on proper tactics. Socialists of the leftist persuasion saw the war as the lever of social revolution. Hervé, for example, not only rejected any distinction between offensive and defensive wars, but also wanted to use every type of popular protest—including the general strike or even armed insurrection—against governments to prevent war. They assumed that the interests of the proletariat everywhere coincided. And if war broke out, workers, having no country and no stake in preserving their homelands, should use the opportunity to abolish the capitalist order. But convincing the workers and even their leaders that they had no homelands was no easy feat.

The great majority of socialists abhorred war in every form. They believed that peace provided the best context for the growth of the working classes. Many took this logic a step further, recognizing the right of national defense and the workers’ desire to protect their fatherlands. They hoped to reconcile internationalism with defensive

429 The full text of the resolution is available in Braunthal, History of the International, 319.
431 Foster, History of the Three Internationals, 202ff.
patriotism. Even so, they disagreed on the best means of averting or reacting to war. French pragmatists, like Jaurés, believed in the power of the popular militia or of international solidarity as the best weapons. Their belief in the strength of the International and in direct action to avert war was juxtaposed against German pessimism. Both Haupt and Howorth explain how the “semi-fatalistic attitude and inactive pacifism of the Germans hindered the French party’s optimistic call for action.” The German socialists refused to believe that war would break out as the ruling classes had too much to lose and would not risk participating in a large-scale conflict. “The net result of this game of psychological warfare being conducted by the national press in both countries was”, as Howorth explains, “that whereas the German socialists were actually led to accentuate their nationalist commitment, the French socialists were led to exaggerate German internationalism to the point of absurdity, performing miracles of ideological prestidigitation in order to conceal and deny the existence of nationalism within the SPD.”

The resolution passed at the Stuttgart Congress—a radical statement promoting anti-militarism—seemed to offer something to everyone. The Germans and the French, the leftist radicals and the moderates—all interpreted it as their victory. Its radical character did not threaten the pragmatists because, as Haupt explains, “it seems that the majority of delegates attached little importance to the motion because it concerned a hypothetical future and because they thought that for the moment it committed them to nothing. For them impending revolution was an effective argument with which to intimidate the bourgeoisie, not a strategic goal.” Moreover, a clause stating that “the International is not able to determine in rigid forms the anti-militarist actions of the working class, which are naturally different in different countries and for different circumstances of time and place,” left the door open for each country to choose the most appropriate measures to prevent war. Even though the leftist agenda was accepted, no concrete and binding anti-military strategies were enforced. For the remainder of the years before the First World War, the French attempted to coerce the Germans by any means possible into a policy promoting the use of the general strike. Yet, the Germans, fearing reaction from a conservative autocratic government, refused to comply.

The Copenhagen Congress in 1910 merely confirmed parliamentary activity as a primary means to stop war. By the time of the extraordinary Basle Congress in 1912, when the German socialists refused to call for street protests against militarism and war at the onset of the Balkan Wars, the threat of any direct action or revolution had decreased considerably. Paradoxically, as Haupt shows,

the German socialists, pessimistic as regards the possibility of preventing war, displayed optimism and calm in every serious diplomatic crisis; the French, on the other hand, confident that the International could stop a general clash, became anxious and active whenever the international situation deteriorated.

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433 In 1910, Jaurés published “L’Armée Nouvelle” a study of popular militia. He believed that the abolition of the professional army would remove one of the most significant causes of the war. The ruling elites could no longer use propaganda to manipulate the masses into war. Joll, The Second International 1889-1914, 112-114.
434 Haupt, Socialism and the Great War, 17; Howorth, “The Left in France and Germany.”
435 Howorth, “The Left in France and Germany,” 86.
436 For full text of the resolution, see Braunthal, History of the International, 361-3.
437 Haupt, Socialism and the Great War, 21-2.
440 Haupt, Socialism and the Great War, 34.
Yet, beyond reactions to specific crises and debates over tactics, there was a significant difference in how the socialists of each country perceived the power of the International. The French believed that the Second International had come into its own as a force in international relations. As a universal voice of workers, it could afford direct action to prevent war or diminish its spread. In response, the Germans accused the French of not realizing the difficult position of the SPD within an autocratic system. In the safety of Republican democratic institutions, the French had the freedom of action. The German socialists, on the other hand, could not afford direct anti-militaristic activity and were limited to the press and parliament. In their eyes, the Second International was not powerful enough to influence the German ruling classes and any attempts to do so would be hopeless and even dangerous. In essence, both the French and the Germans were applying national logic to their policies and the International was powerless to effectively mediate between these national interests.\footnote{Joll argues that such national perspectives were a product of each country’s historical traditions. In France, there was an association between revolution and patriotism; in Germany, the Wars of Liberation were tied to liberal reform; in Italy, the socialism was tied to the struggle for unity and national greatness. Hence, it was difficult for Socialists to separate the social and national issues. \textit{The Second International 1889-1914}, 110.}

There is no doubt that, willingly or not, nationalism had entered into the Marxist discourse. J. J. Schwarzmantel points to three main components of the socialist construction of nationalism. Firstly, since they spoke on behalf of the masses, only socialists and workers were the true bearers of patriotism. Secondly, through democracy and social reforms, the workers could gradually come to power within the nation-state. And lastly, as workers’ stake in the nation expanded, so did their justification for patriotic defence and need to preserve independence.\footnote{Schwarzmantel, “Class and Nation: Problems of Socialist Nationalism,” 249-251.} Hervé and Luxemburg denied the compatibility between proletarian internationalism and national rights. But more and more, such a position was a radical exception than the rule amongst socialists. Socialists had no choice but not only to respond to nationalism’s growing power but somehow offer a constructive response to its enduring power and appeal. This was even more pressing the further one travelled eastward from the Western European capitals.
CHAPTER 6: RADICALIZING THE EXTREMES: 
THE NATIONALIZATION OF MARXISM EAST OF THE ELBE.

NATIONALISM IN EASTERN AND EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: THE DILEMMAS OF MULTIETHNIC EMPIRES AND NATIONAL OPPRESSION.

National diversification and local particularisms produced contentious debates amongst socialists of all ideological colours and national stripes. Nowhere was this more visible than east of the Elbe. While Western European socialists resided in the comforts of stable nation-states, democracy, parliamentarism, and relative freedom of expression, their Eastern and East Central European brethren faced a much more tenuous situation. Without legal recognition and forced into underground activity, most lived and operated in clandestine circumstances. In the revolutionary turmoil of the mid 19th century, when Marx and Engels dreamed of socio-economic transformations, the entire region came under the sweeping force of national revivals (in both cultural and political forms). Industrialization and nationalism had reached the most remote and backward corners of the region and had generated in people a desire for both socio-economic change and for national recognition. The eastern parts of the continent were lagging behind the western advancements, but to artificially separate Eastern and Western Europe into distinct intellectual or ideological regions would be superfluous and unwarranted. Nonetheless, the peculiar conditions of life under the Russian and Austrian hegemony did produce variations in Marxism, which were less prominent (or even absent) in the West. Issues that seemed peripheral or insignificant to western socialists were paramount to their eastward comrades, and nowhere was this dichotomy more visible than in the arena of nationalism.

Although reformative strategy and parliamentary successes grounded Marxism in the reality of the early 20th century nation-state, nationalism remained an abstract notion for many western socialists. Even though Marx’s negation of everything national had been abandoned in practice, it continued to remain a taboo subject. Even those who had rejected the Bernstenian viewpoint perceived the nation-state as a necessary evil—a framework for the promotion of workers’ rights. As the previous chapter revealed, nationalism had been subtly reshaping socialist thinking, but failed to generate any systematic debates within the Second International. Even a mere theoretical exploration of the phenomenon seemed to stir up uncomfortable implications. Its widespread appeal and its divisive influence within socialism pushed it to a disquieting periphery. Yet, for many socialists of East Central and Eastern Europe, nationalism remained not only an immediate reality, but also a central ingredient in the growth of workers’ movements. Ignoring nationalism was not only out of the question, but it would amount to political suicide. The national and social causes were inseparably linked, producing unsettling questions: Could the national cause be granted primacy over socio-economic questions? Was national liberation a prerequisite for social justice? Could international solidarity be an adequate substitute for self-determination? Could the socialists of an oppressive nation really understand the socialists of an oppressed nation?

The circumstances in East Central and Eastern Europe, especially within the multinational Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires significantly shaped the reception of Marxism in the region. Although some Western socialists denied the compatibility of proletarian internationalism with national rights, and most simply felt uneasy

444 Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 69-70.
about nationalism, the Polish, Russian and Austrian socialists embraced it as an issue innate to the socialist cause. Several factors account for such a distinctive outlook.

The nationality question became a critical defining issue of the eastern reaches of Europe in the 19th century. By the latter half of the century, through modernization and industrialization, most peoples of the region had acquired a degree of national consciousness which translated into a desire for rights (e.g., language or education), autonomy (territorial or cultural) or complete self-determination.\textsuperscript{445} In both the Romanov and Habsburg Empires, the national and social questions were closely intertwined. Demographic transformations, fluctuating political alliances, urbanization, industrial growth, expansion of state bureaucracies, and the spread of literacy continuously reshaped internal and external dynamics of national groups. For some, like the Poles, who had been partitioned between three empires, with workers living and working under different circumstances and struggling with distinct sets of problems, cementing a unitary national party was difficult. Interpartition relations were complicated and any coordination of ideological and political activity posed challenges.\textsuperscript{446} A Polish nobleman living in Galicia in the 1880s had a much different outlook than his compatriot in the Congress Kingdom. While the former participated in the cultural and political life of the oppressor state, the latter experienced repression and assimilation at the hands of the oppressor.

Intraethnic peculiarities aside, the working-class in each of the empires offered yet another mixture of conflicting interests. In a broader sense, workers experienced a dual oppression at the hands of a foreign yolk and of their employers. Such national oppression and economic exploitation fused the national and social aspirations together. A Czech worker could experience exploitation by either a German or Czech employer but the oppression at the hands of the former seemed much more degrading. Reconciliation between Polish and Russian or Czech and German socialists was perpetually tested. In most scenarios, the lines between class and ethnic divisions were continuously redrawn. Depending on the region, the time period, and even the factory, the social and national tensions fluctuated significantly. Hence, while “in western Europe,” as Forman aptly explains, “solidarity was a question of forging links across borders, [in] Eastern Europe, it was a question of the structure of the working class itself.”\textsuperscript{447} Socialist parties that managed to comprise several national peoples—essentially becoming little internationals—struggled with schisms along regional and especially ethnic lines. Externally, in a battle for ideological-political allegiance against nationalists, and internally, in an effort to maintain organizational cohesion, socialists had to give due attention to the national question. By late 19th century, managing national antagonisms was just as important as resolving social tensions.

Socialists of East Central Europe were never isolated from their Western comrades as close links were maintained between the various parties and organizations. They participated in the debates on opportunism, reformism, and party unity. Yet, they had a few significant distinguishing characteristics: Firstly, economic and political backwardness coupled with rapid industrialization juxtaposed established and stable capitalist powers of the West against the revolutionary forces of the East. While the West had somehow accepted capitalism’s slow

\textsuperscript{445} See, for example: Waldenberg, \textit{Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej}, chapters 3 to 5; Davis, \textit{Nationalism and Socialism}, chapter 6; Eric J. Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

\textsuperscript{446} See, for instance, Piotr S. Wandycz, \textit{The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984).

\textsuperscript{447} Forman, \textit{Nationalism and the International Labor Movement}, 70.
evolution, the instability in the East offered hope of radical transformation. It is here that alternate paths to socialist heaven were first conceived. Hence, for instance, even the conservative peasants could be convinced to follow the workers’ lead on the road to revolution. The region became a testing ground for uneven development, alternate tactics, and the exploration of different roads to Marxist utopia.

Secondly, these peculiar conditions in East Central and Eastern Europe produced socialists who were willing to engage in a “serious and open-ended dialogue with non-Marxist theories and ideologies.” Norman M. Nairnmark argues that streamlined Marxism of the West had been modified in Eastern Europe, where its roots and evolution were much more diverse. Adherence to orthodox Marxism certainly existed (as personified, for instance, in Georgy Valentinovich Plekhanov), but there was also an eagerness to bring other ideas into the fold of socialism. “There was always a readiness,” as Walicki points out, “to combine Marxism, conceived above all as a theory of capitalism, with the newest trends in philosophy, to extend Marxist thought in new directions.” Walicki goes as far as to claim that the rejection of dialectical materialism (eventually associated with György Lukács and Antonio Gramsci) was not a result of criticism against Soviet Marxism, but rather a product of East Central European socialism’s rejection of Orthodox Marxism at the turn of the century. To take the argument further: nationalism became one of the key stimulants for the extension of Marxism. In the most simplistic of terms, if the proletariat was to bring about emancipation from all forms of oppression, national liberation could not be ignored. These socialists—including Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz and Karl Renner who came from strikingly different backgrounds—were not only interested in bringing the national question into mainstream Marxist thinking by defining and understanding the phenomenon, but they also wanted to use Marxism to resolve national antagonisms. At the very least, harnessing nationalism’s power would add a formidable weapon to the Marxist arsenal.

This brings us to the third characteristic of East Central European socialists: their attempt to make nationalism a socialist cause. But could socialists understand and accept the desire of some peoples for nation-states? Socialists began to emerge who not only wanted to discuss the national question, but felt compelled to include it in the Marxist ideological package. Some, like Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (discussed below) went as far as to claim that ignorance of the national question was a sign of the decadence of Western European Marxism. Neglecting one of the most pressing contemporary issues was simply not acceptable. To that end, he and many others became preoccupied with the study of nationalism. Some wanted merely to define and understand its roots and evolution—to explore the nation-state as an important event of the 19th century, and to identify its subjective and objective criteria. Yet, there were many who wanted to develop more tangible solutions to alleviate national oppression. Although some could be readily labeled as nationalists (like Pilsudski) or internationalists (like Luxemburg), many cannot be neatly categorized as they oscillated between the two polarized extremes. The majority who wrote on the national

448 Walicki, Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of ‘Western Marxism,’ 8.
449 Norman M. Naimark, The History of the “Proletariat”: The Emergence of Marxism in the Kingdom of Poland, 1870-1887 (Boulder: Columbia University Press, 1979), see chapter 3.
450 Walicki, Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of ‘Western Marxism’, 39. Kolakowski is much more conservative in this regard and simply divides Marxists into two categories: On the one hand, are the professional Marxists “whose interest centers on Marxism itself, and who study the problems of philosophy, history, economics, or sociology for the purpose of demonstrating the correctness of Marxism […] to prove that his interpretation is closest to the spirit of Marxism conceived as a pre-existing whole.” On the other hand, there are those “who make use of Marxist conclusions as an aid to solving the problems of their respective disciplines.” Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. II, 193-4.
question shared a common belief that Marxism and nationalism were not necessarily incompatible; that political or cultural self-determination was closely related to social justice (perhaps even with the former being a precondition for the latter); that workers were the sincerest repository and expression of genuine patriotism; that socialism could only be fully developed in a democratic nation-state; and that socialist patriotism could produce revolutionaries who promoted social change.

Given the peculiar circumstances of Eastern and East Central Europe, it should not be surprising that the most comprehensive Marxist studies on the national question as well as the biggest socialist supporters and critics of nationalism at the turn of the 20th century emerged from the region. To that end, this chapter will explore the diverging solutions to nationalism proposed by socialists east of the Elbe: Rosa Luxemburg's rejection of nationalism and promotion of vague territorial autonomy, and the Austro-Marxist focus on cultural autonomy.

**Marxist Anti-Nationalism: Rosa Luxemburg and Revolutionary Internationalism.**

A Polish-born Marxist of Jewish heritage, martyred by the hands of reactionary forces at the height of revolutionary turmoil in Germany—Rosa Luxemburg (and in a broader sense Luxemburgism), has become synonymous with revolutionary internationalism. She epitomized Marx and Engels’ international cosmopolitanism, economism, and the belief in the inevitable progression of the historical forces towards a workers’ revolution. But the road to a cohesive theory and tactics for a European-wide revolution was no easy task for a Pole born in the era of post 1863 January Insurrection in Congress Poland. When Luxemburg entered politics in the early 1890s, socialism had already received a second wind and was on its way to achieve first parliamentary victories across Western Europe. In East Central Europe, socialism was beginning to organize and consolidate into concrete movements and organizations. Along with many young Poles disheartened with the insurrectionary tradition and the Romanticism of the gentry, Luxemburg delved into alternatives and found socialism, which seemed to offer a comprehensive solution.

**The Slippery Slope of Nationalist Conciliation: The Roots of Luxemburgian Uncompromising Revolutionary Proletarian Internationalism.**

Already in her intellectual youth, Luxemburg encountered two trends in Polish socialism. On the one hand, there was the legacy of Ludwik Waryński’s Proletariat (also known as the Great Proletariat or Proletariat I), the first Polish Marxist group that criticized the insurrectionary tradition and rejected Poland’s reconstitution as an independent state. On the other hand, Bolesław Limanowski’s Polish People (Lud Polski) prioritized the road to national self-determination. The question of independence was the most definitive marker of Polish socialism, and

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451 Again, “economism” in this instance is meant to denote the belief of reducing human relations to their economic relations. It is not meant in a “revisionist” sense (which Luxemburg continuously attacked) which focused on the daily improvements of workers for bread and butter through reforms and parliamentary activity. To some extent, this is the “economism” of which Lenin accused Luxemburg. As Tom Lewis explains: “In Lenin's view, Luxemburg’s dismissal of the right of nations to self-determination thus involved ‘a sort of ‘imperialist Economism’ like the old Economism of 1894-1902, which argued in this way: capitalism is victorious, therefore political questions are a waste of time. Imperialism is victorious, therefore political questions are a waste of time!’” Tom Lewis, “Marxism and Nationalism,” *International Socialist Review* 14, (2000).

Red Rosa opted for the former position, believing that nationalism’s progressive force in Europe was completely spent, that nation-states were nothing more than bourgeois constructs, and that the only viable motherland was the proletariat. Socialism would either be international or it would not be at all. For the rest of her life, she persistently attacked nationalism, even to the point of violating her own ideological integrity. Nonetheless, to call Luxemburg a crude national nihilist would be an overstatement. She was sensitive to national oppression and did recognize cultural identity as an important dimension of the working-class consciousness. Moreover, she devoted much of her talents to the understanding of nationalism. What pushed her towards dogmatic economism and uncompromising revolutionary proletarian internationalism was what she perceived to be the slippery slope of nationalist conciliation, which she witnessed firsthand on two important ideological-strategic battlefields.

The first of Luxemburg’s ideological-strategic battlefield was the sectarian struggle within Polish (and later in a more broader sense, Russian) socialism. The questions of autonomy, self-determination and independence were a pressing issue amongst Polish socialists who disagreed on the appropriate path for the proletariat. A schism in the 1890s divided Polish socialists into the pro-independence Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and Luxemburg’s Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP). Nettl argues that Luxemburg’s pursuit of SDKP’s interests and the fight against the growing influence of the PPS pushed her to argue against everything national. Jie-Hyun Lim even postulates that her anti-PPS schematism blinded Luxemburg from recognizing “fully the dialectical interaction of revolutionary internationalism and social patriotism.” Fighting nationalism within the corridors of Polish socialism pushed her to the periphery of the movement. Moreover, Luxemburg’s struggle for an all-Russian social democracy (i.e., unity between Polish and Russian socialists) at the turn of the 20th century only added another layer of challenges. Her support for the Bolsheviks (against the reformist Mensheviks) was juxtaposed against polemics with Lenin on the question of self-determination. These circumstances produced personal intrigues, power realignments, and sectarian deadlock, pushing Luxemburg towards ever-growing anti-nationalism.

The second front in Luxemburg’s battlefield was fought in the corridors of the SPD and the Second International. Eventually becoming the voice of the Leftist Radicals, Luxemburg aspired to promote the spirit of

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456 This was partly a response to the dictates of the Second International which called for a single socialist party in any one country. Hence, Luxemburg believed that Poles and Russians should collaborate within the confines of a Russian-wide socialist party.

457 Many historians have debated Luxemburg’s polemics with Lenin on the question of self-determination. See, for instance, Horace B. Davis, “The Right of Nation Self-Determination in Marxist Theory—Luxemburg vs. Lenin,” in The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg, ed. Horace B. Davis (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 9-48. Kołakowski argues that Luxemburg’s differences with Lenin were strategic in nature. However, more recent scholarship has revealed the more deep-seated ideological differences between the two. See, for example, Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 84-6.
Scientific Socialism by ensuring the revolutionary character of the socialist movement. In every instance, she stressed the primacy of class over national divisions, of international over national solidarity, and of social emancipation over national liberation. In her worldview, the struggle against nationalism (and self-determination) was inseparably linked with the battle against Bernstenian Reformism and the threat of conciliatory Centrist Orthodoxy (both of which she considered synonymous with opportunism). Conciliation to capitalism—especially giving credence to the nation-state in any manner or form—would only delay the inevitable collapse of the bourgeois system.

Luxemburg realized that “nationalism, when advanced by socialists, always retains a reformist component and that reformism is inherently tied to nationalism.” As the working classes were drawn more closely into the pacifying web of national interests, Luxemburg felt even more compelled to spare no effort in combating this trend. Only the spontaneous and powerful force of the working masses channeled into revolutionary internationalism would direct the proletariat towards true socialism.

ECONOMIZING NATIONALISM: WAS LUXEMBURG A NATIONAL NIHILIST?

Fighting a two-front war against Reformism and nationalism earned Luxemburg the labels of a radical dogmatic economist and national nihilist. Although Red Rosa rightly came to personify anti-nationalist thinking in the Second International, her ideas on nations, states, self-determination, and nationality were far more complex to be lumped into any generalized label. Her weltanschauung was indeed shaped by unshakable belief in the iron laws of economic progress (i.e., inevitable progression of the capitalist system towards breakdown); nonetheless, she did not blindly accept Marxism but rather attempted to relate the Marxist method to contemporary circumstances. Her views on the national question were not a product of economism. As both Lim and Walicki assert, it was rather the study of nationalism—and the significant threat which she believed it posed to the socialist cause—that pushed Luxemburg to withdraw into dogmatic economism. She needed to reach deep into the Marxist arsenal—and she certainly had a formidable intellectual capacity to do so—in order to combat this most threatening of socialism’s enemies. Nationalism pushed socialists into reformism, it disrupted the cohesion of socialist parties, it hindered international solidarity, it discouraged revolutionary spontaneity, and it violated the purity of the Marxist method. There was no doubt in her mind that it had to be stopped.

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458 In almost all surveys of Marxism, Luxemburgism is associated with Leftist Radicalism within the Second International. This has produced a generalized perception of Luxemburgism as dogmatic schematism—a literal interpretation of Marxism. See, for instance, McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, chapter 3.

459 This point of view was most clearly elucidated in her *Reform or Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1973 [originally published in 1900]).


461 Her writings are filled with criticism of Marx and Engels thoughts on a variety of topics. She certainly did not hide her disapproval and rejection of many of Marx’s assertions if they had been disproven by contemporary circumstances.

462 Even so, many historians emphasize Luxemburg’s economism as one of the fundamental flaws of her approach. For such an interpretation, see Löwy, *Fatherland or Mother Earth?*, 30-35.

463 Lim asserts that that her “ultra-leftist position on the national question resulted in her economism, and not vice versa.” “Rosa Luxemburg on the dialectics of Proletarian internationalism and social patriotism,” 500. Walicki argues that only in her struggle with nationalism did Luxemburg draw heavily from economism to defend her position. Andrzej Walicki, “Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism (1893-1914),” *Slavonic and East European Review* 61, no. 4 (October 1983): 565-82. A similar debate was waged on the pages of *Z Pola Walki* throughout the 1960s. Some like Feliks Tych would agree with Lim’s interpretation; others like Antoni Czubiński argued along Walicki’s line.
Foremost, an ardent believer in scientific socialism, Luxemburg skillfully applied the Marxist method to comprehend the contemporary world. Yet, to accuse her of dogmatically applying Marxism would simply be untrue. She had a formidable grasp of Marxist concepts and jargon, and did not fear to question even the most fundamental assertions of her forefathers and contemporaries. What becomes immediately apparent is that her interpretation of nationalism emerged from a broader understanding of the materialist conception of history. Economic relations were determining factors pushing forward the evolution of the capitalist system. All processes, including the emergence of nation-states were subjugated to these inevitable historical forces. Several assumptions emerged from this premise.

Luxemburg agreed with Marx and Engels that capitalism stimulated the emergence of ever-larger territorial units. This process left no room for subjective factors, which were merely temporary by-products of a given stage of the historical process. Nation-states had become one of the most prominent reflections of the capitalist phase and were destined for the dustbin of history with the advent of socialism. Yet, Luxemburg never accepted an automatic historical progress a la Plekhanov, always maintaining an activist approach to events. In Reform or Revolution she stated: “It is not true that socialism will arise automatically from the daily struggle of the working class. Socialism will be the consequence of (1) the growing contradictions of capitalist economy and (2) the comprehension by the working class of the unavoidability of the suppression of these contradictions through a social transformation.”

Nonetheless, her rejection of nationalism was heavily influenced by economic determinism. Accordingly, the tendency of political-economic progress towards centralization made the rise of small nation-states obsolete. States arose in the pre-capitalist stage to stimulate large-scale industry. The establishment of new states was therefore solely measured by their progressive contribution to the maturity of capitalism. Once capitalism matured, the demands for self-sufficiency and national independence became self-defeating. Such an outlook allowed her to completely reject independence for the Poles, while simultaneously supporting such an endeavor in the Balkans—turning a long-standing belief of Marx and Engels on its head.

In the case of Poland, “it was because three partitioned regions were integrated organically into the partitioning powers in different ways that the reconstruction of historical Poland was a utopian dream.” Such organic integration (term borrowed from Lim) would push the Polish bourgeoisie of each partitioned region (i.e., Russian, German and Austrian) to align with the capitalist interests of their respective partitioning rulers rather than with their co-nationals of different classes. This was the general premise of Luxemburg’s 1897 dissertation Industrial Development in Poland. Emancipation of peasants, elimination of customs and tariffs, and the development of railways all stimulated the integration of Congress Poland into the Russian Empire. Since both now

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464 Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution, 31 (italicized in the original).
465 Walicki rightly points out this peculiar exception in Luxemburg’s thought. “Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism (1893-1914),” 568-9. Both Kolakowski and Walicki argue that “Luxemburg’s thought was permeated by an unshakable, doctrinaire fidelity to the concept of iron historical laws that no human agency could bend or break.” Walicki, Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom, 248; Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. II, chapter 3.
466 Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution, 28-9.
467 It is ironic that Luxemburg utilized Marx and Engels’ own ideals to dismantle their views of the Balkans. Nonetheless, like her forefathers, she believed that national movements could only be measured according to their contribution to progress (in the pre-capitalist era).
468 Lim, “Rosa Luxemburg on the dialectics of Proletarian internationalism and social patriotism,” 506.
constituted important components of a single capitalist system, the breakup of this arrangement would be a step backwards for both—a regression into a pre-capitalist stage. Any call for Polish independence was not only reactionary and counterrevolutionary but it went against the historical currents, returning Poles into the hands of the backward gentry. As the above two case studies revealed, national aspirations in all instances had to be measured against the yardstick of their progressive nature prior to and during the bourgeois period.

Luxemburg believed that one of the biggest sins of Social Democrats was the acceptance of the nation-state as a venue for socialist activity. Although she occasionally acknowledged the agitational value of nationalism, she warned against the false promises of noble patriotism’s contribution to the socialist cause. In a nutshell, nationalism should never be considered an alternative socialist policy. Such an attitude reflected two important dimensions of Luxemburg’s weltanschauung.

Firstly, it highlighted an important split amongst socialists. Joseph A. Petrus argues that two distinct visions of the final revolution existed amongst the Social Democrats of the Golden Age. On the one hand were those who believed that the “world revolution described a protracted series of national class revolutions.” On the other hand, a minority with Luxemburg in the driver’s seat “bluntly asserted that the world revolution was to be just that—one simultaneous international coup directed by the international socialist leaders and the masses against the ‘world system of capitalism.’” She seemed to be premising, “as Petrus rightly concludes, “some kind of universalist, capitalist development and arguing in favor of a socialist revolution which would be one simultaneous international event”—a single, international (i.e., non-national) coup. The final stage of capitalism was the world market and an international proletariat. A worldwide socialist revolution was the ultimate goal and a class-conscious proletariat was its harbinger. Reformism had to be rejected for it misdirected the final goal of the socialist movement. Reform-oriented social democratic movements could never deliver the complete transformation of society that a revolution would provide. “Any struggle for reform,” as Luxemburg asserted, “that was not subordinated to the coming revolution was a hindrance rather than a help to socialism, whatever its immediate outcome might be.”

The emphasis on the ultimate goal coincided with a profound belief in the power of internationalism and of the working classes—the international proletariat fundamentalism. The Polish case study is most insightful in elucidating this line of thinking. According to Luxemburg, with the advent of capitalism at the turn of the 20th century, the pan-European revolution no longer required Poland’s revolutionary zeal against Russia, which ceased to be a bastion of reactionary ideals. “Russian Tsardom,” she asserted, “derives neither its inner strength nor its

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external significance from the subjugation of Poland.”474 The Polish working class’ new ally was the Russian proletariat, while (Polish and Russian) bourgeoisie became their common enemy. Polish nationalism, a feudal ideal promoted by the gentry and appropriated by the bourgeoisie, had no hold amongst the working classes.475 The duty of the Polish proletariat thus was to reject political nationalism in order to safeguard the purity of their class-consciousness in preparation for a worldwide revolution.476 On a broader scale, Luxemburg believed that “class consciousness could exist separately from and untainted by national consciousness and that the working class could fulfill its historical mission without becoming a ‘national class’.477 Such blind belief in the power of working-class solidarity was almost unparalleled in the Second International. Although she intermittently recognized the national features of a worker’s identity, she asserted that the working-class components of their consciousness would prevail. Moreover, according to Nettl, Luxemburg believed “in the importance of the [Second] International, not merely as a confederate gathering of autonomous parties, but as a supreme law-making body for that growing section of the world which represented Socialism and the future.”478 The Second International and not nationalism was to be the flag-bearer and prophet of the masses.

Secondly, assuming nation-states to be a by-product of capitalism, Luxemburg made a sweeping conclusion that all of the appendages of nationalism were nothing more than bourgeois constructs. Given this materialist framework, the national question was completely irrelevant to socialist strategy in a world dominated by the globalization of capital (i.e., imperialism).479 Nationalism could never assist the revolutionary forces in bringing down the capitalist system. Consistent with such vantage point, Luxemburg assumed that any other pathways like self-determination (or Reformism) were distractions, which offered illusory and erroneous alternatives. National liberation (or parliamentary reform) expressed the interests of a particular group (associated with the bourgeoisie) and not the whole of society.480 Acquisition of statehood (or parliamentary successes) could never resolve the more pressing social oppression. Moreover, as encapsulated in the breakdown theory, capitalism contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction (given its inability to expand indefinitely), so giving credence to national forms, even for strategic purposes, was a waste of time.481 Using state mechanisms to reform capitalism amounted to conciliation at best and betrayal of socialist ideals at worst. Eliminating socio-economic oppression and promoting the interests of the working class were simply not compatible with nationalism or self-determination. No form of

474 Luxemburg, “The Polish Question at the International Congress in London (Jul 1896),” in The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg, 52-3. She continuously admonished Marx and Engels as well as several of the leaders of the Second International for blindly supporting Poland’s independence.
475 In 1905, Luxemburg argued that there was a misconception in western Europe about the national cause in the ranks of the Polish proletariat: “Socialists abroad were misled into believing that the entire Polish labor movement regarded the restoration of Poland as their programmatic demand, a demand no longer even subject to the question, and on this basis expressed their support of it.” The Polish Question and the Socialist Movement (1905), in The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg, 69.
476 These ideas were expressed in both The National Question and Autonomy and The Polish Question and the Socialist Movement, in The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg, 60-289.
477 Walicki, “Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism (1893-1914),” 571.
479 This lay at the center of the polemics between Luxemburg and Lenin on the strategic application of the concept of self-determination.
480 Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution, 23-35.
liberation—of nations (or women\(^{482}\)—could eliminate the much more destructive and appalling economic
exploitation of the masses. Imperialism or national oppression could not be stopped without the abolition of
capitalist relations of production.\(^{483}\) Only the overthrow of the entire system of oppression would provide full
emancipation. Hence, promoting any abstract rights (in the realm of gender or nationhood) would simply be
offering false hope.

Like Marx and Engels, Luxemburg opposed the notion of universal rights. She explained her position in
*The National Question and Autonomy*:

> the duty of the class party of the proletariat to protest and resist national oppression arises not from
any special ‘right of nations,’ just as, for example, its striving for the social and political equality
of sexes does not at all result from any special ‘rights of women’ which the movement of
bourgeois emancipationists refers to. This duty arises solely from the general opposition to the
class regime and to every form of social inequality and social domination, in a word, from the
basic position of socialism.\(^{484}\)

She concluded that the right of nations was nothing more than a metaphysical cliché, and that dialectical materialism
had broken such eternal formulae by showing that there are no eternal truths and no rights.\(^{485}\) Thus, her famous
assertion that “the ‘right’ of a nation to freedom as well as the ‘right’ of the workers to economic independence are,
under existing social conditions, only worth as much as the ‘right’ of each man to eat off gold plates.”\(^{486}\) No group
of people could arbitrarily, through their will, break the laws of progress. At the London Congress in 1896,
Luxemburg fought the Polish delegation, which wanted the Second International to acknowledge the importance of
Poland’s self-determination. She cynically argued: “the international proletariat is presumably supposed to run up
the red flag with its own hand, on the nationalist edifice, and so consecrate it as a temple of internationalism.”\(^{487}\)
Although successful in suppressing the specific demand for Polish independence, she was unable to stop the
International from making a general declaration against national oppression. A few years later, she warned that such
declarations should not move beyond sympathy, calling “the workers of all such [oppressed] nations to enter the
ranks of international socialism as the only remedy for national oppression.”\(^{488}\) Not national self-determination but
rather class self-determination, not the establishment of independent states but international socialist revolution, not
the will of a nation but rather class interests, would ensure the road to socialist victory.

**Nationalism versus Nationality: How Rosa Luxemburg Learned to Accept the National Question.**

Given her consistent negation of everything national, why is she not deserving of the label of a national
nihilist? Kołakowski rightly points out that Luxemburg “was frequently blind to the empirical reality of social
events and showed an extraordinary lack of political understanding in regard to national questions.”\(^{489}\) Yet, as Lim
argues, following the 1905 Russian Revolution, Luxemburg underwent a transformation, moving away from rigid

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\(^{482}\) Similarly to nationalism, Luxemburg rejected feminism as a viable goal of socialism. She did not believe that a
women’s movement would be capable of liberating women without the broader socialist revolution.

\(^{483}\) Luxemburg, *The Polish Question and the Socialist Movement* (1905), 85; the same ideas are emphasized by
Bronner, *A Revolutionary for Our Times*, 86.

\(^{484}\) Luxemburg, *The National Question and Autonomy*, 110.

\(^{485}\) Luxemburg, *The National Question and Autonomy*, 111.

\(^{486}\) Luxemburg, *The National Question and Autonomy*, 123.

\(^{487}\) Luxemburg, “The Polish Question at the International Congress in London (Jul 1896),” 57.

\(^{488}\) Luxemburg, *The Polish Question and the Socialist Movement*, 73.

economism towards recognition of national culture and eventually accepting autonomy as a viable solution to the national question.\footnote{Lim argues that due to the struggle with the PPS, Luxemburg could never promote independence for Poland but that arriving at complete autonomy was quite a significant shift in her ideological perception of nationalism. “Rosa Luxemburg on the dialectics of Proletarian internationalism and social patriotism.”} Krzysztof Jaskułkowski disagrees, claiming that such ideas were nothing more than economism disguised.\footnote{“Róża Łuksemburg o narodzie i kulturze narodowej,” in Naród – Tożsamość – Kultura. Między kiecznością a wyborem, ed. Wojciech Józef Burszty, Krzysztof Jaskułkowski and Joanna Nowak (Warszawa: Sławistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy, 2005), 275-284.} Nonetheless, the latter’s interpretation does not fully account for Luxemburg’s affinity for national culture, differentiation between nation and nationality, and her acceptance of complete autonomy.

In her correspondence with friends, lovers and comrades in arms, Luxemburg revealed sensitivity to national cultures.\footnote{See, for instance, her candid attitudes expressed in private correspondence with Leo Jogiches—a long-time political partner and lover. Elżbieta Ettinger, Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg’s Letters to Leo Jogiches (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979).} She was keenly aware of the consequences of national oppression, for both the broader socialist movement and the individual worker. Walking the tightrope between the (oftentimes not so subtle) chauvinism of her German co-workers and national politics (in the Polish and Russian contexts), all while promoting workers’ solidarity and the primacy of revolutionary aims, pushed her to take more radical positions than she might otherwise have chosen. It is equally important that her fierce attacks on nationalism were not solely a product of tactics (against the PPS and other patriotic socialists) or of Marxist fundamentalism. Recognizing the power of nationalism, she wanted not so much to harness its power for ideological or strategic reasons, but rather to distinguish between its cultural and political dimensions. The cultural life of a nation had a viable existence, especially in the arts or literature. The political life of a nation, on the other hand, was an extension or category of bourgeois machinations. The capitalists merely presented their own class interests as those of the masses. There was a subtle but nonetheless important distinction: Luxemburg was anti-nationalist not anti-nationality.\footnote{Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 84-5.}

Nationalism, nations and nation-states were all dimensions of bourgeois politics, at a particular stage in the capitalist development. This starting point produced a fundamental error in Luxemburg's philosophy: everything political had to be bourgeois, and therefore had to be rejected.\footnote{In many ways, even Marx and Engels had given somewhat more credence to politics than Luxemburg.} Nationality, on the other hand, was related to ethnicity and its cultural, linguistic and literary representations. In their apolitical forms, these could become the true reflections of nationalities. From this perspective, Luxemburg was not afraid to show affinity for national arts and literature, especially those of Poland, which were closest to her heart.\footnote{Throughout her life, she praised Adam Mickiewicz’s work. Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. I, 52-3.} She acknowledged that capitalism did not create national cultures in a vacuum, but rather within a territory, in a specific setting, in a particular language, and based in certain traditions. Nonetheless, national unity in a political sense was a farce as nations were composed of different classes, each with its own set of interests.\footnote{Luxemburg, The National Question and Autonomy, 135-7.} Nationalism meant different things to different classes and so there could be no talk of a collective and uniform will of the nation, or self-determination of the nation.

Whilst Luxemburg always framed the struggle against national oppression in the broader context of fighting capitalism (in Germany) or absolutism (in Russia), she insisted on democracy for each group within multiethnic settings. Foremost, she believed that socialist parties offered the best protection to minorities—they...
could safeguard a minority’s language and culture against the centralizing and coercive forces of governments. Yet, working to abolish national oppression and promoting free cultural development while simultaneously refusing to support self-determination was no easy task. For example, she worked to forge socialist unity between Polish and German workers, but lamented that many established Western European socialists did not distinguish between integration and assimilation.\(^\text{497}\) While calling for the PPS to follow SPD’s lead, she had to pressure the Germans to work harder at protecting Polish culture and language against Prussian chauvinism. At one point, she even had to answer a charge of insulting a minister in her pamphlet “In Defence of Polish Nationality.”\(^\text{498}\) Since national culture had a class character (i.e., national program of the proletariat), stimulating workers’ class-consciousness, “equality before law for nationalities and political organizations, and the assurance of national cultural development” was acceptable.\(^\text{499}\) Independence was certainly not a viable option for nationalities, but could autonomy ensure the preservation of ethnic identities?

Viable national cultures—and here Luxemburg wholeheartedly moved step-in-step with Marx and Engels’ categorization of historic and non-historic peoples—could receive autonomy (i.e., regional or local self-government) if they demonstrated the required material conditions: “its own bourgeois development, urban life, intelligentsia, its own literary and scholarly life.”\(^\text{500}\) Lim even argues that Luxemburg moved far beyond national-cultural autonomy, which her Austrian comrades proposed, towards a position of autonomy, especially in the Polish question. However, what must always be emphasized is that autonomy only denoted administrative divisions. In essence, “communal, district, provincial self-government [would] make it possible for each nationality, by means of a majority decision in the organs of local administration, to establish its schools and cultural institutions in those districts or communes where it possesses numerical preponderance.”\(^\text{501}\) Cultural distinctiveness was acceptable; it was even permissible to exist in an autonomous form. However, independence was out of the question and even autonomy was supposed to be merely a temporary solution to facilitate class warfare.\(^\text{502}\) Her version of autonomy never accepted the right to political independence, even if only in a federalist form.\(^\text{503}\) Its primary aim was to promote the establishment of large territorial units and the spread of capitalism, and it would always be measured according to its contribution to the advancement of socialism.

The Great War pushed Luxemburg to the edge of Marxist fundamentals. In her 1916 *Junius Pamphlet*, she finally recognized the right of national self-determination as a temporary strategy in response to the conditions created by the Great War. “International socialism,” she asserted, “recognizes the right of free independent nations, with equal rights.” Yet, she quickly qualified such support:


\(^{499}\) Luxemburg, *The National Question and Autonomy*, 175. Autonomy would only be afforded to those peoples who have progressed to the capitalist stage. Those like the Latvians would not be afforded this privilege.

\(^{500}\) Luxemburg, *The National Question and Autonomy*, 265.


\(^{502}\) Jaskułkowski, “Róża Luksemburg o narodzie i kulturze narodowej,” 284.

\(^{503}\) Davis actually argues that Luxemburg allowed for the possibility of a federation. *The National Question*, 11. However, affinity for large territorial units combined with autonomy should not be equated to federalism. Luxemburg never directly came out in support of the federated model for Poland, Russia or Austria. And she was highly critical of Austrian socialists for promoting such ideas.
But socialism alone can create such nations, can bring self-determination of their peoples. This slogan of socialism is like all its others, not an apology for existing conditions, but a guidepost, a spur for the revolutionary, regenerative, active policy of the proletariat. So long as capitalist states exist, i.e., so long as imperialistic world policies determine and regulate the inner and the outer life of a nation, there can be no ‘national self-determination’ either in war or in peace.\(^{504}\)

To an extent, she had reached a point which Marx and Engels accepted in the 1860s. She recognized the distinct features of nationalism as viable elements in a revolutionary strategy for some nationalities. Although using nationalism for tactical reasons became tolerable, it still amounted to playing with fire. Even during the Great War, Luxemburg still retained the core belief that nationalism was only acceptable in its class-oriented form and only when supporting the advancement of socialism. Although she remained weary of nationalism for the rest of her life, many other socialists began to look at nationalism not as socialism’s main enemy.

**SOLVING THE NATIONALITY PROBLEM: ASTRO-MARXISM AND CULTURAL SOLUTIONS TO THE NATIONALITY QUESTION.**

Class-based solidarity certainly faced a challenging context east of the Elbe. These circumstances produced not only the most ardent critics of nationalism such as Rosa Luxemburg, but also its most creative supporters such as Otto Bauer and Karl Renner. Once again, the realities of life in Eastern and East Central Europe were a critical ingredient. The Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires were conglomerates of multiple ethnicities, national groups, regional diversities, and shifting class structures. The proletariat of these eclectic empires faced complex socio-economic and ethnic cleavages, which hindered socialist organizational unity and effective party policy.\(^{505}\) By the early 1900s in Austria-Hungary, the nationality problem had been pulling apart the monarchy for over a century. As one historian aptly explains: “it had reduced almost all public questions to national prejudices.”\(^{506}\) Cries for self-determination sounded from every corner of the empire. The establishment of dualism in 1867, giving preeminence to the Hungarians and Austrians in their respective halves, did not strengthen the tottering Great Power. To the contrary, it exacerbated the tensions and centrifugal forces that threatened its unity. At best, Vienna’s relations with Budapest denoted mutual mistrust. The Hungarian calls for independence were held at bay only by the Monarchy’s threat of extending the vote, which would have considerably weakened the position of the Magyar nobility vis-à-vis the various minorities within the borders of the Crown of St. Stephen. By the late 19th century, the ineffectiveness of the Taaffe and Badeni governments revealed the parliamentary deadlock resulting from negotiation and compromise with national interests.\(^{507}\) Vienna’s strategy of playing one nationality against another worked in the first half of the

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century but was no longer a reliable strategy. Each ethnic group’s ability to manipulate the Reichsrat put the empire in a straitjacket of political paralysis.

The gradual extension of the electoral franchise (leading to full universal suffrage in 1906) and widespread industrialization in the Austrian half of the empire produced both a supply of workers and an intellectual socialist elite. Socialist moderates (usually coming from liberalism), led by Viktor Adler, managed to fuse the leftist and rightist tendencies into a single Social Democratic party. However, unifying proletarians of various national stripes into a single working-class organization, all while operating in the shadow of the mighty SPD, was a daunting task. This obsession with preserving unity of the movement guided many of the party’s policies. From its inception in 1889 at Hainfeld, “it fought to maintain its precarious unity as an international party representing the various national elements in the western half of the Austro-Hungarian empire,” as Vincent J. Knapp explains, while confronting “national dissent, political fragmentations and open poverty.” Following Marx’s footsteps, the party’s commitment to internationalism was front and center. Nonetheless, the organization’s leaders quickly realized that unlike their Western comrades, they could not afford to dismiss the nationality question. Yet, while overemphasis on international solidarity could alienate the rank and file, self-determination would only lead to a division of the vast territories into small and unviable statelets. A middle ground between self-deterministic nationalism and internationalism had to be found to attenuate separatist voices. Many Austro-Marxists “came to the conclusion that a settlement of the nationalities problem was the prerequisite of social and political progress in Austria.” Paradoxically, the “party opposed on principle to the existing state and society began to work out programs of reconstruction for this very state.”

**AUSTRIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: ACCOMMODATING THE HABSBURG EMPIRE’S ETHNIC MOSAIC.**

Although a comprehensive examination of Austro-Marxists is outside the scope of this study, a cursory assessment of their distinct outlook is warranted. Leading socialists in Austria—including Max Adler, Otto Bauer, Karl Renner and Rudolf Hilferding—began to look at Marxism as a social science based on historical and sociological investigation. Through the prism of rigorous empirical study, influenced by positivism, and responding to the peculiarities of the Austro-Hungarian realities, they engaged in a dialogue with neo-Kantians and essentialists, trying to expand Marxism into new realms. “They wanted to take account,” as Tom Bottomore explains, “of new conceptions in epistemology and the philosophy of science, and to engage in empirical investigations of new social phenomena.” Moreover, as Nimni points out, they “rejected at the political level the dichotomy reform-revolution

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508 For example, granting autonomy to the Polish nobility in Galicia in return for their support in the central parliament, while simultaneously playing on the Ruthenian-Polish strife over political and economic privileges to keep both ethnic groups in line.


as exhausting all categories of political activity.”

A discussion over reform or revolution did not adequately respond to the realities of oppression and exploitation that confronted the inhabitants of the multiethnic state. The national question quickly became one of the central facets of Austro-Marxian thinking and analysis.

In a genuine attempt to eradicate national intolerance, national privileges and national cleavages, the party reorganized its structure in 1897 along a federalist framework. According to this administrative decentralization, the six dominant national groups—Czechs, Germans, Poles, Italians, Slovenes and Ukrainians—would have complete autonomy and would be bound together through the executive committee, a shared party program, and biannual congresses. The demands of the member nationalities had been temporarily satisfied. Yet, as the turn of the century approached, it became more and more apparent that for many Austrian socialists, especially those who felt nationally oppressed, “internationalism had as its basic presupposition nationalism.” Moreover, the character of the Habsburg Empire pushed the Austro-Marxist brand of socialism in the direction rarely taken by Marxists in Western Europe. Given the growing complexity of society, they began to “depict a whole social process of development [my emphasis] in which economic, political, and ideological elements were interwoven, however much the economic changes might be seen as preponderant.” From such a perspective, it was natural to begin treating nationalism as a somewhat independent force. Witnessing how national hatred was ripping apart the empire (e.g., Badeni’s language ordinances) and causing strife within the party (e.g., between the Czechs and Germans), the executive committee began to push for a remedy.

The All-Austrian Social Democratic Congress (Gesamtparteitag) at Brno (Brünn) in 1899 offered a comprehensive program that once and for all would resolve national strife in the empire. Three distinct solutions were proposed: the class reductionism position a la Luxemburg, rejecting everything national; the personality principle with emphasis on cultural institutions (initially developed by Renner but presented by a Slovenian); and the transformation of Austria into a democratic federation of autonomous national states. Although the third variable was eventually adopted, the central tenets of the resolution were disputed due to conflicting national interests. For example, most Slavs rejected the use of German as the official language and were vexed over the program’s awkward silence on matters relating to economic affairs, especially given the nature of the movement. Nonetheless, all agreed on decentralized national autonomy along territorial lines as the best prescription to accommodate the empire’s ethnic mosaic, and all compromised on the legislative and administrative functions of each autonomous nationality. In more immediate and pragmatic terms, the party had swayed the rising tide of nationalism within its own ranks, at least for the time being. More importantly, the debates at Brno revealed not only that some socialists were not willing to delay solving the national question until the victory of socialism, but also

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518 Nimni, *Marxism and Nationalism*, 127-8; Kogan, “The Social Democrats and the Conflict of Nationalities in the Habsburg Monarchy,” 207-11. For a full text of the original and revised resolution, see Kogan.
519 Economic inequality was after all a product not only of bourgeois exploitation but also of national oppression. The Czechs wanted to discuss this reality and develop a party policy but the German-speaking leadership was reluctant to provide a solution that would so closely relate national and socio-economic issues.
520 Kogan argues that the Austrian socialists followed the heritage of political thought—continuing the discussion over Austrian federalism—that could be traced right back to the Kremsier Constitution. Kogan, “The Social Democrats and the Conflict of Nationalities in the Habsburg Monarchy,” 212.
that there was a rich harvest of socialist attitudes on the nationality question. Such Austro-Marxist responses to nationalism have been associated with the thought of two men who wanted to find a way to save their multiethnic homeland: Karl Renner and Otto Bauer.

**Karl Renner: Personality Principle and the Peaceful Transition to Socialism.**

Karl Renner came to the study of nationalism from his interest in the social functions of law. He refused to regard laws as a reflection of economic conditions and “wanted to extend his inquiry in a sociological direction by investigating how the same legal norms could change their functions in response to changes in society.”\(^{521}\) He moved away from Marxist economism and reducibility of the forms of the social, asserting that the study of superstructural phenomena such as nationalism had value, especially in the Austrian context. Realizing the need for “proper constitutional and legal regulation of the position of the various nationalities in the Empire,”\(^{522}\) he believed that the best solution was to establish autonomous communities that would be “organized as sovereign collectives whatever their residential location within a multinational state.”\(^{523}\) This *personality principle* labeled territorial exclusivity as the most destructive dimension of modern nationalism.\(^{524}\) In his various works on the subject matter, Renner argued that territorial self-determination should be replaced with individual (i.e., personal) cultural self-determination. What were the roots of this approach and how did Renner envision it in practice?

Foremost, Renner was no revolutionary. His belief in the democratic process denoted a peaceful transition to socialism. The Habsburg Empire, if properly transformed, could become the midwife of the socialist utopia without bloodshed. More broadly speaking, he believed that “a socialist society would develop as the workers gained more control over state institutions and as the proletariat succeeded more and more in obliging capital to perform public functions.”\(^{525}\) Following this prerogative, he emphasized democracy and individual consent, with law as a fundamental regulating force in the life of a citizen. He wanted “to define the principles of a resolution of the nationalities question based on the rule of law.”\(^{526}\) “A lasting solution,” Renner contended in his *State and Nation*:

> is only possible by means of substantive laws, that is, by means of provisions which grant the citizens of a particular nationality as well as the nations subjective public rights with a quite specific subject matter, but do not constitute rule of conduct for the authorities. An exact specification of the holder and content of these rights is the essential juridical question.\(^{527}\)

He allotted each individual personal choice in determining their identity, especially their national association. “Nothing,” he asserted, “other than the free declaration of nationality by the individual before the competent authority can determine national affiliation. The individual’s right to self-determination constitutes the correlate of the nation’s right to self-determination.”\(^{528}\) Essentially, nationality was a component of every individual’s


\(^{524}\) Many historians have wrongly argued in the past that Renner accepted the territorial solution to the nationality problem. For example, Alfred D. Low erroneously asserts that Renner wanted to ensure national autonomy for Austria’s nationalities through the territorial principle. Alfred D. Low, “Otto Bouer, Socialist theoretician of Nationalism, and his Critics,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 22, No. 1-2 (1995): 104-5.


\(^{527}\) Renner, “State and Nation,” 19.

\(^{528}\) Renner, “State and Nation,” 20.
personality—merely a willingness to identify with a specific group. National groups, thus, were to be perceived as juridical persons. But what qualities or characteristics would define a nation?

Renner did not believe that qualities such as language or territory were the most appropriate determinants of nationality. After all, Jews constituted a nation without speaking a single language. Similarly, Renner’s abhorrence of the association of nationality and territory remained one of the most striking and consistent characteristics of his work. It exemplified the worst of what modernity had generated. The link between nation and state could “never produce compromise and equal rights: it [could] only produce struggle and oppression, because its essence is domination.”  

Nationalist sentiment could be considered as something positive, but it was trapped in the modern contraption of the nation-state. He concluded that the political constellation of the state was anti-national. In *The Development of the National Idea*, Renner even contended that there was a natural process of separation of nation from state. Like church, nation could (and should) be separated from state. Nationality or national affiliation was to be based on the more embracing notion of *culture* as each ethnic group was entitled to its own cultural development. “The nation,” he reasoned, “is a cultural community,” so personal national-cultural autonomy was the best solution: “The personality rather than the territorial principle should form the basis of regulation; the nations should be constituted not as territorial entities but as personal associations, not as states but as peoples, not according to age-old constitutional laws, but according to living national laws.”

Such personal association could be applied effectively in either a highly centralized system or one with much autonomy. In the decade before the outbreak of the Great War, Renner worked on the application of national cultural autonomy in Austria—on the organizational principles that could permanently resolve the nationality problem.

In the Austrian case, Renner asserted, the territorial principle would be relegated to merely an organizational principle, arranging the nationalities according to geographical density of settlement. He proposed a dual system. On the one side, the country would be reorganized ethnically, giving national autonomy to each of the eight main ethnic groups. He hoped to arm each nationality with control over its cultural life, especially education, literature and art. On the other side, Renner wanted to resolve economic disparities by creating a two-tiered system of autonomous Gubernia and super-Gubernia. Culture (in national forms) and economics would be completely separated. Hovering over this dual framework would be a democratic constitutional monarchy, a mediating force responsible for the smooth operation of the country and its foreign policy. This structure would eradicate both national hatred and economic inequalities first in Austria and then in Hungary, eliminating the need for self-determination.

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532 Waldenberg, *Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 260-2; Knapp, *Austrian Social Democracy*, 96-99. Waldenberg argues that this structure reveals Renner’s instrumentalist approach to the nationality question is not fully convincing. But I do agree with his assertion, which has oftentimes been ascribed to Renner, that he was not a German nationalist. He did envision the use of the German language as the communication medium of the central government, but such a pragmatic position certainly did not denote chauvinism. He merely pointed out that communication would be facilitated through a common language.
533 Such an approach was highly problematic as economic disparities were quite extensive throughout the empire. And many nationalities would refuse to give up economic control over their livelihood. Renner believed that these inequalities would be rapidly eliminated once the system was in place.
Although there was willingness to accept his ideas in the Austrian case, Hungary was an altogether different phenomenon. There were startling differences between the two halves of the empire, which Renner seemed to dismiss. Contrary to most of his Social Democratic comrades, he maintained a naive belief that the general principles he proposed for Austria could be eventually applied in Hungary as well. He maintained such an attitude even though the Austrian SDP had officially accepted the line that separation from Hungary was the best option for Austria already in 1903. In all his treatises on the nationality question, the future president of Austria proved himself a Marxist in spirit but not in form. As Waldenberg and Nimni aptly point out, Renner’s pragmatic framework never really subordinated the national question to the interests of the working class. This would become the momentous task of his friend, Otto Bauer.

**OTTO BAUER: CULTURAL NATIONAL AUTONOMY AND THE REJECTION OF TERRITORIAL SELF-DETERMINATION.**

Like many Austro-Marxists of German persuasion, Bauer’s writings offered a solution to the nationality problems that would preserve the Austro-Hungarian Empire and eliminate the need for territorial self-determination. But rather than merely outlining constitutional or legal prescriptions, he wanted to understand the process of national formation, and the affinity between nation and state. He accepted that the conquest of power by the working class through gradual reform and the establishment of socialist institutions required the framework of a state. However, was statehood the only or the best reflection of nationalist aspirations? Did each nation need a state? Should each state constitute a single nation? Bauer believed that the desire for a nation-state was a product of 19th century mercantile capitalism, which continuously worked to unite and differentiate.

On the one hand, the drive for self-determination and casting off foreign rule offered benefits to the elites of a nationality, thus eliciting demands from ever-smaller groups of peoples. Simultaneously, on the other hand, capitalism pushed people together into larger territorial units. This dual process could generate a number of equally viable results, not necessarily—as many nationalists proclaimed—leading towards the nationality principle of statehood. Moreover, Bauer asserted that the poor rap-sheet that nationalism had hitherto received in Marxist thought was a result of the bourgeoisie’s ability to identify the bourgeois state with the nation. The elites had simply appropriated nationalism to which workers had equal mandate. On the whole, as Bauer asserted, “not only will nations not disappear with the abolition of class societies, but the very consummation for the socialist project will require an expansion and differentiation of national communities.” Hence, the task for Bauer was three-fold: firstly, to clearly define the phenomenon of nationalism through the prism of Marxism; secondly, to elucidate the evolution of national formation; and thirdly, to prove that socialism could and should appropriate nationalism’s cultural norms.

Bauer defined the nation as “the totality of men bound together through a common destiny [(also translated as a community of fate)] into a community of character.” In his worldview, individuals constituted several expressions of societalised existence, and national affiliation was merely one of these representations of social

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535 See, for instance, Waldenberg, *Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 264.
536 Kołakowski claims that Bauer’s work “is the most important Marxist study in this field [of nationalism], and it based on a shrewd historical analysis.” *Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. II*, 285.
reality. Like Renner, Bauer refused to simplify nationalism to a list of empirical characteristics. Instead, he understood it as a process of cultural identification in the construction of an individual’s personality. What is important is that as an element in the formation of personality, national character was never a fixed and static phenomenon but rather a product of continuously modifying historical forces (or more broadly speaking, mutual determinations). It was a “constantly recurring process of identity formation in which the historical conditions of the struggle for existence were mediated through shared culture (cultural intercourse) and shared heredity (natural exchange).” The past and the present interacted to repeatedly reshape the national character.

Mark E. Blum argues that Bauer purposely developed a flexible framework of nationalism’s adaptability as it compensated for the introduction of new elements into the national community. In other words, if the nation is continuously being reformulated, hitherto excluded groups could be brought (or assimilated) into the fold of the nation. Blum contends that Bauer was trying to bring Jews into the German national community. As a cultural chauvinist, he believed that the German Kultur was supreme and offered all the political and economic fruits that anyone could offer. Waldenberg agrees with the latter assertion but argues (more accurately) that Bauer began to move towards this interpretation only after 1910, when he realized how nationalism could tear apart Austrian Social Democracy. Bauer certainly was not attempting to somehow justify his Jewish heritage in the context of German culture. Rather, he wanted to explain why nations could successfully redefine their community’s membership by continuously assimilating various distinct groups. He offered not assimilation, but rather an alternative—a civic identity that would effectively operate in a pluralistic society. Each individual could simply determine which nationality he or she was willing to join (for their personal reasons).

Nationality was not merely a group of people of the same heredity or some sort of a mysterious essence. Rather, it was the “concrete expression of the existence of the national community in each individual member of the nation,” arising “in a given structure of perceptions and cognitions.” In an organic sense, the national community was an organism that grew and evolved depending on its past experiences and its contemporary living conditions. Bauer discounted any predestined course for national development and argued that the community of fate “did not imply subjection to the same destiny but rather it suggested the shared experience of living the same fate through ongoing communication and interaction.” This communication occurred through various mediums: language, traditions, values, etc. Given that nations had no rights, only persons did, Bauer rejected self-determination of nations as an adequate explanation of nationality formation or as a viable goal for communities. It neither ensured rights of groups (under sovereignty or statehood, especially in large multiethnic territorial units that capitalism produced) nor explained how each individual willingly joined one national community or another. Only culture and personal cultural identification (expressing the national community) offered a comprehensive

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543 Bauer made a point of rejecting existing theory of the nation: spiritual, materialist, voluntarist and empirical.
understanding of nationality. A nation was foremost a cultural community of individuals who became members of the community willingly and consciously.

In his attempt to understand the evolution of national formation, Bauer struggled with the Marxist conception of historical change. On the one hand, he was a devoted Marxist and placed capitalism at the center of the historical process in modern times. Capitalism seemed to grease the wheels of national formation. In a somewhat epiphenomenalist manner, Bauer perceived nationalism’s linear evolution as corresponding to economic development. But on the other hand, he broke away from assimilationist teleology. Capitalism’s globalizing nature had produced large territorial units and assimilated countless people into ever-larger states. At the same time, as Bauer pointed out, capitalism also divided peoples. And it is here that Marxism effectively discounted Marx and Engels’ debasing of the non-historical peoples. Capitalism had awakened the non-historical nations to historical life regardless of whether they had ever possessed a high culture. Industrialization created new connections between people, stimulating the emergence of new or the widening of established cultural communities. Thus, nationalism and the accompanying “national hate had their source in the conditions of the struggle for existence, the class struggle.” In other words, “national hatred was a form of transformed class hatred.” National and class oppression were intrinsically interwoven. Czech workers resented German factory workers, while German workers resented cheap Czech labour. Since the proletarian identity was “forged in at least two communities of character, the nation and class,” socialism’s main task should not only be to reconcile the two aspects but also to move ahead and appropriate nationalism for the social cause.

Bauer was confident that the socialist heaven on earth would be achieved in the nation-state. He believed that the aim of each person in the modern age was to become a full member of a national community, which could protect their cultural and economic well-being. Socio-economic inequality and national hatred emerged from the same root cause: the inability of people to participate in their community. “People had a right to participate in the national culture,” as Forman explains, “and it was only socialism, understood as the rational democratization of every aspect of collective life, that would guarantee this right.” Witnessing the strength of nationalism, Bauer knew that Social Democrats could not remain indifferent to the national project.

Since nations would not disappear after the collapse of capitalism, mastering nationalism was that much more important. Contrary to accepted socialist thought, Bauer claimed that “socialism not only does not obliterate national differences but reinforces and develops them by bringing culture to the masses and making the national idea the property of everyone.” Personal cultural autonomy as promoted by socialists would ensure that all willing, self-proclaimed members of a national community could fully participate in the life of that community. And they would do so under the banner of Marxism. Bauer asserted that “only socialism will give the whole people a share in

547 The one-dimensional evolutionism which Bauer presents has stimulated some debate amongst specialists. Nimni sees this as a major weakness of Bauer’s work on nationalism. Forman, on the other hand, asserts that Bauer had to give some credence to Marxist determinism. Nimni, *Marxism and Nationalism*, 177-8; Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement*, 103.
551 Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement*, 106
the national culture." In a natural and orderly fashion, smaller peoples would readily identify with a larger national community:

With the uprooting of the population through social production, and the development of the nation into a homogeneous community of education, labour, and culture, the more circumscribed local associations will lose their vigour, while the bond which unites all members of the nation will become increasingly strong.

Through a “revolution in the consciousness of the masses,” Bauer explained, “the narrow local associations within the nation become weaker, the national cultural community embraces more closely the people as a whole, and the national community becomes for them a certain and unalterable fact.” Nationalism would become the living experience of socialism. And in its socialist form, nationalism would give people not only full membership in a cultural community, but would also give them control over the conditions of their existence (i.e., over the means of production).

Bauer fully agreed with Renner that the federal structure was the optimal framework for this national project. Each person would simply declare their nationality to become a full member of a community, regardless of their territory of residence. Cultural autonomy would rid the world of the need for the nationality principle (of the state). “While socialist society gradually constructs above the national community a federal state in which the communities of the individual nations are once again incorporated,” as Bauer concluded, “the principle of nationality changes into that of national autonomy, from a rule for the formation of states into a rule of the state constitution.” Culture would provide the framework for the democratization of everyday political and socio-economic existence. Each national community would cut across territorial lines, ensuring the preservation of every member’s cultural rights. In a federation, each nationality would have “a right to legislate and to administer itself, [as well as the] power to dispose over the means and the product of labour [and] military power.” By placing emphasis on culture, Social Democracy would “support the recovery of cultural goods that had been taken from working people [and would link] human emancipation to the development of cultural forms and through it the free development of all.” But would this promotion of national differences not stimulate national antagonisms?

Bauer definitely envisioned socialism as reinforcing national differences. Yet, this would bring culture to the masses and make “the national idea the property of everyone.” As Kolakowski explains Bauer’s thought, this would not lead to national hatred or oppression: “On the contrary, national hatred is a distorted form of class hatred, and national oppression is a function of social oppression. Hence the working class, fighting against all oppression, fights national oppression too, and in bringing about a socialist society it destroys the conditions that might revive national enmity and conflicts of national interest.” If nations were to be granted freedom in the organization of their cultural life, why should they be refused to do so in their own territory? Bauer believed that the struggle for

554 Bauer, The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy, 110.
555 Bauer, The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy, 110.
556 Bauer, The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy, 111.
558 Bauer, The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy, 117.
559 Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 109. Waldenberg argues that Bauer continuously claimed that the Austrian Social Democracy carries the best and only real national politics. Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej, 270.
560 Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. II, 286.
561 Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. II, 287.
statehood was “harmful to socialism because it linked the workers with bourgeoisie.” Here lays one of Bauer and Renner’s (as well as Luxemburg’s) central oversights: they underestimated the need for territorial identification. For the two Austro-Marxist ideologues, cultural identification via the personal principle in a decentralized federation was to satisfy all the patriotic desires of the nationalities, while for the latter, administrative autonomy would meet all national aspirations until socialism would eliminate it altogether.

CONCLUDING REMARKS TO PART II: NATIONALISM DEFEATS SOCIAL DEMOCRACY.

After witnessing the workers’ enthusiastic response to the call to arms in 1914, and after much reflection on the causes of the war and the aims of the various belligerents, Bernstein deplored socialism’s definitive turn to chauvinism:

Our party publications have begun to engage in the same virulent smear tactics that were previously reserved for the nationalist press. Our editors are busy collecting voices that call all forms of criticism against certain classes and political institutions ‘un-Germanic activities,’ thus undermining the possibility of a future rapprochement within the international labor movement. Such irresponsible, xenophobic agitation permanently damages the cosmopolitan idea and destroys the last remaining shreds of trust in the viability of an international organization of the working class.563

Following the August 1914 battle cry, the socialist world was turned on its head. Socialist parties, with the exception of Serbia and Russia, voted overwhelmingly in support of war credits. Preserving the national party—echoing Bernstein’s motto of the movement being everything—became the resounding aim of Social Democrats in every country. Socialists figured that their hard-fought reforms could not be sacrificed to some unspecified and distant international prophecy. Socialists entered parliaments and formed alliances with bourgeois liberals while workers picked up rifles. Social Democracy’s internationalism was replaced with nationalism.

Such a complete shift of perspective was not an aberration. It was a natural conclusion to a process that had began with the emergence of mass political movements in the latter half of the 19th century. Marxism’s founders had warned about the dangerous appeal of nationalism. By the century’s end, Engels, Kautsky and others tried to minimize its appeal at the grassroots. Yet, no matter how hard they tried to maintain theoretical silence on the nationality question, the reality of legal existence within nation-states gradually brought nationalism into the daily practices of the national parties. This produced a schizophrenic division within socialism between adherents and opponents of nationalism; between those who envisioned a gradual pathway to socialism and those who believed in the revolutionary solution; between those who wanted to work within the confines of the existing system and those who wanted to overthrow it; and between those who focused solely on the proletariat and those who were willing to reach out to potential allies.

Reformism confronted this situation directly by aligning nationalist practices with Marxist dogma. After all, Marx and Engels admitted political pragmatism and parliamentarism into the tactical arsenal of the socialist cause. But ideas and conventions emerging at the turn of the 20th century, although a genuine attempt at the modernization of Marxism, merely highlighted the growing influence of nationalism. Justification for national defence, support for colonial expansion, rejection of mass strikes as a tactic, and demotion of revolutionism reflected the changing attitudes. Workers and their leaders had acquired a stake in the existing nation-states.

Bernstein was certainly not the only socialist who wanted to constructively respond to the challenges of nationalism. Eastern and East Central Europeans, whose lives were defined more prominently by the nationality

563 Eduard Bernstein, “The Value of the International Workmen’s Association,” originally published in 1915, in Selected Writings of Eduard Bernstein, 1900-1921, trans. and ed. Manfred Steger (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 163-4. Bernstein, who throughout the years prior to 1914 supported national defence and voted for war credits at the war’s outbreak, abandoned the growing ranks of socialist patriots to become an ardent critic of Germany’s foreign policy. The revisionist forefather’s turnaround did not mean an abandonment of noble patriotism, but rather a rejection of nationalism’s chauvinistic inclinations.
question had much to contribute to the ongoing debates. Unlike their Western European counterparts, they directly tackled the issue. Some, like Bauer and Renner, offered concrete solutions to national antagonisms. Even those who rejected Marxism’s reconciliation with nationalism, like Luxemburg, wrote extensively on the subject matter. Their ideas highlight the rich socialist heritage on the nationality question before 1914, which cannot be neatly categorized into denouncement or defence of nationalism.

Renner and Bauer’s assessments of nationalism were constructive and insightful. But neither of the two men really understood the appeal of territorial self-determination. Renner was perhaps right in painting it as the most dangerous manifestation of nationalism. Yet, he failed to grasp the full importance of statehood to peoples who suffered under a foreign yoke. Perhaps he simply realized the extent to which the power of self-determination could derail (or distort) the Marxist project. Russian Marxists, especially Lenin did realize the danger of bypassing territorial identification. By promoting self-determination up to secession, he wanted to satisfy the thirst for statehood without actually granting full independence. The Russian and the Polish cases—encompassing the third and fourth parts of this study—provide further insight into how the Eastern and East Central Europeans reinterpreted the cumulative Marxist heritage on the nationality question before and immediately after the Great War.
PART III:
“THE WORST SORT OF OPPORTUNISM?”
THE BOLSHEVIK NATIONALITY POLICY.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO PART III.

In “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” Vladimir Lenin revisited Marx and Engels’ position on the Irish question. Writing nearly half a century later, Lenin asked whether Marx was “utopian” and “unpractical” in recognizing and promoting Irish independence in the 1860s. He asked whether the English working class should support the Irish revolutionary struggle. Conversely, could the Irish revolutionary potential spread to the central streets of London? “Marx and Engels pursued a consistently proletarian policy,” he asserted. “The policy of Marx and Engels on the Irish question,” he continued,

serves as a splendid example of the attitude the proletariat of the oppressor nations should adopt towards national movements, an example which has lost none of its immense practical importance. It serves as a warning against that ‘servile’ haste with which the philistines of all countries, colours and languages hurry to label as ‘utopian’ the idea of altering the frontiers of states that were established by the violence and privileges of the landlords and bourgeoisie of the nation.

He concluded: “if the Irish and English proletariat had not accepted Marx’s policy and had not made the secession of Ireland their slogan, this would have been the worst sort of opportunism, a neglect of their duties as democrats and socialists, and a concession to English reaction and the English bourgeoisie.”564 Marx and Engels’ support for the national cause was the proper course of action.

These few comments about Marx’s attitude towards the Irish question reveal several of Lenin’s core ideas about nationalism. Foremost, Lenin urged Marxists not to be afraid to appropriate the national struggle for the socialist cause. This was not opportunism of the bourgeois kind, but rather a pragmatic strategy of drawing on the democratic and revolutionary energy of oppressed peoples. Moreover, since history had produced oppressor and oppressed people, it was the duty of socialists to oppose the national chauvinism of the oppressors. Like Marx and Engels, Lenin was not afraid to declare that a nation that oppresses another cannot be truly free. Secondly, Lenin recognized that the nation-building process, which the bourgeoisie had seemingly finalized by the early 20th century, was far from over. New nation-states—even those that had been labeled as non-historical—were not only conceivable, but even probable. Since nationalism was not yet retrieving into the dustbin of history, it could become a formidable weapon in the socialist arsenal. Thirdly, like Marx and Engels realized late in life, Lenin also believed that the periphery could play an equally if not a more important role in the socialist upheaval. The liberation of an oppressed nation (e.g., India) could itself trigger a widespread revolution in an oppressing nation (e.g., England).

This simplified scheme by no means reveals the complexity of Lenin’s views on the nationality question, but it does outline his conceptual framework. Fighting oppression of every sort, including the national kind, was not only ideologically sound, it was part-and-parcel of the wider democratic and socialist project. Nationalism was a product of capitalism—a bourgeois mask. Yet, it was not something to fear, but rather something to embrace and

564 V.I. Lenin, “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination.” Lenin used Marx’s writings on the Irish question to highlight some of the positive Marxist views on nationalism. He wanted to show that Marx did not reject nationalism outright but rather took a cautious and practical approach.
exploit. Since nation-states would continue to arise, regardless of capitalism’s drive for centralization and affinity 
for large states, socialists should take advantage of nationalism’s revolutionary and progressive qualities.

A discussion of Lenin and Stalin’s ideas on nationalism is inadvertently overshadowed by the multiple 
horrors of the Soviet Union’s misuse of both nationalism and self-determination. It is difficult to separate the 
ideological debates and motives behind policies from their enduring consequences. That millions suffered and 
died in most horrifying of circumstances from abuse of power is unquestionable. An examination of Leninist and 
(and to a lesser extent) Stalinist attitudes should never justify or apologize for the ensuing tragedy of the Soviet 
experiment. Yet, to simply describe these tragic results as totalitarianism’s derivatives or merely as another 
reflection of the encounter with modernity is to neglect the complexity of the many underpinning factors and the 
interplay of ideology and circumstance, which affected the evolution of Soviet nationality policy.

The third section will explore the evolution of Leninist and Stalinist ideas on the nationality question. 
Before 1914, three issues informed Lenin’s thought about nationalism: organizational party structure, need for 
alliances, and adaptation of Western European Marxism to Russian realities. He wanted to attract members and 
loyalty of various nationalities of the Tsarist Empire and to disclaim the approaches developed by Luxemburgists 
and Austro-Marxists. His solution rejected national nihilism and autonomy—nationalities had a right to territorial 
self-determination. Socialists everywhere had a duty to bring nationalism into the arsenal of Marxist strategy.

In the course of the First World War, and especially after the collapse of absolutism in Russia, Lenin 
decided that self-determination could move far beyond a passive (i.e., neutral) support for national aspirations. 
Foremost, it could contribute to the Communist seizure of power in Russia. Yet, it was not until after the October 
Revolution and War Communism (i.e., years of the Civil War) that Lenin realized its full potential as a building bloc 
of socialist society. Intentional and active national building—the drive to delineate territories, modernize, 
standardize languages, and build local elites—could bring nationalities into the fold of Communism. Unfortunately, 
nation building was not reserved solely for the promotion of socialism in each nation; it also meant the creation of 
Soviet citizens and the Soviet state. The framework for this dual policy was finalized by the summer of 1923. Just 
months before Lenin’s final stroke, the Twelfth Congress of the Bolshevik Party developed a decisive prescription 
for self-determination in the Soviet Union. Hence, federalization and korenizatsia (i.e., indigenization) would move

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565 In a recent study of Stalinist policies in Eastern Europe, Timothy Snyder has given new insight into the 
development and evolution of Soviet policies towards various nationalities in the 1930s (right up to the end of the 
Second World War). Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin (New York: Basic Books, 
2010).

566 Although a discussion of the degree of Marxist responsibility for the Soviet experiment, or the continuity-
discontinuity between Leninism and Stalinism are critical debates to the study of early Soviet Union, these 
historiographical debates are outside the scope of the present study. Although they are indirectly and inadvertently 
mentioned in the ensuing discussion, they will not serve as an analytical framework of this work. For an 
interpretation that makes a direct correlation between Marxism, Leninism and Stalinism, please see Walicki, 
Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom or Martin Malia, The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in 
Russia (New York: Free Press, 1994). In essence, Walicki and Malia argue that Marxism was bound to fail from 
cecision. Its aims were simply unrealizable and contradictory. In a recent work, Malia argues that “Marxism 
presents to all its practitioners an intrinsically impossible task. The lockstep logic of history does not mesh with the 
system’s motive force, the class struggle; nor does either one separately lead to the system’s communist goal, which is simply an unattainable utopia. No matter how ‘mature’ capitalism becomes—anywhere, anytime—the 
schizophrenic Marxist fantasy can never be realized in its entirety.” Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze 
alternative interpretation, see for instance, John Gooding, Socialism in Russia: Lenin and his Legacy, 1890-1991 
(New York: Palgrave, 2002).
hand-in-hand in the construction of the Soviet Union. Although the debate over the flexibility of the national-international dialectic—often reflected in the struggle between the radical Left (a la Luxemburg) and the right (associated with self-determination)—ceased after 1923, it was never settled.

If the application of the nationality policy within the Soviet Union was inconsistent, improvised and challenging, its inclusion in the international Communist agenda was even more difficult. Drawing a line between oppressor and oppressed nations in the colonized world was fairly straightforward. But applying the same criteria in Europe, especially in young states east of the Elbe (which were multiethnic or constituted sizable minorities), was a much more complex task. Both Lenin (who produced theses on the national and colonial questions for the Third International) and the Comintern remained silent on the nationality question in Europe. If anything, the Comintern offered contradictory advice. It demanded ideological purity, while encouraging flexible tactics. It wanted to maintain party discipline, while welcoming radical elements of various political stripes into its ranks. It sought a cadre of trusted Communist, while advocating Communist parties as mass movements. It insisted on internationalist content, while promoting national forms. It enforced Bolshevization, while supporting alternate national models. The member parties of the Comintern struggled to incorporate these diverging ideas into their policies. Neither they nor Moscow could settle the debate over the best approach to the nationality question.
CHAPTER 7: THE MARXIST ROAD TO SELF-DETERMINATION:
LENIN AND STALIN’S IDEAS ON THE NATIONALITY QUESTION BEFORE 1917.

AN EMPIRE OF NATIONS: TSARIST RUSSIA IN THE AGE OF LENIN AND STALIN.

“What does deviation towards nationalism mean—irrespective of whether it is a deviation towards Great-Russian nationalism or towards local nationalism?” This question was posed by Joseph Stalin in the “Report on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.” delivered at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934. “The deviation towards nationalism is the adaptation of the internationalist policy of the working class to the nationalist policy of the bourgeoisie,” Stalin answered. “The deviation towards nationalism,” he continued, “reflects the attempts of ‘one’s own’ ‘national’ bourgeoisie to undermine the Soviet system and to restore capitalism. The source of these deviations is, as you see, a common one. It is departure from Leninist internationalism.”

By the late 1920s, the danger of capitalist nationalism had become apparent in Ukraine, where party elites demanded more autonomy than the Kremlin was willing to relinquish. Yet, could the Ukrainians be accused of stepping outside the prescribed Marxist-Leninist understanding of nationalism? After all, Lenin had supported the propagation of national forms of the Ukrainian identity—language, education, and national Communist elites. Was Stalin simply concerned with power politics and an obsessive fear of outside intervention?

Lenin has remained one of the most contested and paradoxical figures of the 20th century. He has been declared a hero and a traitor of the Marxist project, a populist and a political opportunist, a promoter of modernization and of Tsarism in disguise, a genuine believer in utopian ideals and a pathological murderer infatuated with violence, a builder and a destroyer of nations. None of these labels can be conclusively refuted. Lenin is frequently charged with three essential abuses: distorting the utopian Marxist project; obsession with party discipline, undemocratic practices and a frequent recourse to violence, thus predestining a particular path to totalitarianism; and using tactics (especially during the Civil War), which laid the foundations for the Stalinist dictatorship and future abuses of the Soviet system. Since a discussion of all of Lenin and Stalin’s ideas is far beyond the purview of this study, the heart of the following discussion will center on Lenin and Stalin’s conceptions of the nationality question before and after the October Revolution, right up until 1923.

Like their Austrian and East Central European counterparts, neither Lenin nor Stalin shied from the nationality problem. The harsh reality of Tsarism, under which nationalities were experiencing mistreatment at the hands of administrative lynchpins of the imperial system, pushed both Lenin and Stalin to respond in a constructive way to the nationality problem. The blossoming of national awakenings of many peoples throughout the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century only stimulated interest in nationalism. Stalin had firsthand experience in the


Caucasus and Georgia, witnessing Social Democracy’s encounter with nationalism.  

Lenin understood the impact of Tsarist oppression on nationalities. Albeit in different ways, both men realized the necessity of harnessing and controlling the power of nationalism. For many Russian Marxists of the late 19th century, nationalism became an inescapable reality on both the ideological and organizational levels.

Russia remained an empire of many ethnicities, languages and religions regardless of Tsarist attempts at assimilation. Groups with a matured national consciousness in the western borderlands resisted Russification as much as the “backward” peoples of the eastern peripheries, who devotedly clung to their traditional (local) identities.  

Like their Austrian counterparts, Russian Marxists could not ignore nationalism in a region flooded with these ever-growing passions. An ideological response was prudent, even necessary. Marxists could not simply stand by and let the bourgeois appropriate the national project for their own ends. The rules of the game were different here than in Western Europe. Given the Tsarist repressions—especially national—a positive Marxist response to nationalism offered several advantages, and given the small size of the working masses and class-conscious proletarians in the empire, such allies were in high demand. Since nationalists seemingly engendered progressive and democratic forces, they could serve as valuable partners.

Although the national energies could be exploited, their usage entailed many serious dilemmas for a Social Democratic organization in a multiethnic state. Foremost, mobilization of the masses and the effective use of their revolutionary potential required cross-national solidarity, which was no easy task given the antagonistic atmosphere of national-cultural awakenings of the 19th century.  

The management of this energy required organization and leadership. Party structure would have to accommodate for diversity without losing centralized control. A defining characteristic of many Eastern European parties was the dichotomy between the need for a tight and centralized party structure for security purposes (in an environment of illegality and conspiracy) and the need for broad appeal to multiple—oftentimes questionable and incongruous—partners. Multiple national interests had to be balanced against an all-Russian party ideology and strategy. Lenin had accepted these limitations and decided to tackle them head-on.

Against National Oppression: Lenin’s Early Thoughts on the Nationality Question.

Before the October Revolution, both Lenin and Stalin had much to say about the nationality question. As latecomers to Marxism—joining the international socialist camp only at the turn of the 20th century—and unlike...
many of their senior comrades, they were not afraid to handle nationalism.\footnote{Tych makes this suggestion in his work. 
*Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918*, 271.} In their *Weltanschauung*, Marxism did not instinctively have to be anti-nationalist. Their starting point was the Russian context, where the Imperial framework created a prison house of nationalities, whose distaste for Romanov abuses could be channeled into the socialist project. In the years before the outbreak of the Great War, two sets of factors—internal (within Russia) and external (within the wider socialist movement)—guided their work.

The Second International’s recognition of the right to self-determination in 1896 inadvertently signaled a green light to those interested in the nationality question. Yet, in Western Europe, the incongruence between nationally oriented practices of Social Democratic parties and their ideological dismissal of nationalism created an uncomfortable silence. Kautsky’s orthodox remedy was to provide guidance to the issue. But his cursory writings remained an inadequate solution for multi-ethnic states east of the Elbe. Austrian and Polish socialists attempted to answer the challenge directly and openly. Austro-Marxists proposed the extra-territorial personal cultural autonomy model (in a multi-ethnic state), while the Poles offered a defense of self-determination of smaller nations (to justify their struggle for independence).\footnote{See Chapter 5 and Part V of the present study.} Luxemburg launched criticism at both of these groups, which she perceived to be anti-Marxist. Hence, when Lenin and Stalin began to write on nationalism in the early 20th century, they entered a highly sensitive and intense international dialogue, which was already entangled within the broader debates on revisionism, militarism, parliamentarism and imperialism. From the onset, they interpreted the Luxemburgian line as simple defeatism, which left a formidable weapon in the bourgeoisie arsenal. They were equally critical of the Poles, since indiscriminate support for independence was somehow un-Marxist. Even the Austro-Marxist cultural autonomy model was inadequate and faulty, merely giving nationalism too much credence, and leading to particularism and separatism. As Lenin traveled through this ideological jungle, he knew that another way had to be found that would satisfy the Russian realities without breaching any Marxist fundamentals.

Passionate discussions with other (Russian and non-Russian) socialists who supported or opposed nationalism’s insertion into Marxism greatly influenced Lenin and Stalin’s perception of the nationality question. Yet, the Russian context remained a critical ingredient for their peculiar solution to the nationality conundrum. They were aware of the complexity of the multiethnic imperial system and its impact on individual nationalities.\footnote{Stalin had much more experience working directly with Georgians and others in the multi-ethnic atmosphere of the Trans-Caucasian territories. Moreover, he was more familiar with the impact of nationalism on socialist thinking. Perhaps this explains Lenin’s appointment of Stalin as the Bolsheviks’ specialist on the nationality question.} In immediate terms, and similarly to the Austrian case, this ethno-cultural diversity critically informed the organizational question of the all-Russian Social Democratic party. Several problems emerged in the course of the party’s formation and evolution. To be effective, a party representing the whole of the Russian Empire would have to gather and negotiate with a multitude of interests. To attract members and loyalty of various nationalities, the Russians had to remain sensitive to each ethnicity’s interests. Cross-national solidarity was no small feat given the extensive and highly regionalized character of the empire and each group’s individual aspirations. The party’s structure and ideology, as well as the need for secrecy and tight control, had to be accommodating or else it faced declining authority and loyalty. The Jews (in the General Union of Jewish Workers, Bund) and the Poles (in the SDKPiL) continuously refused to give up administrative sovereignty. Even Luxemburg, the apostle of
internationalism who argued in support of a Russia-wide working-class movement, vigorously protected her party’s operational autonomy. Although the nationality question hindered party construction, equally important was the Russian Marxist heritage.

That Russian intellectuals arrived at the gates of Marxism through populism revealed an important characteristic of future Russian Marxism. Focusing on the peasant commune, these young intellectuals promoted an anti-Western philosophy, believing that the road to a Russian utopia lay somewhere between Slavophile belief in the specificity of Russia and Western European capitalism. According to Alexander Herzen, socialism would come to Russia not through modernization but rather through backwardness and communalism. Rejecting the Western road to salvation, they opted for a distinct path in which the people’s power would regenerate the nation and bring about justice. When the movement (by the students) to the countryside failed miserably, more terrorist tactics were applied, culminating in the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. It is through the rejection of both populism and violence that many Russians arrived at (what appeared to be rational and scientific) Marxism. Georgii Plekhanov, the father of Marxism a la Rus, was one of the first to dispel fears of capitalism. He argued that for all intended purposes, Russia had already entered the capitalist stage (especially after the 1861 emancipation of the peasantry). Hence, the proletariat, replacing the unreliable bourgeoisie, would become the revolutionary force of the future. All that was needed was a political party that could overthrow the autocracy and establish liberal democracy, and eventually seize power.

The populist legacy certainly had a lasting effect on Russian Marxism. Nonetheless, to argue that a Russian socialist in fact was “no more than eternal Russian painted red,” or that “beneath Lenin’s Marxist veneer, he was a throwback to the unscientific and conspiratorial People’s Will,” is to neglect the complexity of Marxism’s variations at the turn of the 20th century. Even contemporaries did not see Marxism as a static and inflexible framework merely suited for Western Europe. Regional peculiarities of Eastern Europe pushed Marxism away from formulaic dogmatism and towards new alternatives. Late in life, even Marx entertained the notion of uneven development and wondered whether Russia would skip some stages of the capitalist development. Ironically, as Russian Marxists were arguing against populism, which they perceived to be much too primitive, Marx began to entertain the notion of utilizing the commune. Undoubtedly, the peculiar Russian context produced unintended deviations.

Many could not understand why there was no cooperation between the bourgeoisie and workers in Russia to initiate an anti-autocratic bourgeois revolution. The answer lay in the character of the various strata of Russian society. On the one hand, the middle class was highly conservative and feared every sort of working class radicalism. The workers, on the other hand, were too miserable to support a bourgeois revolution that would not necessarily improve their lives. “Russia thus found itself,” as Gooding concludes, “in a situation that was in some respects premature for the bourgeois revolution and yet in other respects had already passed the point when it

578 Gooding, Socialism in Russia, chapter 1. Populists actually preferred social reform to political reform. Unlike Marxists, they believed in individuals (rather than classes) as agents of change.
579 The initial movement of Zemly i Volya (Land and Liberty) split into the terrorist Narodnaya Volya (People’s Will) and the more moderate Chernyi Poredel (Black Repartition).
580 McLellan, Marxism after Marx, chapter 5.
581 Malia, Russia Under Western Eyes, 272.
583 For a discussion of Marx’s affinity for the Russian commune, see the articles by Teodor Shanin, Haruki Wada, Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan in Late Marx and the Russian Road.
seemed feasible or appropriate.” In this atmosphere, Western currents met Russian peculiarities to produce a Marxist solution for a backward society that might take a distinct path to the proletarian utopia.

It is in this setting that Lenin converted to Marxism in the 1890s. His perception of Marxism as both an absolute scientific and moral truth “made his belief in the justice of his cause and the inevitability of its triumph all the more cooper-bottomed.” Moreover, Lenin was a revolutionary first and a Marxist second. That is not to say that he was a populist Blanquist disguised in Marxist garb. He was simply both an ideologue and a man of action—one who Marx aspired to become but never did. To a large extent, what came to be known as Leninism “was able to project itself as internally consistent because it was developed by just one man in less than a decade in the period 1914-1917.” It stemmed from Lenin’s conviction that he “alone had privileged access to a method and a body of knowledge that was more scientific, more rigorous and more exact than any competitor scheme of thought.” He wanted to be a scientist of history, economics, destiny and even, as will be shown, of nationalism. Paradoxically, Lenin was characterized by both ideological rigidity and flexibility. Before 1914, three issues guided Lenin’s attitude towards the nationality question: organizational party structure, need for alliances, and adaptation of Western European Marxism to Russian realities.

The construction of a strong socialist movement in Russia was an arduous task made even more difficult by the underdeveloped democracy. In this repressive environment, pragmatic solutions oftentimes would have to supersede ideological purism. Yet, it would be reductionist to simply label Lenin’s motives and ideas as cynical opportunism. Connor and others argue that the Bolsheviks exploited the nationality question as a strategy without any genuine interest in self-determination; that it was merely a ploy to manipulate and exploit the disenfranchised masses. Whether in theory or practice, Lenin was trying to figure out “how to combat nationalism when necessary and how to manipulate it in the interests of the international movement whenever possible.” Although pragmatism certainly remained an important consideration, there was also a genuine attempt to resolve the nationality issue that extended far beyond mere tactical value.

The repressive conditions of the Tsarist Empire compelled Russian intellectuals to seek a viable nationality policy. But the vastness of the empire and its diverse constituting elements posed many problems for any political movement that tried to spread its wings across the entire country. There is no doubt, as Michael Forman argues, that it was the establishment of the Social Democratic party—forging unity of the Russian working class—that guided Lenin’s perception of the nationality question. The issue of party construction became paramount. Only unity and loyal cadres could ensure the survival of a socialist movement.

584 Gooding, *Socialism in Russia*, 29.
585 The eventual split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, which further exasperated the debates on the nationality question, had origins within the nature of Russian Marxism. Each group formulated a distinct pathway to the proletarian heaven.
586 Gooding, *Socialism in Russia*, 35.
587 Gooding, *Socialism in Russia*, 34.
By the 1890s, it became clear that terrorist tactics would not be able to allow Russia to leap to the final revolution. The assassination of Alexander II, resulting in widespread repressions, was a pyrrhic victory, which convinced many that open political activity was premature. In the aftermath, many joined the Marxist camp. These new converts “called for the construction of a new kind of organization capable of evading the secret police and harnessing popular energies.” Upon entering the Marxist world in the last decade of the 19th century, Lenin immediately became convinced that the weakness of democratic progress in Russia should not be ascribed to the working classes but rather to the party, which failed to coordinate the workers’ struggle. “It was not the spontaneity of the masses [Lenin] condemned,” as Harding explains, “but the organizational and theoretical shortcomings of the leadership to channel and direct it.”

Discipline, a tight hierarchy, and small size—these ingredients would protect the party from enemies and would ensure its growth in the future. Elite of professional revolutionaries would give leadership and direction to the movement.

In “Where to Begin,” Lenin condemned the fragmentation of the socialist movement in Russia. The following year, in What Is To Be Done? he offered a solution. He wanted to resolve the “question of the role of Social-Democrats in relation to the spontaneous mass movement,” to eliminate the fragmentation of Social Democracy (i.e., the power struggle within the party), and to direct both the ideology and activity of the movement. A small, tightly knit party of professional revolutionaries would channel the energies of the masses towards socialism. “The Party that fights against all economic, political, social, and national oppression,” Lenin declared, “can and must find, gather, train, mobilise, and set into motion such an army of omniscient people.”

Defending his position, he argued that “Those who make nation-wide political agitation the cornerstone of their programme, their tactics, and their organisational work, as Iskra does, stand the least risk of missing the revolution.” The small group of leaders would build such a wealth of agitational experience that when the revolutionary moment arrived, it would possess the abilities to adapt itself to the most diverse and rapidly changing conditions of struggle. Lenin warned against a premature revolution that would only result in the destruction of the party. He asserted that only a well-organized, flexible and tested all-Russian party, led by a trained cadre of socialist intelligentsia, could properly channel the spontaneous energies of the masses. What he envisioned was a network of professionals conducting clandestine work, guided by a united ideology (embodied in a party newspaper), ready at a moment’s notice to act

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593 Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 72.
594 Harding, Leninism, 30.
595 Trotsky rightly feared that such centralized control was a slippery slope towards substitutionism (i.e., the idea of the party substituting the movement, and then a central committee substituting the party). The Mensheviks wanted a much looser organization of the party. Eventually, these structural disputes became a significant contributor to the rupture of the party. Finally, in the summer of 1903, at the Second Congress, Lenin’s faction (i.e., Bolsheviks who constituted the majority) which promoted the “elitist party” defeated its opponents (i.e., Mensheviks) who called for a “mass party.”
597 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “What Is To Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement,” in Collected Works, Volume 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 347-530. Reedited by the Marxists Internet Archive. Available at: www.marxists.org. All the texts from Collected Works being utilized in this study have been taken from the above source.
598 Lenin, “What Is To Be Done?”
599 Lenin, “What Is To Be Done?”
600 The role was prescribed for Iskra. Lenin wrote quite a bit about Iskra’s role as a mobiliser, organiser and proselytizer of social-democracy in Russia.
in unison with and on behalf of the proletariat.\textsuperscript{601} During the Great War, Lenin would realize that “socialist transformation required the emergence of a new state form patterned after the party itself.”\textsuperscript{602}

A well-disciplined all-Russian party would require “an army of omniscient people.” The establishment and maintenance of alliances with various \emph{progressive} elements of the empire was essential to the movement’s growth. Two specific groups were identified by Lenin as possessing popular passions: the peasantry and the non-Russian minorities. Both were dissatisfied, disenfranchised, and exploited by autocracy. Driven by longstanding grievances, they were perfect candidates for recruitment. Yet, if convincing peasants to join Social Democracy was difficult, bringing the various ethnicities into the fold of an all-Russian party involved even more dilemmas. Cross-national party structure would require delicate negotiation with minorities. Centralization would have to be balanced against individual national interests. Although initially Lenin looked to his Western European counterparts for guidance on the nationality question, he quickly realized the limits of such an approach. Transposition of Western ideas to the Russian context was simply impossible.

On a broader level, Lenin shared Kautsky and the Second International’s vision of the nationality question.\textsuperscript{603} For instance, he wholeheartedly supported larger territorial units and Kautsky’s affinity for language as a key determinant of nationality. At the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Lenin wanted to expand on Kautsky’s ideas. Firstly, he differentiated between stages of capitalist development (which later on were expanded through his study of imperialism). There was no doubt that nationalism was a product of capitalism. However, in the very initial stages of capitalism, national states were required to promote the growth of the proletariat. It was only in the later stages that nationalism was appropriated and exploited by the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{604} Even Marx admitted that the class struggle would be carried out within states. What distinguished Lenin’s point of view was that he envisioned the national question as a \emph{political} issue. “Thanks to Lenin’s understanding of the relative autonomy of the political process,” Löwy explains, “he was able to avoid both subjectivism and economism in his analysis of the national question.”\textsuperscript{605} Even though history was driven by economic progression, politics remained an important dimension of the Marxist

\textsuperscript{601} Such a vision of the party and the masses has created much debate amongst scholars. Some, like Szporluk envision Lenin as little more than an aspiring Red Tsar, a man who offered a new ideological framework for the Russian empire. Others, though, reveal that Lenin indeed was a genuine Marxist. Harding argues that “the privileged role allotted to the socialist intelligentsia in organising and articulating the grievances of the proletariat and leading their political struggle, far from being a Leninist deviation from Marxism, is central to the arrogance of Marxism as a whole.” Harding, \textit{Leninism}, 34. James Gregor argues that “What Is To Be Done?” marked one of the most defining moments in Lenin’s conceptualization of Marxism. It pushed Lenin towards hierarchical and centralized solutions based on obedience, discipline, belief in Marxism as social science, and the role of party intellectuals in leading the masses. Gregor, \textit{Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism}, 102-3, 118-27.

\textsuperscript{602} Forman, \textit{Nationalism and the International Labor Movement}, 82.

\textsuperscript{603} During the Great War, Lenin would refute Kautsky’s centrism, but in the years before the outbreak of the war, he followed the SPD leader’s line of reasoning. In various articles from 1914, Lenin still defended Kautsky’s definition of the national question. The only exception in the prewar years was Lenin’s refusal to overtly support Poland’s independence. On this issue, he preferred to defer to Luxemburg’s position. Although he did not directly reject Poland’s independence, he did not believe it was achievable in the contemporary situation.

\textsuperscript{604} Eventually Lenin expressed these ideas in both his prewar studies of nationalism: “Critical Remarks on the National Question,” in \textit{Collected Works}, Volume 20, 17-51; and “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” in \textit{Collected Works}, Volume 20, 393-454. Reedited and republished by the Marxists Internet Archive.

\textsuperscript{605} Löwy, \textit{Fatherland or Mother Earth?}, 41.
National liberation was part and parcel of the process of proletarian emancipation and internationalist struggle for national equality. Ideology and even dogmatism could not be divorced from the actual socialist realities of the early 20th century, least of all in Russia. Fighting national oppression had to become an important and believable banner of the Social Democratic cause. It had to be given a proper place within the party program.

CREATING SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA: THE REALITIES OF A MULTIENTHIC PARTY.

Like his Austrian counterparts, Lenin realized early on that only an effective and overt opposition to national oppression could unify the all-Russian party while simultaneously eradicating the various minorities' distaste for everything Russian-imperial. He acknowledged the sense of grievance against Russian chauvinism that persisted amongst the nationalities, and recognized how national oppression and national antagonisms hindered international unity of the workers. It was important to understand and to respond to the psychological implications of the oppression. Centuries of Tsarist rule had created formidable barriers of mistrust. Convincing the non-Russians to the socialist cause would require more than token statements against national subjugation. To be convincing, the Second International’s declaration in support of all nations’ right to self-determination had to be actualized in a concrete manner. Furthermore, neither Bauer and Renner’s personal cultural autonomy nor Luxemburg’s limited territorial autonomy offered a genuine solution of eliminating national mistrust. So how did Lenin envision the actualization of self-determination that would not only reduce national antagonisms, but would also bring nationalities over to the socialist cause and unite the international proletariat, all while stimulating the class struggle? Could conciliation be achieved between the separatism of national self-determination and the rigidly centralist organizational principles of the party? As both the Jewish and Polish cases revealed, developing a cohesive nationality policy would not be simple.

The battle with the Bund erupted already during the initial discussions over the establishment of the RSDLP at the turn of the 20th century. Similarly to the Austro-Marxist solution implemented at the Brunn Congress, the Bund wanted to organize the all-Russian party along ethnic lines. It hoped to acquire representational jurisdiction over all Jewish workers of the empire. Being most familiar with the distinct plight of the Jews, it would speak and act on their behalf. Although Article 9 of the programme of the RSDLP accepted at the Second Congress in 1903 promoted the right of all nations to self-determination, the Bund wanted more operational autonomy. For the next two decades, Lenin continuously challenged the Bundist, and by extension, Austro-Marxist national cultural autonomy for its separatist policies. But criticizing the Bund’s organizational separatism while simultaneously supporting all nations’ right to self-determination was opening a paradox that would come back to haunt not only Lenin, but the future Soviet Union as well.

Lenin’s approach to the Polish question, even more so than the Jewish case, revealed the precarious balance between strategy, ideology, party politics and power alliances. The SDKPiL joined the all-Russian party in 1906

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606 It is interesting that neither Stalin nor Lenin overtly depicted nationalism as a false consciousness in the manner that Marx and Engels perceived the phenomenon.

607 Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 77.


610 Such criticism never stopped Lenin and Stalin from borrowing ideas from both the Austro-Marxists and Luxemburg, especially when it suited their needs.
under a Lenin-Luxemburg alliance against the Mensheviks. Attempts at unity had been made already in 1903, but the RSDLP’s Article 9 (on self-determination) had created a barrier that Luxemburg was, at least initially, unwilling to cross. From the beginning, Lenin felt uneasy about Luxemburg’s opposition to self-determination, which in the Polish context denoted the struggle for independence. In “The National Question in Our Programme,” he attempted to justify this policy through an attack on the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Although he opposed Poland’s separation from Russia on similar grounds to those propagated by the SDKPiL, and he labeled the PPS’s platform as reactionary and opportunistic, he did not agree with the former’s national nihilism. “Recognition of the right of nations to self-determination” certainly did not “imply support of any demand of every nation for self-determination.” The PPS lacked class principles, and their support for the restoration of Poland was almost un-Marxist. Yet, the Tsarist system necessitated a struggle against national oppression for the sake of party unity at the very least. Relying on Kautsky, Lenin incorporated the battle for independence to the wider struggle against autocracy and for democracy in Russia. Self-determination was simply a progressive force. To dispel Luxemburg’s fears, he labeled Marx and Engels’ support of Polish independence as an obsolete strategy, fit for mid 19th century but completely outdated for the early 20th century.

On the one hand, he had to acquiesce to Luxemburg’s rejection of nationalism in return for support in his own battles against the Mensheviks. On the other hand, he was torn by her continuous attacks on self-determination, especially as he did not want to deny the idea of independence to any nation. Although class antagonism was pushing national question into the background, nationalism remained a powerful force. Dismissing it would amount to doctrinarism. “No doubt,” Lenin tried to explain to Luxemburg, “the restoration of Poland prior to the fall of capitalism is highly improbable, but it cannot be asserted that it is absolutely impossible, or that circumstances may not arise under which the Polish bourgeoisie will take the side of independence.” Proletariat’s working-class interests were of primary concern and should never be overshadowed by any national concerns, and Russian Social Democracy did not in the least intend to tie its own hands. “In including in its programme recognition of the right of nations to self-determination,” the RSDLP merely “takes into account all possible, and even all conceivable, combinations.

The SDKPiL did not join the RSDLP until three years after its establishment, when both declared a truce on the nationality question. Yet, even in the ensuing years, friction persisted. Finally, immediately preceding the outbreak of the war, Lenin could no longer hide his aversion for both national nihilists and supporters of national cultural autonomy. Although he penned several pieces on the nationality question himself, he also recruited Stalin for the task of producing a definitive Bolshevik statement on the nationality question.

611 By this time, the PPS had become Luxemburg’s political nemesis. For further details, see the last section of this study.
612 In several instances, Lenin stressed centralism and party unity as the main products of the struggle against national oppression. Self-determination would bring all non-Russian peoples into the fold of the all-Russian Social-Democratic party.
613 Lenin, “The National Question in Our Programme.”
614 Lenin, “The National Question in our Programme.”
615 By 1908, the old arguments between a highly centralized party versus a broad organization were reawakened. Although attempts at maintaining unity continued, the two groups could not be reconciled. Finally when Luxemburg and Jogiches (patrons of the SDPKiL) made clear that they would only support the Bolsheviks within the larger Russian Social-Democratic Party, Lenin decided to formalize the separation from what he perceived to be deviations. This was completed by 1912. Thereafter, Lenin no longer felt constrained to appease Luxemburg’s
Stalin’s *Marxism and the National Question*, published in early 1913, revealed several key tenets as well as tensions that emerged in the Bolsheviks’ discourse on nationalism. Foremost, the study was a frontal attack on the Bund and Austro-Marxists. Stalin accused Bauer of creating “paper nations,” artificial entities devoid of essential territorial identification, whose proletarian-bourgeois unity could not last. The Bund’s blind following of the national cultural approach amounted to separatism and reactionary bourgeois nationalism. Neither could effectively resolve the nationality problem. Before offering his own solution, Stalin provided a definition: “A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifest in a community of culture.” He also asserted that “it is only when all these characteristics are present that we have a nation,” warning that “it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be absent and the nation ceases to be a nation.” Although he admonished Bauer’s (psychological) subjectivism, he argued that “one must take into consideration the specific spiritual complexion of the people constituting a nation. Nations differ not only in their conditions of life, but also in spiritual complexion [my emphasis], which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture.” Trying to promote the historical-economic line *a la* Kautsky, Stalin freely borrowed from his adversaries. So how did nationalism come about and how would the Bolsheviks deal with it?

Like many Marxists, Stalin (and Lenin certainly agreed) believed that nationalism was a *bourgeois mask*, a temporary expression of a particular period of economic development, when feudalism was dissipating and capitalism emerged through the amalgamation of people into nations: “The national struggle under the conditions of rising capitalism is a struggle of the bourgeois classes among themselves. Sometimes the bourgeoisie succeeds in drawing the proletariat [and the peasantry] into the national movement, and then the national struggle externally assumes a ‘nation-wide’ character. But this is so only externally. In its essence it is always a bourgeois struggle, one that is chiefly favourable to and suitable for the bourgeoisie.” A progressive force in early capitalism, nationalism became corrupted when it succumbed to bourgeois manipulations. Nationalism as a *bourgeois masking ideology* became a defining characteristic of Stalin and Lenin’s thought. Nationalism could never be fully trusted for national interests could easily trump proletarian goals. Although there was room for cooperation between all classes in a reluctance to accept self-determination. This was certainly an important turning point in Lenin’s conceptualization of the nationality question.

It is important to acknowledge that Stalin came over to the Leninist conception of the nationality question only in the last few years before the outbreak of the Great War. Initially, Stalin wholeheartedly aligned with the Luxemburgian rejection of nationalism, which he perceived to be a considerable threat to Marxism. He was never able to shake off all of these beliefs, and for the rest of his life remained much more cautious about nationalism than Lenin. van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, 58-72.

Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 12, 26, 31-3.


As van Ree points out, it is quite surprising that Stalin did not simply appropriate Kautsky’s definition. It seems that he emphasized cultural identity much more than his orthodox counterpart.

Stalin believed that both the proletariat and the peasantry are key participants in any national movement. Their support for the bourgeois project would depend on the degree of class antagonism and class-consciousness.

Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 17.

Terry Martin identifies this aspect as a defining characteristic that informed Lenin and Stalin’s conceptualization of Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s and 1930s. No matter how much credence was given to the development of national identities in the republics, suspicion of nationalism persisted. Martin argues that by the 1930s, Stalin
nation—especially in the name of progress and democracy—such inter-class collaboration always remained dangerous. Vigilance was essential as nationalism could at any moment redirect proletariat interests away from socialism. To qualify the Marxist position, Stalin emphasized the difference between opposing national oppression and supporting nationalism.

Lenin and Stalin were adamant about fighting national oppression. And the best weapon was not outright rejection of nationalism or national cultural autonomy, but rather self-determination. “The right of self-determination means that only the nation itself has the right to determine its destiny,” Stalin proclaimed, “that no one has the right forcibly to interfere in the life of the nation, to destroy its schools and other institutions, to violate its habits and customs, to repress its language, or curtail its rights.”624 Russian Social Democracy aimed to remove the foundations of national antagonisms. But Stalin’s understanding of self-determination should never be read as a carte blanche for nationalism. Socialists were not to interfere in the natural evolution and growth of nationalism, as long as nationalism did not hinder the socialist project.625 One thing was clear: they could not and should not actively aid the nationalist project. “Nations have the right to arrange their affairs as they please,” Stalin explained, “they have the right to preserve any of their national institutions, whether beneficial or pernicious—nobody can (nobody has the right to!) forcibly interference in the life of a nation. But that does not mean that Social-Democrats will not combat and agitate against the pernicious institutions of nations and against the inexpedient demands of nations.”626 This was an attack on Bauer’s idea that nations were permanent and growing, and that they could be “organized.”627 Again, the notion that nationalism was a temporary phenomenon never subsided in Lenin and Stalin’s thought, even during the early Soviet era. National identity was a fleeting phenomenon that had little independent quality.628 So under what circumstances and in what forms could national oppression and antagonisms be eliminated?

Stalin believed that national oppression could be reduced under capitalism, but never fully eradicated.629 Although only socialism would be able to completely eradicate national antagonisms, certain forms of national expression under capitalism could effectively lessen national hostility. But extraterritorial autonomy would not be

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625 This also highlights Stalin’s belief that nationalism had different meaning for each class. With such a worldview, he was opening a door to both a narrow definition of who could qualify to define a nation (or who would be afforded such a right), and a foreshadowing of workers’ patriotism. See, for instance, Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 124-5.
626 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 53. Lenin and Stalin would maintain this position until after the October revolution when their policy of korenizatsia moved far beyond the passive position they maintained towards nationalism before 1914.
627 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 31-2. For Stalin, “national character remained shaped primarily by education and circumstance, not by biological or racial factors. Nations were no outgrowth of the world of tribes but modern, newly integrated entities representing the overcoming of such ethnic communities.” van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, 67-8.
628 To a large extent, Stalin upheld Luxemburg’s position on the transient nature of nationalism. Nationalism was quickly becoming obsolete. Moreover, Lenin and Stalin hoped to master nationalism in order simply to destroy its foundations.
629 This was another line of attack against Bauer. Gradual reformism or evolutionism could never bring complete emancipation to the nationalities (and workers). Austrian parliamentarism had strict limitations and only negative implications of disrupting the unity of the workers’ solidarity. The fourth section of the study was devoted to the negative consequences of national cultural autonomy.
enough. Only a territorial definition of nationality offered a practical solution. Assuming that nations were sovereign and equal, Stalin postulated that historical conditions and the national will would determine whether autonomy, federation or complete secession would satisfy any given nationality. Yet, Stalin found fault with all of these approaches—none seemed to offer a fully satisfying solution. Leaving the door open to interpretation, he emphasized that the “economic, political and cultural conditions of a given nation constitute the only key to the question of how a particular nation ought to arrange its life and what forms its future constitution ought to take.” Western Marxists, the Second International, Austro-Marxists, and Luxemburg feared the territorial solution, which the Bolsheviks embraced. The “strategy of ethno-territorial proliferation” became a pillar of the interwar Soviet nationality policy. Yet, unlike Lenin, Stalin remained much more guarded and suspicious of territorial self-determination. Stalin believed in unity, and by extension, in the defense of Russian centralism. This was nothing strange as most Marxists showed preference for large territorial units. But beyond affinity for Russia’s vastness, Stalin also agreed with Marx and Engels’ differentiation between historical and non-historical peoples.

Not all nations could be afforded the same right to national existence, which national cultural autonomy promised. In attacking Bauer, Stalin asked: “What sort of ‘solution’ of the problem is it that mechanically squeezes nations into the Procrustes’ bed of an integral state?” Bauer was prepared to promote the aspiration of all peoples, regardless of their perceived vitality. This approach, in Stalin’s understanding, artificially produced and protected nations that otherwise would have been assimilated. Worse yet, in some instances, such a backward-looking strategy forced various classes of a nation to cooperate, thus hindering the more important class antagonism. Stalin believed that “One cannot seriously speak of the ‘cultural community’ of a nation when the masters and the workers of a nation have ceased to understand each other.” Such cross-class collaboration was justifiable in a revolutionary moment, but it could not serve as a permanent solution. Besides, capitalism stimulated the withering away of nationalities through ever-growing assimilation. Contrary to Bauer and once again in line with Luxemburg, Stalin believed that the world was being de-nationalized. Hence, the struggle of some groups for a separate political or cultural life was a futile endeavor. More than any other group, he expected the Jews to accept such a destiny. Lacking “definite and integral territory,” the Jews would have to succumb to capitalism’s assimilationist processes. National cultural autonomy was a pipe dream that would never protect them from inevitable assimilation. Moreover, the establishment of institutions, which could guarantee the complete freedom of Jewish cultural

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630 In many ways, Stalin was much more reluctant than Lenin to unconditionally support self-determination as a Marxist strategy.
633 This in part explains why Stalin began to reverse much of the Leninist nationality policies already in the late 1920s.
634 Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, 62-3. Stalin’s affinity for everything Russian certainly amounted to a complex sense of patriotism. Even when in the 1930s Stalin pushed for Russian as the universalist form of Sovietism, it is an oversimplification to call his approach chauvinistic. He simply perceived Russia as the “new vanguard of the world revolution, a country on the verge of overtaking France and Germany in pushing the world forward.” And this certainly was not unlike Marx’s depiction of Germany in the mid 19th century.
635 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 32.
development in Russia, was impossible due to the prevailing political system of the empire. The main danger was that the fight against assimilation would inevitably lead to an acceptance of bourgeois tactics and values. If they continued on this road, Bundist socialists would become bourgeois nationalists. National cultural autonomy stimulated nationalism beyond the acceptable bounds of Marxism.

For the less developed peoples of the Russian Empire, national cultural autonomy a la Bauer would denote the preservation of archaic values and traditions. It would prevent the drawing of the backward nations into a more modern cultural development. Nationalism was not meant to preserve small national units, but rather modernize them—even if this meant that they would have to be assimilated. Indeed, nationalism as a tool of modernization would become a defining characteristic of the future Soviet Union. Self-determination was to be understood as “regional autonomy” for a “definite population inhabiting a definite territory.” The aim was to “unite workers of all nationalities in Russia into united and integral collective bodies in the various localities and to unite these collective bodies into a single party,” which would offer “wide autonomy for the regions within the single party whole.” Party structure had to reflect state structure. Those destined for assimilation would never reap the benefits of nationhood; the right to national existence was reserved only for the historical peoples in crystallized units such as Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, or the Caucasus—or at least for those who were defined as worthy of such a privilege by the Bolsheviks.

On the eve of the outbreak of the First World War, Lenin’s persistent calls for the right of nations to self-determination isolated him from the Mensheviks, from his ideological allies (especially Luxemburg), and even from some of his Bolshevik counterparts (like Nikolai Bukharin and Georgii Plekhanov). Stalin’s treatise had barely put a dent in either the national nihilist or the Austro-Marxist camps. By 1912, Lenin had become irked by the continuous attacks on his nationality policy. As the split with the Mensheviks was finalized and the need for Luxemburg’s support fizzled, he decided that it was time to compose a comprehensive defence of his ideas on nationalism. Lenin’s “Critical Remarks on the National Question” (1913) and “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination” (1914) became the shield and sword of his Weltanschauung. The former was a frontal attack on all his critics: Mensheviks, liquidators, Cadets, Bund, national-cultural autonomy, Luxemburg, and bourgeois nationalists. Nobody was spared. The latter article continued the offensive against the various misinterpretations of the Marxist approach to the nationality question. Furthermore, along with other writings from 1913 and 1914, it amounted to a definitive statement on self-determination.

639 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 59.
640 Although several historians point out Lenin’s writings from 1913 and 1914 as constituting a turning point. Most see it as Lenin’s agitation for propaganda work. In the ensuing discussion, I will actually point out that it was much more than that, amounting to an outline of all of Lenin’s nationality tenets and principles, which were eventually tried and tested on the Soviet model.
“Critical Remarks on the National Question” was a commentary on several contentious and closely interrelated contemporary issues: language, education, limits of territorial autonomy, and assimilation. The very last he labeled as “nationalist bogey.” In order to promote their class interests, the bourgeoisie had instilled in people a fear of assimilation, which was nothing more than “capitalism’s world-historical tendency to break down national barriers, obliterate national distinctions, and to assimilate nations.” Lenin’s evaluation of assimilation was much more nuanced than that of Stalin.

Lenin defined a two-stage model of nationalism’s role within capitalism: the natural progress of history promoted the rise of nation-states in the early stages of capitalism and their gradual disappearance in its latter phases. Language was an important marker of this historical process. Lenin argued that “the requirements of economic exchange will themselves decide which language of the given country it is to the advantage of the majority to know in the interests of commercial relations.” Neither forceful assimilation nor outright rejection of assimilation was desirable. The former would merely stimulate hatred: “it will sharpen antagonism, cause friction in a million new forms, increase resentment, mutual misunderstanding, and so on.” Resisting assimilation, on the other hand, was akin to swimming against the currents of history. In many cases, demands for language or separate national schools were futile. And the dangers of doing so were many. Foremost, it amounted to the promotion of archaic, feudal, and backward elements, thus stalling modernization. It offered an illusion of the permanence of national identities to small groups with little vitality. And it facilitated the bourgeoisie’s exploitation of the proletariat, thus distracting the working classes from their socialist objectives.

Both cultural-national autonomy and bourgeois nationalism generated all of these pitfalls. That the latter was dangerous was obvious to all. The former, promoting a proto-bourgeois solution in quasi-Marxist terms (Lenin compared it to Proudhon’s ideas) also amounted to opportunism. It promoted the preservation of languages and nations in their pre-capitalist forms, throwing them an illusory lifeline, and promising their survival by stressing their culture and language. All of this could only be achieved at the price of progress and modernization. Besides, cultural life could never be separated from its economic and political implications. Jews in developed states had understood this and opted for assimilation. Their East Central and Eastern European counterparts—oppressed, isolated, and kept in primitive conditions—learned to believe that preserving their cultural identity was the only viable solution. But no amount of cultural rights could secure the complete freedom of a people. Nonetheless,

641 Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question.”
643 Lenin strongly opposed separate schools for various nationalities as they would break apart the thousands of economic, legal and social bonds between peoples (that capitalism had established), and it would worsen the conditions of the various nations. Lenin, “Cultural-National’ Autonomy,” Collected Works, Volume 19, 503-7.
644 Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question.”
645 Lenin believed that no national group could ever be simply satisfied with cultural life. Culture seemed inseparable from its political and economic dimensions, especially when looking at class interests.
646 Lenin argued that “The Jews in the civilised world are not a nation, they have in the main become assimilated, say Karl Kautsky and Otto Bauer. The Jews in Galicia and in Russia are not a nation; unfortunately (through no fault of their own but through that of the Purishkeviches), they are still a caste here. […] The best Jews, those who are celebrated in world history, and have given the world foremost leaders of democracy and socialism, have never clamoured against assimilation. It is only those who contemplate the ‘rear aspect’ of Jewry with reverential awe that clamour against assimilation.”
647 Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question.” That is why he rejected Bernstenian revisionism. Lenin did not believed that these problems could be fully resolved under capitalism or through far-reaching reforms. The goal of socialist utopia remained a primary objective. Harding explains: “For Marxists such as Lenin it was precisely the
even though he opposed “privileges for any nation or any one language,” Lenin believed that national oppression was a critical barrier to working-class unity. The way to overcome this obstacle was not through national-cultural autonomy, national nihilism or “philistine nationalism,” but rather through democracy and self-determination.

Democratization was the driving force of historical progress and the central socialist weapon against national oppression. Lenin asserted that “Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the ‘most just,’ ‘purest’, most refined and civilized brand.” But he quickly explained that “whoever does not recognize and champion the equality of nations and languages, and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality, is not a Marxist; he is not even a democrat.” The promotion of democracy would eliminate national oppression and promote the genuine national culture in its socialist forms (not to mention that is would also stimulate class antagonism). But Lenin and Stalin had much trouble with the concept of a national culture. Both rejected national cultures, which tended to be highly exclusive. “The elements of democratic and socialist culture are present, if only in rudimentary form,” Lenin explained, “in every national culture, since in every nation there are toiling and exploited masses, whose conditions of life inevitably give rise to the ideology of democracy and socialism.” But he asserted that often national cultures were dominated by the bourgeoisie which ensured that the workers would remain on its peripheries. The key was to encourage the socialist features of that culture, in hope that the culture of working-class democracy would eventually replace the national culture.

Democracy, progress, modernization—these were the driving forces of history that would collectively resolve national antagonisms. Lenin described this process:

The awakening of the masses from feudal lethargy, and their struggle against all national oppression, for the sovereignty of the people, of the nation, are progressive. Hence, it is the Marxist’s bounden duty to stand for the most resolute and consistent democratism on all aspects of the national question. This task is largely a negative one. But this is the limit the proletariat can go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the “positive” activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism.

The national question was intrinsically tied to progress and democratization, and these could be encouraged. But Lenin had an important warning for Marxists: they were to take a “neutral” approach to nationalism. Once the democratizing goals were reached, no other “positive” support could be afforded to a national cause. Such a balancing act between supporting and opposing nationalism was difficult. Paradoxically, “[no] privileges for any nation or any one language” was to be understood as an unwavering battle against national oppression. If not doing enough would denote abandonment of the socialist struggle against oppression (of every kind), and doing too much would amount to bourgeois nationalism, what was the right approach to nationalism?

The Swiss model, which many socialists pointed to as the prototype of harmonious national coexistence, was also Lenin’s favourite. “The experience of Switzerland proves,” he contended, “that the greatest (relative) degree of national peace can be, and has been, ensured in practice where you have, a consistent (again relative) democracy throughout the state.” Although Switzerland emerged from a confluence of “special, unique historical and social conditions,” the overarching principles could be replicated in Austria and Russia. Since federation and

disparagement of the idea of a final goal of socialism that was the diagnostic mark of all the traitors to Marxism. Leninism, was expressly formulated to reinstate the dialectic as the methodological foundation of Marxism, and to insist that without a substantive goal—specifying socialism as a unique set of values and institutions—socialism would inevitably become trivial and bourgeois.” Leninism, 65.

648 Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question.” For Stalin, national culture meant only a “national identity” or “symbolic ethnicity.” He did not go as far Lenin in highlighting some of the other benefits that a national culture could embody. Martin, Affirmative Action Empire, 12-13.
decentralization went against the capitalist need for the “largest and most centralised possible states,” Lenin suggested democratic centralism as a solution. It would require “local self-government with autonomy for regions having special economic and social conditions, a distinct national composition of the population, and so forth.”

The territorial solution was once again highlighted: “in order to eliminate all national oppression it is very important to create autonomous areas, however small, with entirely homogeneous populations, towards which members of the respective nationalities scattered all over the country, or even all over the world, could gravitate, and with which they could enter into relations and free associations of every kind.” Unlike many of his socialist colleagues, Lenin much more clearly understood the national affinity for statehood and territorial identification.

In an unpublished sketch of a proposed “Bill on the Equality of Nations and the Safeguarding of the Rights of National Minorities,” he offered a scheme for the restructuring of the Russian Empire. To some extent, this rarely mentioned blueprint revealed many ideas that were later applied in the Soviet Union. It assumed that borders and regional divisions would be constructed based on contemporary economic conditions and national composition of the population. Ethnography and economics would serve as the central principles of a nationality policy. In Lenin’s ideological constellation, self-determination fused socialist principles, the struggle against national oppression, the requirements of capitalist development, and the various peoples’ territorial identification into a coherent and all-encompassing package. Bauer and Luxemburg’s “underestimation of the strength of the urge to create a national state” became the springboard for Lenin’s second wave of attacks on national-cultural autonomy and national nihilism. As they entered the bourgeois-capitalist stage of development, a people formed national movements with the aim of forming their own national state. As witnesses to this ongoing historical process, socialists had to react with a decisive policy, lest they would lose a revolutionary force.

Rather than rigorously following Marx and Engels’ categorization of historical and non-historical nations, Lenin preferred to analyze each individual national movement in its concrete historical context. This was part of his politicized worldview and his conceptualization of uneven development. Capitalism did not develop at the same pace and in the same ways in all corners of the world. Local conditions played a critical role in shaping both the direction and speed of economic progress in any given region. Hence, Lenin categorized nation-states and national struggles according to their level of development: “the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and the

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649 In both the Russian and Austrian cases, this would denoted a complete restructuring of the official-bureaucratic administrative divisions to fit the requirements of capitalism.
652 This is precisely how recent historiography has depicted the Soviet nationality policy of the interwar period. See, for instance, Baron, Soviet Karelia: Politics, planning and terror in Stalin's Russia, 1920-1939.
654 Three critical beliefs informed his worldview: Firstly, Lenin realized the danger of sweeping generalizations. Socialists needed a somewhat subtle and sophisticated approach to certain issues. Hence, as Harding concludes, “part of Lenin’s case against the extreme anti-militarists was their lack of discrimination and nuance. Theirs was a blanket rejection of all wars and a call to the workers of all countries to strike and revolt.” Leninism, 71. Secondly, uneven development required an individual assessment of each state (and nation) in the context of its capitalist maturity. The important conclusion was that nationalism was not always, and in all instances, a retrogressive phenomenon. Thirdly, self-determination was a universal call to all nations and not any specific group. It had an international-cosmopolitan character that worked to prevent any turn to chauvinism or overemphasis of any particular national group.
United States” where nationalism had ceased to be a progressive force; “Eastern Europe: Austria, the Balkans and particularly Russia,” where self-determination rendered assistance to the socialist revolution; and “the semi-colonial countries, such as China, Persia and Turkey,” where the anti-imperial liberation struggle was directly connected to the bourgeois-democratic project. To evaluate nationalism, one had to identify its progressive potential from the point of view of the local conditions and its contribution to progress. What historical period is the nation passing through? And “what are the concrete features of the national question and the national movements of that particular country in that particular period?”

Once these concrete, historical, and national-specific criteria are applied and it is determined that the struggle for self-determination—understood as secession from an alien national body—would be a progressive step for a nation, then such a movement should receive full support from socialists. Norway’s separation from Sweden revealed enormous benefits to both the economic development of each state and the cross-border proletarian unity. But did such secession not counter the Marxist preference for large territorial units? Lenin believed that secession should not be feared if it stimulated progress. That is why he concluded that in “her fear of the nationalism of the bourgeoisie of oppressed nations, Rosa Luxemburg is actually playing into the hands of the Black-Hundred nationalism of the Great Russians!”

Blinded by a partisan struggle against the PPS, she could not understand that dismissing national aspirations of oppressed peoples (i.e., Poles) to liberation actually legitimized (Russian) national oppression.

Rather than labeling peoples as historical or non-historical, it was more important for Lenin to highlight the division between the exploiter and the exploited. Marx and Engels had distinguished between oppressed and oppressive nations, but they could not have predicted how imperialism would transform these dynamics. Lenin witnessed how colonialism had intensified exploitation, taking the notion that “no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations” to its final conclusion: imperialism had become the highest stage of capitalist oppression. Moreover, the right to self-determination was not only a critical component in the battle against colonial exploitation in the periphery, but it would also stimulate or reawaken the revolutionary élan of the workers in the metropole. Such an approach allowed Lenin to fuse “the national democratic revolutionary process in the colonies with the project for socialist revolution in the advanced countries,” and to speak “a language of psychological empowerment to colonized and economically-dominated peoples.” Colonial liberation would hasten the crisis of capitalism by reawakening the workers from the falsehood of piecemeal reforms that had temporarily stalled their revolutionary élan. Workers would no longer be duped by the bourgeoisie’s export of exploitation abroad and by its token concessions to the working masses. Such anti-imperial (i.e., anti-colonial, anti-oppression, anti-Great Power, etc.) rhetoric became central to the future Soviet nationality policy. It explains why the Bolsheviks worked so hard to

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656 Lenin, “The Right Of Nations To Self-Determination.”
658 Harding, Leninism, 205-10.
659 Later on during the Great War, Lenin would produce Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, which argued that the collapse of capitalism would be triggered in the periphery, where imperialism’s token profits had not clouded the eyes of the exploited masses. It would then extend back to the center, leading to a worldwide revolutionary domino. Lenin’s Selected Works, Volume 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 667–766.
demean the Russian culture within the Soviet project (at least until the early 1930s when Stalin revived it). Great Russian chauvinism fueled the national hatreds of all the various peoples of the Tsarist Empire.

What made Luxemburg and many other Marxists most uncomfortable in Leninist thought was that it led to decentralization and fragmentation of large territorial units. It seemed that self-determination would reverse capitalism’s centralizing tendencies. But Lenin clarified that the mere recognition of the right to self-determination did not automatically presume disintegration:

freedom of divorce will not cause the “disintegration” of family ties, but, on the contrary, will strengthen them on a democratic basis, which is the only possible and durable basis in civilised society. To accuse those who support freedom of self-determination, i.e., freedom to secede, of encouraging separatism, is as foolish and hypocritical as accusing those who advocate freedom of divorce of encouraging the destruction of family ties. Just as in bourgeois society the defenders of privilege and corruption oppose freedom of divorce, so, in the capitalist state, repudiation of the right to self-determination, means nothing more than defence of the privileges of the dominant nation and police methods of administration, to the detriment of democratic methods.

Recognizing the right to self-determination was important “for the sake of the basic principles of democracy.”

“To insist upon, to advocate, and to recognize this right”, Lenin asserted shortly afterwards, “is to insist on the equality of nations, to refuse to recognize compulsory ties, to oppose all state privileges for any nation whatsoever, and to cultivate a spirit of complete class solidarity in the workers of the different nations.”

Secession would only be applied when national antagonisms were so tense that they prevented normal economic function. Moreover, only a few national movements would be granted such support.

Lenin was adamant that no nation had an absolute right to statehood. “To advertise the right,” Harding explains, “did not mean advocacy of its exercise.” When such a right was recognized, it had to always and everywhere be conceptualized in universalist and international terms, from the perspective of the workers’ class struggle. Calling for “no privileges for any nation or any one language,” Lenin affirmed that the proletariat must be confined to the “negative demand for recognition of the right to self-determination, without giving guarantees to any nation, and without undertaking to give anything at the expense of another nation.” If the bourgeoisie of an oppressed national fought an oppressor, socialists could certainly support such a struggle. However, as soon at the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation began to identify strictly with a bourgeois nationalism, then socialists had to oppose it. Since nationalism of any oppressed nation had the general democratic content—removal of all inequality, privileges and exclusiveness—it was an inseparable component of the socialist project. The mere recognition of “the right of all nations to self-determination implied the maximum of democracy.” Promoting self-determination encouraged democracy; it was one of several universal slogans in the struggle against oppression.

Lenin accepted that the road to socialism could take multiple paths. Nationalism was simply one of these potential pathways. It was a means to an end. “The commitment to the cause of national independence was only a temporary tactic,” Harding explains, “that could never command the unambiguous support of the proletarian party.

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660 Martin sees this colonial premise and the “Greatest-Danger Principle” as one of the underpinning foundations of the interwar Soviet nationality policy (especially under Lenin). *Affirmative Action Empire*, 6-7, 238-45.

661 Lenin, “The Right Of Nations To Self-Determination.”


664 Harding, *Leninism*, 211.


666 Lenin, “The Right Of Nations To Self-Determination.”
[It was] just the prelude to international unity; it could never be valued as an end in itself.” As already emphasized above, both Lenin and Stalin perceived nationalism to be a temporary phenomenon (even if they remained vague on how long that phenomenon would last). The main practical task was “that of day-by-day agitation and propaganda against all state and national privileges, and for the right, the equal right of all nations, to their national state.” Not unjustifiably, Luxemburg perceived such a conceptualization of self-determination as strategic opportunism. Such manipulation was expected of the bourgeoisie and not of genuine socialists.

Lenin retorted that doing nothing was simply leaving the reins of nationalism to the bourgeoisie, which would certainly exploit the situation against the proletariat. Not recognizing the right to self-determination would promote national antagonisms. Worse yet, this was the divide-and-conquer policy practiced by the Tsarist bureaucrats. In the right circumstances, self-determination would stimulate progress, ensure the alignment of working-class forces, and offer a medium through which socialism could be distributed to the masses. On a broader level, it could become a catalyst of a global crisis. In the Russian context, it would “ensure the greatest chances of national peace, should she remain a multi-national state, and the most peaceful (and for the proletarian class struggle, harmless) division into separate national states, should the question of such a division arise.” What Luxemburg failed to understand, as Lenin argued, was that even if small nations separated from larger territorial units, they would quickly realize the benefits of belonging to a bigger state. Eliminating barriers of oppression would only strengthen the willingness for economic cooperation. Drawn by these advantages and by bonds of proletarian unity, secession (if ever realized) would be brief. Hence, “the class-conscious workers do not advocate secession,” Lenin concluded, as “they know the advantages of large states and the amalgamation of large masses of workers. But large states can be democratic only if there is complete equality among the nations; the equality implies the right to secede.” Moreover, witness to the coercion of the Tsarist system, Lenin preferred secession to the forcible retention of minorities. The carrot and not the stick would prevent separation and partition.

**IMPERIALISM AND NATIONALISM: SELF-DETERMINATION DURING THE GREAT WAR.**

The Great War transformed the European ideological and political landscape. Siding with the radical camp, Lenin and Stalin felt betrayed by socialists who defended their fatherlands at the outbreak of the war. Yet, Lenin did not despair over nationalism’s apparent victory. In late 1914, he extolled national pride as a source of the Russian

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668 Lenin, “The Right Of Nations To Self-Determination.”
669 Luxemburg accused Lenin of strategic opportunism and falsehood. She believed that the slogan was merely a tactical ploy to sway the masses towards the socialist cause. It was a tool expected of the bourgeoisie and not of socialists. But Lenin retorted that doing nothing was simply leaving the reigns to the bourgeoisie that would certainly exploit the situation against the proletariat. Not recognizing the right to self-determination would promote national hostility—a divide and conquer policy practiced by the Tsarist bureaucrats.
670 Lenin, “The Right Of Nations To Self-Determination.” Waldenberg argues that from 1914 onwards, Lenin was strictly concerned with nationalism from the perspective of education and propaganda. Yet, such a perspective is fairly narrow, as self-determination moved far beyond educational value. There is no doubt that Lenin believed self-determination to be a highly useful agitational tool for propaganda purposes. However, to limit Lenin’s beliefs to mere propaganda is to dismiss most of the ideas presented in his writings.
671 Lenin, “The Right Of Nations To Self-Determination.”
672 For Lenin, nationalism was always perceived as a temporary and fleeting phenomenon.
674 Lenin, “Theses on the National Question.” Elsewhere, he described the repressive atmosphere of the Russian Empire as “in a state of scarcely concealed civil war.” “On the Question of National Policy.” Voluntary ties were much more preferable to compulsory ties.
nations' revolutionary energy in a struggle against Tsarism.\textsuperscript{675} The war revealed many lessons, highlighting nationalism's enduring strength. The collapse of the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman Empires was the most important of these lessons, and both Stalin and Lenin turned out to be attentive students.

Although the Zimmerwald Manifesto proclaimed the right of nations to self-determination, the Bolshevik leaders continued to struggle against criticism.\textsuperscript{676} In nothing else, the war had dispelled all uncertainties about imperialism. It became clear that imperialism entailed “the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers.”\textsuperscript{677} It had divided nations into oppressors and oppressed, and according to Lenin, each had a specific responsibility. The socialists of the “oppressor nations must demand that the oppressed nations should have the right of secession, for otherwise recognition of equal rights for nations and of international working-class solidarity would in fact be merely empty phrase-mongering, sheer hypocrisy.” The socialists of the “oppressed nations must attach prime significance to the unity and the merging of the workers of the oppressed nations with those of the oppressor nations” to avoid becoming “the allies of their own national bourgeoisie, which always betrays the interests of the people and of democracy, and is always ready, in its turn, to annex territory and oppress other nations.”\textsuperscript{678} Socialists were to fight national oppression without supporting or promoting the growth of national cultures. To defeat capitalism, socialists would have to use any strategy in their arsenal. If self-determination was a dubious weapon before 1914, it had now become a viable component of the Marxist revolutionary strategy.

“Envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon” became one of Lenin’s central maxims.\textsuperscript{679} Already in 1915, he argued that “we must combine revolutionary struggle against capitalism with a revolutionary programme and tactics on all democratic demands,” including self-determination of nations.\textsuperscript{680} He realized that to expect a social revolution to have purely socialist underpinnings was unrealistic.\textsuperscript{681} Thinking of the revolution solely as a proletarian phenomenon was too narrow and deterministic. Successful revolutions were broad and multifaceted mass movements encompassing various groups and multiple processes. In 1916, Lenin articulated his position in response to the Zimmerwald Left’s debates over annexations.\textsuperscript{682} The social revolution was “not a single act, it is not one battle on one front, but a whole epoch of acute class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of economics and politics, battles that can only end in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.”\textsuperscript{683} Foremost, support for self-determination was not akin to promotion of bourgeois ideals. Quite the contrary, it should be perceived as one of many catalysts that could create conflicts and crises in the capitalist system and that could

\textsuperscript{676} During the war, Lenin faced criticism from all: Bukharin, Piatakov, Radek and Luxemburg.  
\textsuperscript{678} Lenin, “The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination.”  
\textsuperscript{680} Lenin, “The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination.”  
\textsuperscript{681} Lenin, “The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up.”  
\textsuperscript{682} Waldenberg wrongly argues that Lenin begins to support this position only in 1916. The same ideas were already introduced in 1915, in “The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination.” Even the wording of this concept is fairly similar. \textit{Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe}, 290-7.  
trigger revolutionary attacks on the bourgeoisie. Those who refused to acknowledge the national question as a feature of socialist arsenal and of the broader revolutionary process were opportunists or were too obsessed with economism.

That opportunists like Kautsky had supported the defence of their fatherland in 1914 was somehow acceptable. They simply betrayed the Second International and the socialist project. But what Lenin could not understand was why genuine Marxists like Luxemburg were unwilling to accept nationalism’s appropriate position within Marxism. The energy of the nationalist cause had not been completely sapped by capitalism and imperialism. The revolutionary potential of nationalism should remain an important aspect of the socialist cause: “The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an independent factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the real anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene.” Recognizing, understanding and appropriating nationalism’s complexity would never turn it into an actual socialist goal. Nonetheless, it had significant revolutionary value that should not be dismissed.

Lenin lamented over Luxemburg and other Marxists’ failure to comprehend the conditional and political dimensions in their evaluation of the national question. Arguing that “capitalism is victorious, therefore political questions are a waste of time” produced an apolitical approach that was harmful to Marxism. Besides, “while being based on economics, socialism cannot be reduced to economics alone.” Hence, once again Lenin emphasized that each national movement had to be evaluated according to the concrete situation, which socialists of a nation faced in a particular place and time. Marx and Engels’ support for Polish independence, a credible tactic against Tsarism right up to the 1870s, had become obsolete in early 20th century. Yet, in the mid-19th century, the Polish national struggle had been a viable battlefield against reaction and absolutism. “Instead of rejecting any examples of Marx’s tactics—this would mean professing Marxism while abandoning it in practice,” Lenin explained, “we must analyse them concretely and draw invaluable lessons for the future.” Marx and Engels had realized that if a national movement had progressive features, it should be promoted; if it became enthralled by bourgeois ideals, it had to be discarded. What Lenin argued was that nationalism should not be discarded offhand simply for being outside the economic framework of Marxism.

Equally troubling was the reformist nature of both cultural national autonomy (Bauer and Renner) and territorial autonomy (Luxemburg). Lenin acknowledged the difficult position of the SDKPiL in the Polish context and its need to oppose everything national lest it would be grouped with all the other nationally oriented pseudosocialists. Opposing bourgeois nationalism was certainly commendable. Yet, Luxemburg seemed to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Even her wartime approval of territorial autonomy did not go far enough to resolve the nationality question. Firstly, it could never quench the thirst of nations for the right to complete liberation. Lenin feared that any piecemeal solutions would only confirm the bourgeois propaganda that socialists were indifferent to the needs and aspirations of the nationalities. Secondly, territorial autonomy amounted to a reformist change “which leaves intact the foundations of the power of the ruling class and is merely a concession leaving its power unimpaired.” Only self-determination including secession amounted to a revolutionary change that undermined the

684 Some of these catalysts included the arming of the peoples or the struggle for the separation of the Church from the State.
685 Lenin, “The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up.”
686 Lenin, “The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up.”
foundations of bourgeois power. Besides, an autonomous nation could never enjoy rights equal to that of the ruling nation. Lenin realized that “even where the chance of secession being possible and ‘practicable’ before the introduction of socialism is only one in a thousand,” the recognition and promotion of this right was the most viable solution.  

Lenin, “The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up.”

Lenin feared that any piecemeal solutions would confirm the bourgeois propaganda that socialists were indifferent to the needs and aspirations of nationalities.  

Lenin, “The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up.”

Assigning such permanence to nationalism was perhaps a product of Lenin’s perception of the situation in Europe and especially in Russia. Harding and Forman point out that he saw Russia as experiencing only the initial stages of capitalism. Socialism seemed so distant that forays into nationalism were harmless and could benefit the overall struggle against Russian Tsarism.

Lenin, “The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up.”

Gooding, Socialism in Russia, 16.
ethnicities—also engendered mass-scale intimidation, violence and repression.692 Between 1917 and his death, Lenin continued to struggle between the uses of the carrot and the stick. To him, the two were not contradictory, but rather merely revealed Marx’s dialectical clash of opposites.

Although Soviet realities would later distort the nature of peoples’ willingness to participate in the socialist project, before the October Revolution, Lenin still wanted to bridge the gap between the party and the masses. Malia and Walicki interpret these views as amounting to an ideological illusion. Giving agency to the masses was unrealizable and even self-contradictory given the coercive nature engendered in the dictatorship of the proletariat. The revolutionary vanguard was not interested in any popular input but rather preferred obedience and discipline.693 Gooding, on the other hand, highlights Lenin’s considerable and persistent inclination towards reformism. He argues that the struggle for democracy and willingness to cooperate (revealed in the New Economic Policy) lay at the center of Leninism.694

The transformation of capitalism into socialism would not be an easy or quick task.695 The victory of democracy could not wash away years of national oppression. Initially, socialism would merely create an environment conducive to the abolition of national oppression:

the possibility becomes reality “only”—“only”!—with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres, including the delineation of state frontiers in accordance with the “sympathies” of the population, including complete freedom to secede. And this, in turn, will serve as a basis for developing the practical elimination of even the slightest national friction and the least national mistrust, for an accelerated drawing together and fusion of nations that will be completed when the state withers away.

The emergence of a socialist state would lay the foundations for national coexistence. Although the “hatred of an oppressed nation for its oppressor will last for a while,” respect, equality, and having a say in the construction of the socialist state, would eventually establish “democratic relations between nations.”696 Thus, self-determination was not only ideologically justifiable from the Marxist standpoint, it was an integral component of the revolutionary process and a pragmatic solution to national antagonisms.

DESTROYING THE CAPITALIST STATE, BUILDING THE SOCIALIST STATE: NATIONALITY QUESTION IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION.

The total mobilization of populations for the Great War opened new vistas for Marxists everywhere. This was particularly true in East Central and Eastern Europe, where instability and chaos were endemic. The bourgeois revolution in Russia in February of 1917 was particularly enticing. The collapse of Tsarism—something that seemed nearly impossible just a few years earlier—held a promise of tremendous change. Amidst these events, Lenin came to believe that Russia could take the leap to the socialist revolution. But what forms would the socialist utopia assume after the advent of socialism?

692 The most startling examples of such coercion was the Holodomor, Stalin’s starvation of the Ukrainian population in the early 1930s, which was a component of his purification of oppositionist elements within the Ukrainian Republic.
694 Gooding, Socialism in Russia.
695 The dictatorship of the proletariat could begin already under capitalism. Hence, the transition period to complete communism would last longer than many other Marxists predicted.
696 Lenin, “The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up.”
By early 1917, there was a certain paradox in Lenin’s conceptualization of the nation-state. On the one hand, Lenin recognized that the transition period would require the state apparatus to mediate between the different groups in society. On the other hand, it became clear to him “that socialist transformation required the emergence of a new state form patterned after the party itself.” Like Luxemburg, Lenin believed that reformist or gradual change would not go far enough. The very foundations of bourgeois power had to be destroyed for genuine socialism to take root. In this process, the bourgeois state—an exploitive extension of capitalism—had to be eradicated. By the spring of 1917, the weaknesses of the Russian Provisional Government, and the acceptance by many of its illusory bourgeois-democratic framework, were an even more important motivation for Lenin’s rejection of the existing system. Only a violent overthrow of the entire state machine and the dictatorship of the (vanguard of the) proletariat could bring about genuine change.

In *April Theses*, Lenin dismissed the Provisional Government’s ability to reform Russia. Too conservative and without enough concern for the proletariat, the government would never secure the emergence of socialism. Already during the Great War, Lenin came to accept that imperialism had produced a horribly exploitive system based on “gigantic parasitic states” that functioned “at the expense of individual and group autonomy.” He realized that “overthrowing capitalism could only be achieved by overthrowing the state form to which it was bound intrinsically.” The state had become the exploitive tool of the masses as Marx had predicted. “The nation state,” in Lenin’s worldview, “whose apotheosis was the tyrannical and militarized state capitalist trust, had, finally, outlived its historical role.” Monopoly capitalism had begun to retard progress and development while utilizing the state machinery to control the masses. This entire capitalist apparatus had to go. All the power had to be transferred to the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies. All this anti-statist rhetoric notwithstanding, Lenin continued to believe that nationalism was an important force in history.

Lenin’s radicalism continued unabated throughout 1917. The new Russian parliamentarism had failed to satisfy the masses. No enduring benefits had been achieved from cooperation with a bourgeois government. After the failed coup in July, Lenin felt even more strongly that it was time to act. The limits of the bourgeois (democratic) revolution under the liberal government were becoming evident. “The longer the state survives,” Lenin asserted, “the more perfected it becomes as an instrument of ensuring bourgeois ‘order’ within society; the more it is compelled to arrogate to itself all public functions, the greater therefore becomes the imperative to destroy it, for socialism signified the restoration to society of all the functions absorbed by the parasitic state.” He especially

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697 Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement*, 82.
698 Harding argues that Lenin’s anti-statism was wholly borrowed from Marx and Engels and further informed by Bukharin. Harding, *Leninism*, 146-51.
702 Lenin, “The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution (April Theses).” Harding explains: “The February Revolution had produced, in embryonic form, the organs of popular self-government which, by asserting their power over the simplified mechanisms of economic control which state capitalism had introduced, could revivify the economic life of society and lead Russia on to the path of socialism.” *Lenin’s Political Thought. Volume 2*, 113.
703 Any of Lenin’s political pamphlets from 1917 reveal this attitude: “Political Parties in Russia and the Tasks of the Proletariat,” *Collected Works*, Volume 24, 93-106.
criticized the Menshevik assessment of Russia’s capitalism as still having the potential for further progress and development. Russia had reached the material conditions on which a transition to socialism could begin. Lenin projected this vision in *The State and Revolution.*

By the late summer of 1917, Lenin wanted to justify his rejection of conciliation (towards the government) and the need for a more radical solution. Agreeing with Engels, he concluded that no degree of reform could ever substitute the regenerative force of a socialist revolution. “It is clear,” he explained, “that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this ‘alienation’.” The First World War had transformed capitalism into “state monopoly capitalism.” There was nothing redemptive about the bourgeois state. But, would states simply wither away during socialism?

The withering away of the state denoted neither the anarchist (Bakunian) wholesale and immediate destruction of the entire state apparatus, nor the opportunistic (Bernsteinian or Kautskian) acceptance of the gradual acquiescence or takeover of the state power. All these deviationists, especially the latter group, needed to be convinced not only that there was nothing to fear in the abolition of existing governments, but also that “there were alternative, properly socialist structures of organization available to revolutionary parties through which the transcendence of the existing state could be accomplished.” Lenin envisioned a multifaceted role of the state in the transition from capitalism to socialism, and eventually to communism.

In the first phase, the bourgeois state would not wither away but rather it would be abolished by the proletariat in the course of the socialist revolution. The objective was to smash the “ready-made state machinery” rather than simply taking control over it. Such destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine was “the precondition for every real people’s revolution.” In this initial stage on the road to communism—which Lenin called the lower phase of communist society, or socialism—the dictatorship of the proletariat would remove the instruments of oppression. Following the proletariat’s acquisition of political power, its first task would be to “completely destroy the old state machine and replace it by a new one consisting of an organization of the armed workers, after the type of the Commune.” Destruction would remove the institutions and mechanisms that capitalism used to exploit the masses, and replace them with ones that represented proletarian interests. Only new forms of administrative bodies could unleash popular ingenuity. Lenin pointed out how the Paris Commune “was
able in the space of a few weeks to start building a new, proletarian state machine by introducing such-and-such measures to provide wider democracy and to uproot bureaucracy.” There was no doubt that the old state machinery had to go, but to limit the socialist revolution to its destructive component would dismiss its positive and regenerative aims. Moreover, focusing solely on destruction would boil down to anarchism.

At first glance, Lenin’s radicalism could be interpreted as engendering nothing less than a complete destruction of existing nation-states. Yet, this rhetoric was balanced against a much more practical attitude. Lenin asserted that as communism matured, it could not be “entirely free from traditions or vestiges of capitalism.” To immediately eliminate every bastion of capitalism was simply unrealistic. Bourgeois forms would not be abolished entirely but only in “proportion to the economic revolution,” as “there still [remained] the need for a state, which, while safeguarding the common ownership of the means of production, would safeguard equality in labor and in the distribution of products.” At the very least, the generic state offered a legal framework for the introduction of socialist content and forms. The road away from parliamentarism, for instance, was not “the abolition of representative institutions and the elective principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into ‘working’ bodies.” This was of critical importance: Lenin believed that it was the democratic and egalitarian state that would carry out the social and economic transformation engendered in socialist engineering. Given that the proletariat constituted only a small minority of the Russian population, Lenin wanted to use the state to realize the socialist project.

Although all the vestiges of the bourgeois state would eventually be eradicated, this process would require a thorough but somewhat gradual “cleansing.” Until the “higher” phase of communism arrived, the workers were to control the state. While aiming at the complete abolition of the state, Lenin recognized “that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution, as the result of the establishment of socialism, which leads to the withering away of the state.” In the new world order, the workers would learn new forms of interaction outside of the state machinery, making the nation-state (and nationalism) eventually obsolete. The soviets would become the new “concrete forms of association [replacing] the state and [guiding] society in the direction of socialism”—the workers would become the state.

The State and Revolution revealed much about Lenin’s belief in the transitional phase to the communist utopia. The state would be destroyed and rebuilt in the image of the commune. Yet, more than anything else, this treatise confirmed that “Lenin was [not] pre-eminently concerned with the tactical manipulation of power. Lenin was, above all else, a doctrinaire politician.” Circumstances and the conditions of the moment were the most important determinants of Bolshevik policies. But ideological underpinnings were equally important. Harding rightly points out that: “the strengths, weaknesses and dangers of Leninism arise from its imperious attempt to oblige reality to conform to theory. Theory here does not simply reflect what is evident, rather it anticipates and projects; moreover, it inserts itself as the key element in the whole practical business of transforming reality.”

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712 Lenin, “The State and Revolution.” In formulating his ideas, Lenin relied heavily on Marx’s account of the Paris Commune as a prototype of the future world order. He quoted at length from both “Eighteenth Brumaire” and “The Civil War in France.”
713 Lenin, “The State and Revolution.”
714 Lenin, “The State and Revolution.”
715 Lenin’s Political Thought. Volume 2, 119, 123.
716 Harding, Lenin’s Political Thought. Volume 2, 140.
717 Harding, Leninism, 107.
Through action, theory would become a reality. Yet, because Lenin was a pragmatist foremost, he recognized that the revolutionary process would require discipline, violence, and coercion, and he was not afraid to reach for these to push forward his socialist vision. The revolutionary moment justified the vanguard of the proletariat’s violation of prescribed ideological boundaries. This tactical flexibility explains Lenin’s ability to move far beyond the neutral attitude towards nationalism. By the early 1920s, the Bolsheviks were not only pushing forward the self-determination rhetoric, they were actively promoting the development of socialist content in national forms.

By the fall of 1917, Lenin was convinced that Bolsheviks needed to save Russia for the proletariat. They had reached out to the masses of the country’s inhabitants by promising “bread, peace and land.” But beyond workers and the peasants, they carried their message to the various nonRussians in order to win them over to socialism. Without the support of these nationalities, socialism could not be built in Russia. Hence, a fourth slogan, that of self-determination, entered the Bolshevik pantheon when they rushed through the streets of St. Petersburg in late October of 1917 to seize the Winter Palace.718

718 To some extent, the Bolsheviks became the best organized alternative to the Provisional Government. Their influence continued to grow in the summer and fall of 1917, especially as they gained power in trade unions, local (municipal) institutions, and the soviets.
TO BE NATIONAL IN THE ERA OF INTERNATIONALISM: LENIN DEFENDS SELF-DETERMINATION.

“The denial of the right of nations to self-determination in present-day Russia is undoubted opportunism and a refusal to fight against the reactionary Great-Russian nationalism that is still all-powerful.” Lenin drew this conclusion in his article on the national programme of the RSDLP at the end of 1918. Describing Russia as “our country,” he recounted the brave tale of the Russian socialists’ struggle to promote self-determination against all other European socialists who had strayed away from the proper Marxist response to nationalism. As before the Great War, Lenin once again attacked cultural-national autonomy and national nihilism. The former “implies precisely the most refined and, therefore the most harmful nationalism,” Lenin asserted, “it implies the corruption of workers by means of the slogan of national culture and the propaganda of the profoundly harmful and even antidemocratic segregating of schools according to nationality [and] in accordance only with the ideals of the nationalist petty bourgeoisie.” Equally harmful were Social Democrats of Luxemburgian persuasion, who “in their fear of playing into the hands of the bourgeois nationalism of oppressed nations, […] play into the hands not merely of the bourgeois but of the reactionary nationalism of the oppressor.” The people of each nation had the right to willingly and collectively decide to separate. “The proletariat demands,” Lenin concluded, “a democracy that rules out the forcible retention of any one of the nations within the bounds of the state.” But he quickly qualified his position by stating that “the recognition of the right does not exclude either propaganda and agitation against separation or the exposure of bourgeois nationalism.”

In the post-October period and amidst the Civil War, Lenin still felt required to justify the Soviet application of self-determination in opposition to national-cultural autonomy, territorial autonomy or rejection of nationalism. Demands for bread, land, peace and self-determination—however demagogical they were—certainly helped the Bolsheviks assume power. Yet, between 1917 and 1923—after 1923, no major debates or changes took place in the Soviet nationality policy—the Bolsheviks faced a complicated situation. The Civil War and foreign intervention; rearrangement of the Tsarist territories and the consolidation of the first Communist state; wars with neighbours; as well as the interplay of ideology and circumstance, of intra-party power struggles, and of the continuously evolving understanding of the Marxist utopia—all of these shaped the development of the Soviet nationality policy and the construction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The main aim here is to explain how the Soviet experimentation with nationalism was to be carried out on the domestic banners as well as those of the Communist International (Comintern or Third International). Nationality policy had to provide support for the Bolsheviks, prevent the complete disintegration of the Russian imperial territories, and extend the revolutionary struggle abroad. Within the emerging Soviet structure, the aspirations of the non-Russians had to be balanced against centralized political control over the various Soviet territories and republics. Through language, culture, recruitment of communist cadres and state institutions, the Soviets hoped to acquire loyalty to the emerging Soviet

system.\textsuperscript{721} From 1917 until 1923, the battleground over the proper approach to nationalism was wrought within and outside of the Bolshevik Party. Moreover, the same ideological struggle extended to the emerging national Communist parties throughout Europe.

**LENINIST ASSUMPTIONS: HOW TO USE NATIONALISM EFFECTIVELY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY MOMENT.**

Connor rightly points out that “by conceding all, or rather, by seeming to concede all to nationalism, one in fact was promoting internationalism. [The] best way to avoid or to dissipate a grass-roots demand for independence was to proffer that independence.”\textsuperscript{722} The scheme was simple: giving people the right to independence (or national equality if they chose to remain in the Soviet state from the beginning) would remove national antagonisms, allowing economic endeavors to fuse (or assimilate) peoples into larger territorial units. Eventually, all the nationalities of the former Tsarist Empire would realize that secession was not in their best interest, and all would come back into the fold of the Soviet framework, within which they would receive territorial autonomy.\textsuperscript{723} It was part and parcel of the Marxist dialectic, as Stalin would explain in 1930, of “disunion for the purpose of union.”\textsuperscript{724} The rhetoric of self-determination would allow nationalities to realize that they did not need secession to retain national rights and privileges. The Bolshevik nationality propaganda, though widely professed, would certainly not be carried out amongst all ethnicities.

Lenin never professed the right to independence for all nations. Political expediency remained an important determinant of how the vanguard of the proletariat would treat any given nation. But this was not mere cynical manipulation, as Connor would like us to believe,\textsuperscript{725} for Lenin wholeheartedly believed that it was the proletariat’s duty to encourage national equality, cultural autonomy, elimination of national distrust, and voluntary assimilation. Self-determination would not only extinguish the flames of both great-power and local-national chauvinism, but would also politically and economically modernize the more backward non-Russians so that they would be not only indebted to socialism, but would willingly embrace it.\textsuperscript{726} It is equally true that Lenin discarded ideology on many occasions when it suited him to do so in pursuit of specific goals. But such flexibility had been a defining characteristic of Lenin’s preoccupation with action going back to the early 20th century. Exigency of the moment always trumped ideology. An abrupt and drastic shift in tactics could always be ideologically justified by Marxist dialectics. Violent actions could be defended with reference to social justice; optimism could accompany

\textsuperscript{721} Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 5.
\textsuperscript{722} Connor, *The National Question*, 34.
\textsuperscript{723} Connor, *The National Question*, 34-38.
\textsuperscript{725} The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s seemed to have vindicated many historians who promoted the depiction of the USSR as involved in *nation-breaking*. Led by Richard Pipes, these scholars never abandoned their “traditionalist” view of Soviet society (i.e., as totalitarian, coercive, etc.). In their eyes, the disintegration of the multiethnic state has only proven what they had been saying all along. Hélène Carrère d’Encausse’s *The Great Challenge* or Stephen Blank’s *The Sorcerer as Apprentice* are representative of this genre. Albeit in different ways, both conclude that the Soviet Union provided meaningless pseudo-cultural concession to nationalities, which were soon after repelled through brutal repression. The regime and its opportunistically power hungry ideologues strategically used a tactical program to exploit the nationalist aspirations of minorities only to deny them their right to self-determination. The seeming unity of the USSR was maintained by force and coercion, with the ultimate objective of breaking down national ties and creating a Soviet Empire. Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930*, trans. Nancy Festinger (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1992); Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994).
\textsuperscript{726} Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, xiii.
intimidation; revolutionary chaos could be balanced with rational policymaking; popularity could be built through authoritarianism; and internationalism could be promoted through nationalism.

Recent scholarship has revealed the powerful and lasting effects of the Soviet nationality policy. The contribution of national sentiments to the collapse of the Soviet Union cannot be doubted. The Soviets strengthened nationalities, build some where none existed before, established clearly defined territories, and conducted unprecedented ethnographic studies of their lands. But all this was accomplished at great expense. The methods Bolshevists used to reassemble the Tsarist territories as well as the improvised and inconsistent implementation of the ensuing nationality policy (including Stalin’s eventual reversal of this practice in the 1930s) cannot be disregarded. Nonetheless, to exclusively focus on the oftentimes violent and coercive mechanisms of Soviet consolidation is not only to disregard some of the constructive and affirmative consequences of the nationality policy, but also to dismiss the complexity of the evolution of these ideas and policies.

The overarching aim of Lenin and his cohorts was to use nationalism to lead people towards the communist utopia. It was hoped that recognizing national aspirations, allowing peoples to speak in their own language, developing national (socialist) elites, and modernizing them, would make them receptive to the socialist message. But Lenin and other Bolshevists quickly learned that their assumptions produced mixed results. They expected that the ethnicities would flock to the gates of Marxist self-determination; that they would support the Bolshevik cause; that they would prefer to exist within the Soviet framework rather than as independence states; and that willingness rather than force and intimidation would maintain unity. On all accounts, they faced tremendous challenges. The turmoil of War Communism, of Soviet Union’s isolation, of the failure of the revolution to spread abroad, of the eventual rebellions (e.g., Kronstadt), and of the powerful drive towards national sovereignty produced contradiction, inconsistency and improvised solutions.

Firstly, the Soviets had to market their image in opposition to Great Power (i.e., Tsarist Russian) chauvinism. It was essential to present the socialist project as the anti-thesis to imperial national oppression. Lenin rightly asserted that the psychology of the oppressed would require much finesse and that distrust could only be eliminated through an outright attack on the oppressors. In his “Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.)” (written in 1919), Lenin explained this dimension of post-Tsarist national mistrust:


729 This has been the prevailing attitude in the recent scholarship on the Soviet nationality policy. Emphasis on the nation-building elements has not led to a dismissal of the accompanying negative consequences, but rather has attempted to show the constructive and often inadvertent dynamics of this process. The diversity of the conceptual frameworks within the historiography of the Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s and 1930s is highlighted by the series of articles in the Russian Review, Volume 59 (2000).

730 The Soviets were never fully able to shake off their Russophilic tendencies. Stalin returned to Russocentric policies by the mid 1930s. See, for instance, Robert Conquest, Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice (London: Bodley Head, 1967).
Among the working people of the nations that entered into the Russian Empire the mistrust of the Great Russians that has been inherited from the epoch of tsarist and bourgeois Great Russian imperialism is rapidly vanishing, under the influence of their acquaintance with Soviet Russia, but that mistrust has not yet completely disappeared among all nations and among all sections of the working people. It is, therefore, necessary to exercise special caution in respect of national feelings and to ensure the pursuance of a policy of actual equality and freedom to secede so as to remove the grounds for this mistrust and achieve the close voluntary union of the Soviet republics of all nations.731

At least until Lenin’s death, Great Russian chauvinism was assumed to pose a greater danger than local nationalisms.732 A bridge to the non-Russians of the former Tsarist Empire could only be built on the suppression of everything Russian and everything imperial.733 Such chauvinism was not limited to the Russians. The attitudes of the Ukrainians and the Poles towards the Jews or of the Tatars towards the Bashkirs would have to be amended as well. Not only would a new policy towards national equality be pursued, “but also the development of the language and literature of the working people of the formerly oppressed nations so as to remove all traces of distrust and alienation inherited from the epoch of capitalism.”734 A comprehensive resolution to the nationality dilemma within the former empire would ensure loyalty to the emerging Soviet state.

Secondly, the fulfilled promise of self-determination and national equality would also serve as a Bolshevik publicity campaign directed at all other nations outside Soviet control. Once they witnessed the wonderful treatment of their brethren under Communism, Lithuanians or Ukrainians (and many others) would want to join them.735 But the effective use of nationalism as a tool of anti-imperialism was tricky. The Bolsheviks wanted to use anti-imperial rhetoric to build nationalities that would become Homo Sovieticus. Without appearing to do so, they wanted to exploit, and then weaken, the national sentiments of peoples.

Thirdly, nationalism would modernize backward peoples. Many Bolsheviks realized the paradox of the socialist revolution in an industrially underdeveloped and ethnically diverse Russia. The peasants would have to be brought into the socialist project. Beyond the smychka,736 nationhood would have to be retained as a component at least of the transitional period. Similarly to the New Economic Policy (NEP), nationalism was a necessary and acceptable short-term solution. The benefits of progress and smooth social relations that it promised outweighed the costs. The concern about backwardness was especially evident in the eastern peripheral territories that significantly lagged behind their European counterparts. Nationally oriented economic programs would carry the much-needed progress to the peoples of the East. It was assumed that progressive nationalism would attract people to socialism.

732 Martin contends that this approach was still promoted by Stalin in 1930 at the Sixteenth Party Congress. The Affirmative Action Empire, 245-7. Nonetheless, it seems that Stalin was becoming weary of certain nationalities (like the Ukrainians) already in the latter half of the 1920s. But at that point, he still felt insecure in the Kremlin, preventing a complete reversal of Lenin’s nativization policy.
733 As previously explained, this was a critical pillar of Lenin’s conceptualization of the dynamic between the oppressed and the oppressor. The psychological trauma of the oppressed could only be healed through a complete rejection of imperialism. It is no surprise that during the Cold War years, the Soviets oftentimes referred to liberation as an effective approach towards the Third World countries (and decolonization).
734 Lenin, “Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.),”
735 This was practical geo-strategic thinking on the part of the Bolsheviks. And throughout the interwar years, they continuously attempted to exploit this tactic.
736 Smychka was a popular Soviet slogan that denoted the cooperation, union or alliance between the city and the village. It was supposed to created a link between the urban proletariat and the poor peasantry. Such cooperation was to become a central building block of socialism in the Soviet Union.
For the non-Russians, development had to be national in form for they were not ready to identify with socialism and with Soviet power. Nationalism would become a cocoon for socialist development. “Aid to backward and weak nations,” Lenin asserted, “must be increased by assisting the independent organization and education of the workers and peasants of all nations in the struggle against medieval and bourgeois oppression and also by assisting in the development of the language and literature of nations that have been oppressed or have been underprivileged.”

But modernization inevitably entailed the growth of self-awareness, especially of the national kind. The key was to determine how to modernize in the spirit of socialism while avoiding the appending national-bourgeois side effects. Socialist content in national forms was to resolve this predicament.

Finally, all of the revolutionary gains had to be consolidated to ensure the survival of the lone and isolated socialist state. In order to survive, the proletariat had to use the state and nationalism to shape the economic base of society and to control all social relations. Lenin assumed that once the heavy hand of coercion was removed (i.e., granting of the right of self-deterination), voluntary unification would ensue. However, many centripetal and centrifugal forces tore at the Soviet state. While the advanced nationalities demanded sovereignty, the underdeveloped groups fragmented along ethnic and tribal (even clan) lines. Identifying and classifying peoples and then organizing them into specific national territories or regions, all while resolving existing ethnic and socio-economic tensions in an attempt to construct a viable union, remained a formidable task. (One might say that it remained one of several unfinished Soviet projects.) Moreover, the shape of the future federation wavered between centralization and autonomy. Balancing local peculiarities with national homogeneity in the image of the Homo Sovieticus would require just the right amount of concessions and coercion, and of institutional freedom and bureaucratization. It was no easy task to establish territorial units that satisfied national aspirations without stimulating irredentism or chauvinism.

All of the above were incessantly debated within the ranks of the party, especially between 1919 and 1923. Even when ideologies or policies had been seemingly finalized, there remained much tension between theory and practice. Many within the party felt uneasy about granting concessions to the nationalities. Consequently, Soviet policy continuously wavered between the two extremes of nation building and nation breaking.

TO ACCEPT OR NOT TO ACCEPT NATIONALISM? THE BOLSHEVIKS DEBATE THE VALUE OF NATIONALISM IN THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY DAYS.

Throughout the Great War, Lenin stood firm against a spectrum of criticism launched at self-determination. Although the outbreak of the war had tempered the debate to some extent, it clouded it in other ways as well. Some socialists pointed to wartime chauvinism of many who professed internationalism before 1914. Even some ardent internationalists, such as Luxemburg, began to recognize the need for a constructive Marxist response to nationalism. Yet, like its predecessor, the Zimmerwald Left did not move beyond lofty proclamations in support of

738 Lenin, “Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.).”
739 National forms were perceived to be harmless vessels for the socialist message. Once implemented in the mid 1920s, this belief persisted within the Soviet ideological constellation for several years.
740 This belief he shared with Bukharin, especially towards the end of his life. Both men realized—much too late—that the Soviet state was swallowing up the Soviet society, with dogmatism, bureaucracy and violence replacing democracy and workers’ initiative.

Before the October Revolution, the leaders of this Leftist faction—including Nikolai Bukharin and Giorgy Piatakov—rejected both of Lenin’s central tenets: that a socialist revolution could take place in the backward Russia and that self-determination could be welcomed into Marxism. Bukharin and Piatakov reduced nationalism to economic terms. At best, the nationality question was a neutral factor in history and hence it could be dismissed. At worst, it was a bourgeois deception to hinder class interests.\footnote{Neil Harding, “Bukharin and the State,” in \textit{The Ideas of Nikolai Bukharin}, ed. A. Kemp-Welch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 87; Andrea Graziosi, “G.L. Piatakov (1890-1937): A Mirror of Soviet History,” \textit{Harvard Ukrainian Studies} 16, no. 1/2 (1992): 135-7.} Even in the course of a socialist revolution, once the workers took hold of the state apparatus, the state (and politics in general) would be redundant. Retaining any vestiges of the nation-state was a step backwards, and would only slow down the advent of socialism.\footnote{Harding, “Bukharin and the State,” 89-90.}

The discussions over self-determination certainly did not cease in the early post-revolutionary days. If anything, they intensified. On the one hand, the calls for self-determination had contributed to the Reds’ victory by attracting (even if only minimal) support for the Bolsheviks and by hastening the disintegration of the Russian Empire.\footnote{The impact of self-determination on the Bolshevik takeover is still being debated in the scholarship, with highly contradictory conclusions. Even at the very least, the calls to self-determination ensured a degree of neutrality towards the Red Army and took away wind from the sails of the Whites who overtly intended to reestablish Russian rule. See, for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick, \textit{The Russian Revolution}, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ronald Grigor Suny, \textit{The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 96-122.} On the other hand, their victory in Russia empowered many Bolsheviks to destroy everything bourgeois and build the socialist society from scratch. Many believed that now when they had seized the state machinery, there was no need to pay what they perceived to be Lenin’s lip service to nationalism. Even the key figures of the People’s Commissariat of nationality Affairs (Narkomnats) were suspicious of self-determination. The new nationality commissars such as the Latvian Peter Stuchka, the Pole Julian Leński-Leszczynski or the Lithuanian Vikenti Mickiewicz-Kapsukas were staunch Luxemburgians who were troubled by Lenin’s liberal ideas about nationalism.\footnote{Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch, \textit{Lenin and the Comintern}, Volume I (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 368-70.}

In late 1917 and throughout 1918, Lenin wanted to exploit the destructive passions of the masses, especially the nationalities that had been disenfranchised and mistreated by the Tsarist system.\footnote{Orlando Figes, “The Red Army and Mass Mobilization during the Russian Civil War 1918-1920,” \textit{Past and Present} 129, (1990): 168-211.} If the Bolsheviks played their cards intelligently, these potential supporters could be “turned into active collaborators whose energy and initiative could play a crucial part in creating socialism.”\footnote{Gooding, \textit{Socialism in Russia}, 65.} Furthermore, the Bolshevik slogans, combining...
social and ethnic grievances, appealed to many disenfranchised elements. There is no doubt that the White Army’s attempt to restore Russian rule earned them few friends amongst the minorities. But Lenin’s strategy, though certainly producing temporary advantages for the Reds, opened a Pandora’s Box. Self-determination stimulated the rise of nationalities. Neither Lenin nor Stalin was against such nation-building. But it soon became apparent that nationalism was not only a formidable weapon against Tsarism, but also a challenge to Soviet rule.

**A REVOLUTIONARY STATE: STATISM AND SOCIALIST ENGINEERING.**

Neither Lenin nor Stalin was fooled by the powerful forces unleashed by nationalism. Lenin left the back door open in case nationalism could not be properly harnessed. It was clear that, if necessary, the interests of socialism could always trump those of self-determination. To reassert this principle, at the very beginning of 1918, Lenin already qualified self-determination as a right afforded only to the working masses of any given nation. Although he began to rework the scope and meaning of self-determination, he continued to promote the concept of secession. Yet, many of Lenin’s colleagues remained weary of nationalism. The more Russia seemed to transform into the miracle of socialism, the more they felt nationalism to be superfluous. Once again, at the Seventh Party Congress in April 1918, Piatakov tried to overturn self-determination. But Lenin refused to eject the policy from the party platform.

In the summer of 1918, War Communism emerged as the main force in the struggle to ensure the survival of the first Communist homeland. Gooding argues that War Communism was the single most important determinant of Lenin’s nationality policy after 1917. The wartime experiences pushed Communists to implement drastic measures, which destroyed any of Lenin’s remaining hopes of an egalitarian society. Dilemmas of food supplies, military threats and warfare, distrust of potential allies (such as Left Socialist Revolutionaries), and overall economic breakdown pushed the Bolsheviks towards centralization. Both ideology and circumstances were dismantling whatever democratic legacy the October Revolution engendered. Only efficiency, hardness, sacrifice, bureaucratic organization, and discipline seemed to be saving socialism. Most importantly, the two years following the revolution taught Bolsheviks to master the art of statism, which became one of the pillars of the Soviet nationality policy.

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751 Suny argues that “neither nationality nor class had an a priori claim on the loyalties of its potential constituents” and the Bolsheviks were aware of this. Hence, they opted for populist appeals that would seemingly speak to the local needs of the masses (i.e., peasantry). They often used ethnic arguments to promote social issues. “National Revolutions and Civil War in Russia,” in *Revolutionary Russia*, 134-6.


753 Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue*, 81. This attitude he borrowed from Bukharin for whom self-determination was only acceptable in class terms.


755 The “Declaration Of Rights Of The Working And Exploited People,” for example, promoted Finnish independence.


757 *Socialism in Russia*, 87ff. Gooding is certainly not alone in pointing to the Civil War and War Communism as a defining moment for the Bolsheviks.

758 The Civil War had a tremendous impact on the mentality of the Bolsheviks. As Orlando Figes reveals, the Bolsheviks learned how to exploit the disenfranchised masses (such as the peasants). *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution (1917-1921)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
In the course of the Civil War—especially between the summer of 1917 and early 1921—Soviet Russia was able to create the economic, social, military and political foundations for its own reproduction. Even Left Communists were coming around to the idea of using the state to engineer socialism. Bukharin realized that “the proletariat would [not] spontaneously and necessarily acquire sufficient self-organization, consciousness, and resolve to realize its historical mission.” Even though he and Piatakov rejected everything national and the permanence of socialism in one state, they found themselves working for “a new state that called itself socialist and whose existence could not be theoretically explained.” They faced a paradoxical situation of saving a state that they wanted to destroy. And they could not reconcile the aspirations of liberated, unalienated individuals with the needs of the planned and organized society. “The only way of overcoming this unarticulated tension,” Harding explains, “was to presume that all free men of right reason would voluntarily assent to the organizational structures and planning directives and accept the restraints and discipline they necessarily entailed.” Inadvertently, the state was quickly replacing the proletariat as the embodiment of the socialist cause; institutional rationalization was replacing revolutionary activism; and state control was replacing democratic oversight.

As the Bolsheviks moved towards bureaucratization and statism, self-determination revealed another of its undesirable consequences: the loss of territories. Finnish independence was quickly followed by demands for secession from a variety of groups. If the first socialist state was to survive, it would have to halt the fragmentation process and consolidate its victories. Long before 1918, Lenin had already accepted the need for coercion and force to keep Russia together but now violence seemed to be the predominant solution. Armed intervention in the name of a centralized and unified state was a necessity. But what he still encouraged amongst his followers was a “skillfully veiled and minimal intervention which, far from inflaming national feeling and anti-Russiannes, would promote socialist consciousness of the workers and peasants of Russia in a common federal state.” He had “sanctioned acts of violence but wanted to protect and gradually convince peoples” to the socialist cause. Yet, regardless of how many benefits could be promised to convince minorities to stay in the union, it was clear that the Red Army would intervene on behalf of or by invitation of the local proletariat or Communist sympathizers. After all, was the Red Army not obliged to assist the workers of all nations?

763 Gooding argues that “the very fact they had applied force so successfully in the political sphere simply encouraged them to think that forceful methods could be applied equally effectively elsewhere.” Socialism in Russia, 79.
764 Gooding, Socialism in Russia, 72, 92. Yet, Gooding’s argument that “violence that Lenin accepted as a temporary necessity was calculated, minimal, clearly end-related and for the short term only” is unconvincing. The reality was that any and all challenges to the party’s dictatorship over all political and economic aspects of the state would have to be eradicated quickly and ruthlessly. Force remained an important mechanism of control over a vast and diverse territory. Coercion was an aspect of Tsarist heritage that the Bolsheviks could not afford to abandon, at least not in the 1920s.
The confrontation between the nation-builders and the internationalists culminated at the Eight Party Congress in the spring of 1919. Piatakov argued that in the transition period of socialism, nationalism had become anachronistic and should be removed from the party platform. Since class was the most important identifier of peoples’ interest, it should take precedence over all others. If nothing else, the proletariat’s seizure of power made nationalism completely irrelevant. Lenin, on the other hand, reached into his wartime writings to emphasize self-determination’s contribution to the revolutionary overthrow of Tsarism. It was not yet the time to abandon a concept that seemed to be building socialism. Nonetheless, realizing the growing power of nationalism (which in some cases turned against the Soviets), Lenin began to rework the scope of self-determination.

The compromise on self-determination reached at the Eight Party Congress certainly did not denote Lenin’s loss of power. By the summer of 1918, Lenin had already realized the many challenges of the nationality question in Russia and was moving towards a reformulation of the concept. After all, in the course of the Civil War (1918-23), Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland achieved independence. And other (non-Bolshevik) governments seemed to spring up everywhere. The compromise was thus not dictated by intra-party dispute as much as by fear of further fragmentation of former Tsarist territories. Self-determination would be now qualified by “the level of historical development of the nation concerned.” The less developed groups (e.g., Uzbeks) could still carry out straightforward self-determination (even until secession). Where national consciousness was underdeveloped, the Bolshevik calls for sovereignty and national rights had tremendous propaganda value. However, for the more advanced ethnicities (e.g., Ukrainians), a more fitting principle of the self-determination of the proletariat would be applied. Such an approach would control the intensification (i.e., bourgeoisification) of nationalism, prevent secession, and ensure a cadre of loyal supporters. The right to self-determination would now be concentrated in the single class of the nation, and by extension in the single party that spoke on its behalf. Moreover, to further restrict the application of self-determination, the nation’s future would be determined either by a nationwide referendum (under the watchful eye of the Red Army) or at a Congress of Soviets. Those at the Eight Congress who remained suspicious of self-determination preferred to emphasize the hypercentralist tendencies of the emerging Soviet state. They simply exalted centralism against the national demands. Nonetheless, Lenin remained adamant about retaining self-determination as a pillar of the Soviet nationality policy.

**Between Nation Breaking and Nation Building: Soviet Nationality Policy, 1920-1923.**

Analyzing the chaos of the Civil War, economic and political exigencies of War Communism, and the improvised nature of Soviet policies, it is easy to paint the Bolsheviks as little more than violent and power-hungry

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765 Following the October Revolution, the nationality question was discussed at three Party Congresses: the Eight, the Tenth and the Twelfth.


767 Martin and Smith see this as Lenin’s conciliation to the growing discontent of the Left Communists. However, by this point, Lenin’s power had become omnipotent. His “conciliation” was more a result of the realities of nationalism’s growing appeal than of fear of factionalism within the Bolshevik party.

768 Lenin, “Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.).” This text was inserted as a revision of the original statement which did not include anything on how class interests would define the scope of self-determination.

769 Smith argues that Lenin also worried about the national nihilism of the rank and file. Many Bolsheviks simply disregarded self-determination and applied cruel methods against the minorities. Limiting self-determination would not only justify some of these tactics but would also serve as a valve to release some of the growing tensions (within and outside of the party). *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 20-22.
thugs, bound on destroying everyone—including nationalities of the former Tsarist Empire—in their quest for centralization and power. Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, Stephen Blank, and Richard Pipes argue that the young Soviet state provided meaningless pseudo-cultural concessions to nationalities, which were soon after reversed through brutal repression.770 The Bolsheviks’ central aim was nation breaking. The regime and its opportunistic and power hungry ideologues strategically implemented a seemingly positive nationality program to exploit the nationalist aspirations of minorities and then to deny them their right to self-determination. The unity of the Soviet state was maintained by force and coercion, with the ultimate objective of breaking down national ties and creating a Soviet Empire.771

Some nation breaking certainly took place between 1917 and 1924 as the young Soviet state attempted to consolidate its political and territorial integrity. But it is an exaggeration to argue that the redefinition of self-determination, the emerging statism or drive for centralization intended to suppress all national aspirations or to destroy nationalities.772 Nationalism remained a surrogate proletariat773—an important ingredient in building support for the emerging Soviet state. The Soviets’ nationality policy was successful during the critical years of the Civil War not solely due to military measures or coercion, but also because of the Bolsheviks’ willingness to concede a great deal to the nationalities.774 They maintained a balance between using force and granting concessions, between top-down policies and grassroots support, and between sblizhenie (i.e., merging or centralization) and korenizatsiia (i.e., indigenization).775 The drive to create the future Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—regardless of whether we think of it as a pluralistic (civic) state, empire or something in-between—involved both nation breaking and nation building. Using this dualistic strategy, by the end of 1920, the Soviets assumed control of Ukraine, Belarus, Central Asia and Transcaucasia. As the Georgian case revealed, this process was neither guided by a readily available blueprint nor completely improvised, neither driven solely by circumstance nor by ideology, and neither artificial nor indigenous.

771 d’Encausse’s work is a good example of this line of thinking. She claims that the Bolsheviks tried to develop a balance between egalitarianism and a unification of nations, but “the scarcity of leadership and resources, coupled with the urgency of the problems they faced, led the Bolsheviks to develop the capacity for state intervention,” which eventually transformed into an “unlimited license to intervene in the name of a supreme authority with unlimited powers.” Similarly, Blank argues that Lenin and Stalin’s “theories and policies postulated criteria for nationhood, self-determination, autonomy, and federalism designed to fragment rival nationalisms and preserve an empire.” (Blank, The Sorcerer as Apprentice, 212.)
772 There are many historians (in addition to the aforementioned three) that uphold this line of reasoning. Alain Besançon argues that Lenin was always anti-nationalistic and was able finally to carry out his program in the early 1920s. “Nationalism and Bolshevism in the USSR,” in The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future, ed. Robert Conquest (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986).
773 The term was borrowed from Gregory J. Massell, The Surrogate Proletariat. Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974). In his work, Massell shows how the Bolsheviks effectively utilized Muslim women in order to promote a socialist program in Central Asia.
775 Henry R. Huttenback was first to point out the duality of sblizhenie and korenizatsiia. Henry R. Huttenbach, ed., Soviet Nationality Policies: Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1990); see, for instance, the article by John N. Hazard.
The Georgian situation highlighted the incoherent and improvised character of the Bolshevik nationality policy. Georgia was a distinct case as the Mensheviks managed to win a considerable victory in the 1919 elections.\(^{776}\) Meanwhile, the Red Army had journeyed through the Transcaucasian territories and crushed the independence of various nationalities (including Azerbaijani and Armenians). Lenin faced a quandary: how to convince the Georgians to join the union without alienating them from Communism, especially as the Georgians seemed to be leaning towards socialism. He knew that a degree of coercion would have to be utilized but he was not content with a mere territorial conquest. Such an approach would simply replicate the Tsarist model which socialism had fought to destroy. Only through education and propaganda, would socialism take root amongst the minorities.\(^{777}\)

Nationalism need not be abandoned; it simply had to be reformulated as a suitable vessel for socialism.

Military force became a central tactic in the process of Soviet unification, but even as the Red Army stood on the northern and eastern borders of Georgia, Lenin insisted on a policy of concessions. Stalin and one of his chief underlings on the nationality question, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, called for a hard-handed strategy. Eventually, the Politburo conceded and the Eleventh Red Army reclaimed the territory for Communism. Yet, “the Sovietization of Transcaucasia was not the result of the simple application of Marxist principles, nor of their cynical abandonment at an inconvenient juncture,” as Suny points out; “rather it was the product of conflict between ideological considerations and realistic assessments, between the strategic requirements of Soviet Russia and the aims of local Communists.”\(^{778}\) By 1921, coercion, iron discipline, organization, nationalization, and mobilization of the working masses had become the motto of the Bolsheviks. But all of these policies were practiced in such a way as to ensure the growth of local support for Communism.

Although a non-Communist Georgian independence was not acceptable, carrying “liberation” on the tips of bayonets was equally disconcerting for Lenin. Throughout the process, he continuously emphasized moderation and caution. In a letter to Ordzhonikidze in early March of 1921, he urged for cooperation with any groups that did not oppose the idea of Soviet power in Georgia. Most importantly, he warned that “Georgia’s domestic and international positions both require that her Communists should avoid any mechanical copying of the Russian pattern. They must skillfully work out their own flexible tactics based on bigger concessions to all the petty-bourgeois elements.”\(^{779}\) A month later, he reiterated both the need for concessions (towards the petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and the peasantry) and avoidance of copying the Russian model. The aim was “to effect a slower, more cautious, and more systematic transition to socialism.”\(^{780}\) One such tactic involved opening trade with capitalist countries. When Stalin and Ordzhonikidze stepped out of these prescribed limitations, they had to face Lenin’s wrath.\(^{781}\) Although he

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\(^{776}\) For the best account of the situation, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Second Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); see especially the third part of the study.


\(^{780}\) Lenin, “To the Communists of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Dagestan, and the Mountaineer Republic, April 14, 1921,” in *Lenin’s Final Fight*, 259-61.

\(^{781}\) This was the first time that Lenin and Stalin clashed on a policy. Stalin often differed to his superior’s ideological eccentricities. This was a hard lesson for the future dictator of the Soviet Union. He quickly understood that openly opposing Lenin was not a good idea for someone striving to acquire a base of power in the future Soviet Union.
had no qualms about reaching for the most coercive tactics, Lenin preferred to win the hearts and minds of
the non-Russians through concessions, cooperation and minimal force.

The Georgian situation (and that of Ukraine as well) between 1920-1922 marked a critical point in
the shaping of the Soviet nationality policy. It was during the takeover of these territories and the
establishment of socialist republics that Lenin’s duality of nation-building and empire-building were
consolidated. Moscow’s arrangements with various nationalities became a component of Moscow’s
broader plan to consolidate the socialist victory. Such conciliation and cooperation was visible everywhere:
in the countryside through the smychka, and in factories through NEP. But this compromise was not merely
a temporary tactical retreat. Lenin genuinely believed that nationalism would build the new Soviet society.

What further convinced the Bolsheviks for the need to build the Soviet state was their inability to spread
the proletarian revolution outside of Russia’s borders. The Treaty of Riga (signed in March of 1921)
concluded the Polish-Soviet War, halting the spread of the revolution westward.

STALIN’S NATIONALITY POLICY: CLASSIFYING, ORGANIZING AND MODERNIZING NATIONALITIES.

March of 1921 marked another defining moment for the emerging Soviet system. The revolution would not
be exported to the West. But even more troubling was the growing discontent within Russia, culminating in the anti-Bolshevik uprising at Kronstadt. To gain control of the situation—throughout Soviet territories and within the
party—Lenin took a autocratic approach. At the Tenth Party Congress (in March of 1921), he removed all remaining
facets of democratic practices. The destruction of all mediating mechanisms between the state and the society left no
checks on the party’s power and bureaucratization. “The party had become,” as Gooding aptly describes, “the
creature of its leaders, who did business in the Council of People’s Commissars and a still smaller body, created in
1919, the party’s Political Bureau.” What also became obvious by early 1921 was the growing rift between Stalin
and Lenin’s visions of the timing and the practice of nation-building.

Stalin’s position on the nationalities had always been narrower and less conciliatory. In opposition to
Lenin’s broad conceptualization, Stalin’s highly specific definition of national viability promoted a deterministic
framework that allowed for disqualification of any ethnic group that was seemingly missing one of the critical
ingredients that defined viable nationhood. He welcomed the ability to build and dismiss nationalisms at will. It
should come as no surprise that eventually nationalism became a convenient catchphrase for an array of counter-
revolutionary activity. Although he recognized the value of nationalism and the need to harness its energy—having a

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782 Edward Hallett Carr argues that already by early 1920, Lenin was replacing the “right to separate” with the “right
to unite.” *A History of Soviet Russia: The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, Volume One* (London: Macmillan,
1964), 364.

783 Gooding, *Socialism in Russia*, 83.

784 Jeremy Smith argues that Stalin’s work with non-Russians (especially in Narkomnats) was a defining stage in his
early career in the Soviet system. Jeremy Smith, “Stalin as Commissar for Nationality Affairs, 1918-1922,” in

785 Such was the paradox of Stalin’s understanding of nationalism. On the one hand, he promoted a broad
conceptualization of nationalism and its power. Nations had a right to determine their destiny. Yet, at the same time,
on the other hand, he called for broad territorial autonomy for all the various minorities. See, for instance, Forman’s
discussion on this critical issue: *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement*, 129ff. Löwy argues to the
contrary that Stalin’s perception of self-determination was dogmatic, restrictive and rigid. D’Encausse, arguing to
the contrary, states that Stalin’s approach was much more positive than Lenin’s. Munck and Gooding assert that
Lenin’s approach contained a running theme of democracy and moderation.
stronger grassroots understanding of nationalism than Lenin—Stalin was much more weary of its intensity and strength.

Already in 1918, when secession seemed to place the Bolshevik project on the road to fragmentation, Stalin began to argue that self-determination was outmoded and that all should be subjugated to the principles of socialism. Unlike Piatakov and Bukharin, he did not directly oppose self-determination. Nonetheless, similarly to Bukharin, he did not believe that secession would resolve the national antagonisms. In his thesis on the nationality question, he argued that: “[The] formation of the new independent national states did not, and could not, bring about the peaceful co-existence of nationalities; it did not, and could not, eliminate either national inequality or national oppression.” By the Tenth Congress, he actually limited the definition of self-determination “to the right of nations to secede, a slogan which is more precise and definite.” Stalin recognized that the issue of secession lay at the root of the Soviet nationality policy. Rather than granting them sovereignty, he believed that the best way to rule over the mixed population of the former Tsarist territories was to classify, organize and modernize them. As the People’s Commissar for Nationality Affairs (Narkomnats), Stalin was to develop and implement the Soviet nationality policy.

For Stalin, nationalism’s value lay in its modernizing potential. The immediate tasks of the Narkomnats included: initiating economic improvements; creating educational facilitates; promoting cultural activities; attracting local intelligentsia to create loyal Communist cadres; and conducting socialist propaganda in local languages. In a contradictory manner, it became both an executive extension of the central government in Moscow and a representative voice of the national minorities. Stephen Blank rightly points out that the inability of the Narkomnats to extract more power to legislate or implement policy from the RSFSR Sovnarkom had detrimental effects on the ability of the minorities to voice their grievances. Yet, his assertion that “minority territories were regarded from the start as subjects of the Russian state and objects of its policies,” is not fully convincing. In a more insightful manner, Smith reveals that between 1918 and 1920, Narkomnats was organizing military, political and cultural work on the ground while simultaneously convincing Moscow to support regional autonomy. But rather than complete separation, Stalin preferred to think of self-determination as equality that would eradicate all traces of past discrimination. He wanted to educate people in Communism, to combat inter-ethnic violence, and to eliminate socio-economic backwardness.

789 Narkomnats was already established in the summer of 1917 by the Bolsheviks to emphasize the importance that Lenin ascribed to the nationality question. Following the October Revolution, separate national commissariats were gradually established under the Narkomnats. Two groups quickly emerged in the Commissariat: those of the Western borderlands and those of the Eastern peripheries.
790 Smith rightly argues that this was the most important defining aspect of Stalin’s attitude towards the nationality question. “Stalin as Commissar for Nationality Affairs, 1918-1922,” 48-9.
791 Smith, The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 30ff.
792 Blank, The Sorcerer as Apprentice, 214.
793 Smith, The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 34.
There is no doubt that this process of national territorial autonomy was often ruthless and insensitive to local traditions but Stalin was unwavering about dragging the various minorities into civilization even against their will. Such modernization would entail the classification of the various nationalities into territorial units that would constitute the emerging Soviet Union. Unlike Lenin, Stalin was not concerned with ideological considerations as much as with practical solutions. Practical considerations shaped national territories, and “once embarked upon, the policy developed in such a way that the existence of nationally cohesive and self-conscious units came to be seen as being valuable in their own right.”

Such units would provide the foundations for cultural and economic development necessary for socialism. The ultimate goal was that all this work would foster loyalty to the Soviet state.

In his “Theses for the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.),” Stalin outlined the main priorities of the Soviet nationality policy embodied in korenizatsia. The three key areas included: the development of Soviet states “in forms corresponding to the national complexion of these peoples; establishment of “courts, administration, economic organisations and organs of power, functioning in the native languages and staffed with local people;” and the creation of “press, schools, theatres, recreation clubs, and cultural and educational institutions generally, functioning in the native languages.” The most immediate concern were the 25 million underdeveloped peoples of the East “who have not gone through any capitalist development, have little or no industrial proletariat, and in most cases have retained their pastoral economy and patriarchal-tribal manner of life […], or who have not gone beyond the primitive forms of a semi-patriarchal, semi-feudal manner of life.” The solution was “to draw them into the work of building a Soviet economy on the basis of Soviets of toiling peasants, by creating among these peoples strong communist organisations capable of utilising the experience of the Russian workers and peasants in Soviet-economic construction.”

Nation building and the recognition of the right to secede were lofty ideals, but they would amount to very little unless accompanied by real national equality.

Only the overcoming of cultural and economic backwardness would create real national equality. For Stalin, “the element of the actual (and not merely juridical) equalization of nations (help and co-operation for the backward nations in raising themselves to the cultural and economic level of the more advanced nations), [was] one of the conditions necessary for securing fraternal co-operation between the labouring masses of the various nations.” The proletariat of the advanced nations was to assist the labouring masses of the backward nations in their cultural and economic development.

Without such aid, peaceful co-existence and fraternal cooperation of the various nationalities within a single world economic system would not be possible. This process of socialist maturity would require the fusion of the national and the Bolshevik elements of each territory. As most of the loyal Communists were Russian, there was an immediate need to acquire local support. But balancing native aspirations against Moscow’s directives was no simple task.

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795 Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 64-5.
796 All the quotes in the paragraph were taken from Stalin, “The Immediate task of the Party in the National Question.”
797 Stalin outlined four main objectives in 1921: “1) the study of the economic conditions, manner of life and culture of the backward nations and nationalities; 2) the development of their culture; 3) their political education; 4) their gradual and painless introduction to the higher forms of economy; 5) the organisation of economic co-operation between the toilers of the backward and of the advanced nations.” “Concerning the Presentation of the National Question. May 2, 1921,” in *Collected Works*, Volume 5.
Two dangers seemed to stand in the way of the Communist solution to the national question. The most dangerous deviation—and here Stalin still followed Lenin’s lead—was Great Russian chauvinism which persisted amongst some Russian Communists. Mimicking Lenin, Stalin asserted that nationality policies had to be sensitive to the local conditions. The Russian measures could not be mechanically copied everywhere. Moreover, Stalin disingenuously chastised the Russians who dominated over the more underdeveloped peoples. These “kulak colonizers,” as Stalin called them, had created much distrust by attempting to displace native populations. However, behind closed doors, Stalin remained a believer in Russian superiority. Russian workers and peasants offered the best foundations for socialism. There were also practical reasons to promote everything Russian.

Russians were often the only supporters of Bolshevik rule, so uprooting them would denote a significant loss of support in the peripheral areas. The other danger involved “Communists from the local native population who experienced the harsh period of nationality oppression, and who have not yet fully freed themselves from the haunting memories of that period, often exaggerate the importance of specific national features in their Party work, [leaving] the class interests of the working people in the shade.” When the liberated people got a taste of national freedom, even in seemingly Communist forms, they pushed for further concessions that directly violated the prescribed class-oriented limits delineated by Moscow. More broadly speaking, Stalin feared that too much freedom and democracy would turn nationalism into an enemy of Moscow. There is no doubt that the Bolsheviks’ pursuit of loyal allies in all the borderlands required much ideological flexibility. Followers of all political stripes—from nationalists to Leftist sympathizers—were being fused into loyal (or at least obedient) cadres. Loyalty remained a critical concern in the structuring of Soviet power. But since these and many other challenges and dangers loomed on the horizon, it was important to finalize the nationality policy.

The nationality policy was conclusively outlined at the Twelfth Party Congress in April of 1923. At the congress, Stalin explicated all its main dimensions. Foremost, it was to remove Great-power chauvinism and eradicate the emerging local national prejudices of the various non-Russian peoples (especially in ethnically mixed regions). And secondly, it was meant to establish actual equality between the various ethnic groups by bringing them out of cultural and economic backwardness and into a military, political and economic union. The strategy

799 Stalin, “The Immediate task of the Party in the National Question.”
800 Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 135-7. Smith argues that Stalin feared the liberalizing policies that Lenin envisioned for the Soviet Union. Once the Civil War was coming to an end, Stalin (like many other Bolsheviks) believed that that widespread conciliation of the war years should be abandoned for a much stricter approach. Smith, “Stalin as Commissar for Nationality Affairs, 1918-1922,” 49.
801 Smith points out two Soviet models that were used to resolve the problem of loyalty: on the one hand, they utilized Russian Soviets who acted on behalf of a national minority (as in Turkestan); and on the other hand, they granted authority to national leadership over and above that of the Soviets (as in Bashrevkom). The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 93ff.
802 Stalin, “National Factors in Party and State Affairs. Thesis for the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), Approved by the Central Committee of the Party. March 24, 1923,” and “The Twelfth Congress of the R.C.P. (B.). April 17-25, 1923,” in Collected Works, Volume 5. Yuri Slezkine has placed this notion of “equality” at the center of his conceptualization of the Soviet nationality policy. He argues that the Soviets’ persistent obsession with ethnicity led to the idea that “all nations—indeed all nationalities no matter how ‘backward’—were equal because they were equally sovereign, that is, because they all had the same rights.” He stresses Suny’s depiction of the ethno-territorial framework as responsible for the autonomous nature of the republics, but he carries this concept further. The Soviets believed that national “form” (e.g., culture) rather than national “content” (e.g., national aspirations) would be preserved within each ethnicity. Consequently, party ideologues, for instance, championed native-language education as part of the nativization program. “The ultimate
involved the promotion of national territories, languages, elites and cultures. The development of official state languages and of elites who entered into positions of leadership in the party, government, educational and economic institutions would constitute the pillars of 

*korenizatsiia* (i.e., indigenization). The intention was to “make Soviet power seem ‘native (*rodnaia*)’, ‘intimate’ (*blizkaia*), ‘popular’ (*narodnaia*), ‘comprehensive’ (*poniatnaia*).”

Terry Martin elaborates on the distinctiveness of the Soviet model: “it supported the national forms of minorities rather than majorettes. It decisively rejected the model of the national state and replaced it with a plurality of nation-like republics. The Bolsheviks attempted to fuse the nationalists’ demand for national territory, culture, language and elites with the socialists’ demand for an economically and politically unitary state.”

Questions of strategy towards ethnic particularism, of use of coercion, of constitutionalism, of legitimacy and public appeal, and of the pace and extent of socio-economic transformation were all intertwined in the conceptualization of Soviet nationality policy. Lenin wanted “to maximize national political and cultural autonomy within a federation dominated by the Communist Party and to condemn the over-centralizing tendencies of more Russian chauvinist members of the Party.”

The process of “nativization” (*korenizatsiia*) permitted the republics not only to blossom ethically and culturally, but also to experience upward mobility, access to education, and a hope of socio-economic improvements.

Yet, while Lenin urged for flexibility on the ground, the upper layers of Bolshevik elites were bound into ever growing ossification. Nonetheless, for the next decade, *korenizatsiia* created and recreated nations and nationalities throughout the Soviet Union. How to approach nationalities was only one side of the coin; the other entailed the question of the proper structure of the Soviet Union.

**CREATING THE USSR: AUTONOMIZATION OR FEDERALIZATION.**

The emerging Soviet state was alone and isolated, facing a hostile and antagonistic world of capitalism. Consequently, by 1920-1921, the interdependence of Moscow and its assortment of republics and regions was gaining wider political and economic importance. “The isolated existence of individual Soviet republics,” Stalin explained, “is unstable and precarious owing to their existence being threatened by the capitalist states.”

Defence, restoration of the economy, and trade between territories were essential for the union. Cooperation between Russia and her peripheries was essential. To maintain their independence, border regions relied on Russian military and economic assistance; conversely, Russia could not maintain its military and economic power without assistance in fuel, raw materials and food from the border regions. These limbs of Soviet power could never be severed without

good,” Slezkin explains, “was the abolition of all backwardness and thus all differences, but the fulfillment of that goal was postponed indefinitely. […] All non-Russians were ‘nationals’ entitled to their own territorial units and all nationally defined groups living in ‘somebody else’s’ units were national minorities entitled to their own units.” The Soviet Union was a *communal apartment*, as opposed to an empire, with every family (i.e., ethnicity) dwelling in a room of its own. “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, No. 2 (1994): 416, 424, 430.


Suni, “State, civil society, and ethnic cultural consolidation in the USSR,” 28.

These aspects of Soviet life have been explored by other scholars such as Sheila Fitzpatrick.

Stalin, “The Immediate task of the Party in the National Question.”

This certainly did not mean that there was equality between Russia and the other territories and republics. For instance, Azerbaijan was labeled as a prototype of a Communist Muslim power and a widow to the Muslim world. Armenia, on the other hand, had to value to the Soviets and was neglected. Hence, some republics or regions were simply “more equal” than others.

causing harm to the union. Moreover, they would have to mature at a much faster rate if the whole organism was to survive. From 1917 onward, the Bolsheviks faced not only questions of inter-ethnic tensions, socio-economic disparities, regionalism, and loyalty, but also of the future structure of the union. They “wanted to establish borders which were fair to all parties involved, made economic sense and at the same time satisfied as far as possible the ethnological principle.”

The 1918 Constitution indirectly suggested the federalist model for the future union. The same notion was supported by Stalin in 1921 at the Tenth Party Congress. Throughout the early 1920s, competing visions of the union fluctuated between federalism, confederalism and autonomy. “Given the autonomisation policy in the RSFSR,” as Smith explains, “it seemed reasonable to suppose that the simplest and most effective way to create a united state was to extend the principle of autonomy to the five independent republics.” The organization of relations between the republics boiled down to two choices: granting real independence or establishing real unification. The former would mean that Moscow would stop interfering in the affairs of the various territories. The latter would denote abandoning all notions of territorial independence for autonomy.

In a 1922 interview for the Pravda, Stalin was asked: “Does it follow from this that the union of the republics will end in re-union with Russia, in merging with her, as is happening with the Far Eastern Republic?” He replied that the approach that was used in the East could not be applied to established republics for “whereas the former was established artificially (as a buffer), for tactical reasons (it was thought that the bourgeois-democratic form would serve as a reliable guarantee against the imperialist designs of Japan and other powers) and not at all on a national basis, the latter, on the contrary, arose as the natural result of the development of the respective nationalities, and have chiefly a national basis.” To fuse all the republics into Russia would be reactionary, as it would mark a backward step to Russification. He was convinced that fusion of peoples would occur naturally: “The Soviet regime is so constructed that, being international in its intrinsic nature, it in every way fosters the idea of union among the masses and itself impels them to take the path of union.” Whereas the capitalist multinational empires were disintegrating, “in our federation, which unites no fewer than thirty nationalities, we, on the contrary, are witnessing a process by which the state ties between the independent republics are becoming stronger, a process which is leading to an ever closer union of the independent nationalities in a single independent state.”

Stalin, always a cautious pragmatist, warned of the danger of simply toying with fictitious independence. Inescapably, the young Communist cadres emerging from the soil of korenizatsiia, regarded independence (or at least the right to secede) as an important issue. “Stalin wanted to ensure unity,” as Smith concludes, “while preserving the attributes of localized decision-making and national cultural self-government which were essential to

810 Smith, The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 66. Many traditional scholars (such as Pipes or d’Encausse) maintain that the Soviets aimed at artificially separating the various ethnic groups through a deliberate policy of divide and rule.
811 Smith, The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 175.
his aim of eradicating backwardness. In his mindset, nationalism would improve the cultural and economic circumstances of the more underdeveloped peoples, it would consolidate Bolshevik power, and would build loyalty to Moscow—combined, these policies would become the building blocks of socialism.

Whereas Stalin was preoccupied with the smooth running of the state, especially its economic development, Lenin (ever the ideologue) was focused on the broader theoretical framework of the union. Independence and autonomy were powerful ideas, which needed clarification. Lenin had intervened in 1921 and 1922 to stir the party resolutions on the nationality question towards federalism. But it was the Georgian case once again that would reveal Lenin’s last attempt to push forward his vision of the Soviet state. Since the Red Army’s blatant invasion of an independent Georgia, Lenin continuously urged for moderation and sensitivity. He hoped that the Bolshevik leaders would apply an impartial strategy that would consider local interests and aspirations. When news reached him of Ordzhonikidze’s intolerance towards Georgian nationalism (which had been sanctioned by Moscow), and especially of the Kabakhidze incident, Lenin became outraged. The failing nationality policy in Georgia revealed not only the limitations of Bolshevik cooption of nationalism, but also of the broader contradictions of the emerging Soviet system.

The Bolsheviks in Georgia were acting insensitively because they were weary of nationalism in a state that had for three years experienced independence. They readily reached for intimidation, which seemed to be an acceptable strategy. Yet, Lenin was not worried as much about local nationalism as about other emerging trends. Foremost, he could not accept the growing Great Russian chauvinism. He “saw the root of the problem not in the behaviour of individual communists but in the surviving influence of the tsarist, bourgeois, Great Russian bureaucracy.” Remnants of Tsarism were visible everywhere. Consequently, in a 1922 memo to the Politburo, Lenin announced: “I declare war to the death on dominant national chauvinism.” Worst yet, the growing state bureaucracy, which had oppressed people for years under Tsars, had been simply redressed in red. The reality of Soviet power revealed a conspicuous absence of the workingman in the party and the increasing reliance of the party on bureaucratic solutions.

Lenin was working against the realities of Soviet territorial consolidation when he called for autonomy. Already in October of 1920, Stalin labeled secession of territories as a counter-revolutionary act. “We are against the secession of the border regions from Russia,” he explained in an introduction to one of his pamphlets on nationalism, “because secession in that case would mean imperialist bondage for the border regions, a weakening of

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815 Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 185.
816 For the exchanges between Stalin and Lenin, see Lenin’s *Final Fight*, second part.
817 Traditional scholarship had highlighted these exchanges between Lenin and Stalin as amounting to a significant rupture between the two Bolshevik leaders. Yet, as Smith reveals, Stalin did not really care about the theoretical distinctions (between federalism and autonomisation) which Lenin considered critical.
818 During a drinking bout, a drunk Ordzhonikidze had hit a Georgian Communist for his apparently too strong nationalistic sentiments.
821 In his previous writings on the state, Lenin had pointed to the Tsarist bureaucracy as encompassing everything that was evil about autocracy, capitalism and oppression. Bureaucracy was the single most important tool of capitalism in every nation-state.
the revolutionary might of Russia and a strengthening of the positions of imperialism.” Stalin’s solution called for enormous proliferation of distinct autonomous territorial units that would be all unified under Moscow’s centralizing institutions. He explained the nature of this voluntary federalism in October of 1920:

Soviet autonomy is the most real and concrete form of the union of the border regions with central Russia. Nobody will deny that the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Turkestan, Kirghizia, Bashkirkia, Tataria and the other border regions, if they desire the cultural and material prosperity of their masses, must have native schools, courts, administration and organs of authority, recruited principally from the local people. Furthermore, the real sovietization of these regions, their conversion into Soviet countries closely bound with central Russia in one integral state, is inconceivable without the widespread organization of local schools, without the creation of courts, administrative bodies, organs of authority, etc., staffed with people acquainted with the life and language of the population. But establishing schools, courts, administration and organs of authority functioning in the native language—this is precisely putting Soviet autonomy into practice; for Soviet autonomy is nothing but the sum total of all these institutions clothed in Ukrainian, Turkestan, Kirghiz, etc., forms.

Autonomy in national forms denoted korenizatsiia, while federalism meant a high degree of centralization. Whilst Lenin hoped that the former would prevail, Stalin and most Bolsheviks were directing Soviet policy towards the latter.

Lenin, ever the utopian idealist, hoped that the federal framework would be extended far beyond the borders of the union. Already in the summer of 1920, on the forum of the Comintern, he suggested that federalism could be extended to other new members. As the revolution spread through Europe (and the world), new territories could simply establish federal relationships (as new Soviet Republics) with the Soviet Union. In a little known correspondence with Lenin, Stalin argued against this solution. The latter realized that nationalities such as Poles or Finns “would look at a federation on the Soviet model as a form of diminishing their state independence, as an assault on their independence.” Stalin believed that a confederate model would be much more suitable for the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, as in all theoretical matters, Stalin followed Lenin’s attitude.

Some scholars (such as Pipes) argue that federalism indicated a complete failure of Lenin’s nationality policy. Yet, the nationality policy was actually one of the Bolsheviks’ most successful and lasting endeavors. Moreover, by 1923, the Soviet approach to nationalities, more than anything else, revealed the shortcomings of the entire Soviet power structure. It highlighted the mounting limitations in the Bolshevik dualism (and dialectics). Firstly, acquisition of support amongst the non-Russians was painstaking and difficult especially as nationalities learned that the right to secede would never amount to independence. Secondly, national-cultural peculiarities could flourish but divergence from central line was unacceptable. Yet, suppressing political implications of national awakening (i.e., cultural development) was no easy task. Thirdly, although Bolsheviks used both coercion and persuasion, the former always seemed to be more visible. Moreover, no amount of the carrot could replace the stick in situations where nationalists could not be co-opted and converted to the Bolshevik point of view.

Much too late in life, Lenin realized that “the majority opinion in the party was strongly centralist, if not Russian-chauvinist, had accepted the federal principle with reluctance, and was unwilling to make the reality of it, expect in the area of language and culture.” By rejecting democracy within and outside the party, “Lenin had already ruled out the only means by which an effective restraint might have been imposed upon the Politburo.”

This reality doomed over Lenin in his final days when the Georgian situation once again came back to haunt him. Throughout 1922, Lenin had at various occasions signaled his dissatisfaction with the Bolshevik approach to Georgia. To acquiesce their leader’s unabated criticism, Stalin commissioned Dzierżyński to take a closer look at the matter. Dzierżyński’s scathing report painted Georgian Communists as troublemakers whose loyalties to Moscow and to Communism were questionable at best. The Georgians’ chauvinism had been a source of tension, and genuine Bolsheviks (within the Zakkraikom, i.e., Caucasian Bureau) had rightly fought this deviation. Lenin questioned the objectivity of the commission’s tone and remained unconvinced about many of its conclusions. He declared that “what is evident from these materials is that the Central Committee of Georgia’s demands for concessions and for a policy of concessions were seen as being a nationalist deviation in the party, one that must be fought without mercy.”

Lenin’s Bolshevik comrades simply did not have such high level of tolerance for nationalism. “We believe the number one task of our party, and of Soviet power,” as Ordzhonikidze proclaimed, “is to wage a merciless struggle against the remnants of the shameful past, to burn out with a red-hot iron, to use the words of Comrade Stalin, the remnants of nationalism.” Whereas Lenin understood the remnants of shameful past as engendered in Great Russian chauvinism, many of his colleagues perceived all national sentiments in the same monochrome tones of deviation. Moreover, they had not accounted for the emergence of national communism. When Lenin called for a democratic approach to nationalism, most pointed to his eradication of such practices within the party. Nonetheless, korenizatsiia continued to offer quite a bit of protection to the non-Russians through an affirmative action policy of positive discrimination. In the 1920s, the policy remained a powerful legacy of Leninist self-determination.

[826] Gooding, Socialism in Russia, 93.
[827] Gooding, Socialism in Russia, 94.
[828] There was much bad blood between the Georgian leaders and their Transcaucasian counterparts. The former accused the latter of discrimination and intimidation. Finally, Dzierżyński was commissioned to visit Georgia in November of 1922 to clarify the situation and resolve all the problems. Russian Bolsheviks operating in the region developed policies for which they eventually got approval from Moscow. Oftentimes, the Kavbiuro (Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party) acted without consultation with either Moscow or native Communists of the republics.
[831] There was a division amongst Bolsheviks on the nationality question between the Left and the Right. The former wanted to curtail nationalist practices and push for a purely internationalist agenda. The latter wanted to indulge the nationalist agenda in the republics.
[832] Lenin, “Regarding the conclusions of the Dzerzhinsky commission.”
[833] The best example of this phenomenon would be Sultan Galiev.
[834] Much debate has ensued as to the exact timing of Stalin’s rejection of the early Soviet nationality policy. Some, like Martin, see the reversal taking place only in the mid-1930s. Others point to a much earlier event, perhaps even in the latter half of the 1920s when Stalin began to reject indigenization in a systematic manner. Yet, Stalin remained loyal to the nationality policy because it gave him a solid forum to eradicate his opposition—in the first
The final stage in the story of Lenin’s nationality policy emerged in 1923. The revolutionary zeal fizzled in Germany, Moscow faced the scissors (i.e., economic) crisis, some Leftists opposed federalism and korenizatsiya, and serious national problems appeared in various territories. Lenin’s response to these troubles was the Twelfth Party Congress in April of 1923. Although he could not attend the proceedings due to his declining health, Stalin carried his message to the party. The “Theses on National Factors in Party and State Development” echoed all of Lenin’s main ideas about self-determination. Combined with Stalin’s speech at the Fourth Conference of the Central Committee of the R.C.P. on the nationalities policy in June 1923, the two presentations ended all debate on nationalism. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a federation where all nationalities could enjoy the benefits of korenizatsiya. No other official debates on the nationality question would follow in the remainder of the interwar period.

By 1923 when Lenin still dreamed of exporting the revolution, he was faced by the reality that the Bolsheviks had to build socialism at home within the confines of a single socialist state. Nation building through federalism (and autonomy), korenizatsiya, and modernization gradually consolidated the emerging union. But an isolated and encircled Soviet Union also needed to defend and to look beyond its borders. Since economic isolation was destructive, opening relations with other states was quickly becoming a necessity. To accommodate these various objectives without violating any tenets of Marxist internationalism, Stalin would eventually develop the notion of “socialism in one country.” NEP and korenizatsiya had already “embodied the acceptance of the fact that Russia was not a workers’ state, and that international revolution would not come for a long time.”

But did Marx, Engels, and even Lenin not argue that socialism could never be built in a single state, least of all in an underdeveloped Soviet Union? Could nationally confined socialism succeed? By April of 1925, Stalin argued that socialism could take root in a single country. And he was not alone as even Left Communists like Bukharin, Zionoviev and Kamaniev agreed with the construction of socialism in a single country. What this required was the acceptance of the assumption that the socialist project would become closely identified with the Soviet state power.

Henceforth, as Forman asserts, Stalin came to accept that “internationalism was not a principle but an ideological place, that presented by Trotsky. Stalin could easily paint the Leftist rejections of the Soviet nationality policy as Great Russian chauvinism of which Lenin was so critical.

By May 1922, Lenin suffered his first stroke, which would mark a decline in his health and his ability to affect the direction of Soviet policies. Two more strokes inflicted his health in December.


Stalin, “Speeches Delivered at the Fourth Conference of the Central Committee of the R.C.P. with Responsible Workers of the National Republics and Regions, June 10, 1923,” in Marxism and the National and Colonial Question by Joseph Stalin, 172-84. It must be emphasized that both speeches contain the germ of future Stalinism. They both pointed out the dangers of nationalism not only at the Russian level, but also at the local level. Hence, it would be easy to attack local nationalists for being opportunistic, reformative, or guilty of any sort of other deviation.

Martin, Affirmative Action Empire, 9.

Forman, Nationalism and the International Labor Movement, 137.

As van Ree points out, Stalin certainly was not the first Marxist to actually promote such an idea. The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, 42ff. In many ways, the reformist road to socialism had accepted this premise.

van Ree, The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin, 84-95.
tool to be used to justify the vicissitudes of Communist policy commitments.\textsuperscript{842} In the words of Francine Hirsch, the Soviet Union became an “empire of nations.”\textsuperscript{843}

REDEFINING INTERNATIONALISM: NATIONALIZING THE COMINTERN.

Before the Soviet state had to become an empire of nations, its leaders hoped that the October Revolution would spread across Europe. After all, internationalism remained a key ingredient of the socialist project. Only workers’ solidarity across boundaries could ensure proletarian achievements. Lenin began to advocate for the establishments of a third International almost immediately after the collapse of the Second International in 1914.\textsuperscript{844} But these attempts bore fruit only after the October Revolution. It was not until March of 1919 that the founding congress of the Communist International met in Moscow.

The post-First World War period was filled with chaos and hope. In the early months of 1919, the Spartacist uprising in Germany and Bela Kun’s assumption of power in Hungary gave hope to the Bolsheviks that Europe was ready for a proletarian revolution. Moreover, when the Comintern was established in March of 1919, Lenin still maintained that the survival of the first Communist state was hinging on the spread of the revolution beyond Russia’s borders.\textsuperscript{845} He perceived events through the prism of the wider anti-capitalist struggle, with the October Revolution as only one illustration of the world crisis that signaled capitalism’s imminent collapse. To protect the Soviet state and to ensure the spread of the revolution, the struggle for a socialist utopia had to be controlled from Moscow. The Bolsheviks’ right to lead this struggle had been secured through their victory in Russia. But the Kremlin’s perception of Europe’s readiness for revolution was skewed and contradictory.

Firstly, the Bolsheviks were uncertain about what to do with the European Marxist heritage. On the one hand, this heritage had too much experience. Set in its ways, it was opportunistic and reformative.\textsuperscript{846} On the other hand, this heritage did not possess enough experience, especially of the revolutionary kind about which the Bolsheviks could boast. Secondly, the Bolsheviks believed that there was so much social tension in all the European states, that civil wars would break out everywhere. They did not realize that the bourgeois states had survived the war intact. Thirdly, the masses were unwilling to commit to Communism, and the likelihood of a revolution rolling across the world was becoming ever distant. The workers of the world were too tired of war and instability, and the Bolshevik appeals for further destruction were mostly ignored.

At the First Congress of the Communist International in March 1919, the national question was discussed only in the context of the causes of the Great War or more specifically in reference to imperialism and the post-war

\textsuperscript{842} Forman, \textit{Nationalism and the International Labor Movement}, 139.
\textsuperscript{843} Francine Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities,” \textit{The Russian Review} 59, (2000): 201-226; \textit{Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). Her perspective is part of a broader debate within Soviet historiography about the Soviet Union as a state or empire. The aforementioned Slezkine argues that it remained a communal apartment, while Suny contends that it should be perceived as an empire. According to Hirsch, “Soviet subjects, including Communist party elites, were assimilated into official nationality categories through the census, map, and other classificatory devices.” At the same time, “through a range of administrative, economic, cultural, and political institutions, the official nationalities were assimilated into the Soviet state and society.” “Toward an Empire of Nations,” 204.
\textsuperscript{846} O’Connor, \textit{Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919-1943}, 30.
settlements.847 Zionoviev attacked the bourgeois “right to self-determination through referendum,” as nothing more than another form of imperialism.848 “The [capitalist victors] converted the right of nations to self-determination,” another report asserted, “into a disguise for annexationism by creating vassal states whose reactionary governments have promoted a policy of plunder and suppressed the revolutionary movements of the toiling masses.”849 Woodrow Wilson’s self-determination was only a means by which bourgeois victors could justify territorial acquisitions, the growing (reactionary) national chauvinism and the punishment of the vanquished. Worse yet, the young states that emerged from the ashes of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, “hardly had they been established when they went for each others’ throats over national boundaries. The imperialist Allies, meanwhile, organize combinations among the petty states new and old, to keep them tied down in mutual hatred and generalized impotence.” Only a proletarian revolution could “guarantee the small nationalities the possibility of a free existence.”850 During the First Congress, the positive applications of self-determination received very little attention, making an appearance only in the context of debates on colonial struggles.851

In the early 1920s, the Marxist dreams of a world upheaval were still of primary concern. The Comintern never fully shed its revolutionism, even when Europe stabilized by the mid 1920s. In 1920, the Red Army was approaching Warsaw, and the hope of carrying the revolution to the West stimulated the hopes of the delegates of the Comintern’s Second Congress. Lenin’s “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions” prepared specifically for the congress revealed much about the future Soviet relations with its national counterparts and about the direction of Communist nationality policy. In his “Theses,” Lenin asserted that “Communist International’s entire policy on the national and the colonial questions should rest primarily on a closer union of the proletarians and the working masses of all nations and countries for a joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie.”852

The most immediate and conspicuous absence noticeable in the theses is that of self-determination. The pillar of Bolshevik policy before and after the October Revolution was not mentioned overtly. Lenin explained that the national question would henceforth be based on three premises. Firstly, it would be examined through a “precise appraisal of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of economic conditions.” Secondly, it would be based on “a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes, of working and exploited people, and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class.” And lastly, it would require “a clear distinction between the oppressed, dependent and subject nations and the oppressing, exploiting and

sovereign nations." Although there was nothing groundbreaking in these arguments, one idea stood out. The overarching, even if not overtly specified approach was the insistence on the universal applicability of the Bolshevik archetype. “The tension between Bolshevik universalism and national specificity,” as McDermott and Agnew point out, “must surely be viewed as a central, if not the central, dilemma of twentieth-century international communism.” Universalization of Bolshevism was embodied in the “Twenty-one Conditions” that had to be fulfilled by each member party.

As the revolution revealed, only disciplined and professional revolutionaries could assume the role of the vanguard of the proletariat and be chosen to represent the most genuine Marxist heritage engendered in the Bolshevik model. Only tested Communists could be trusted. But could the Soviet model be transplanted without modification to any context? Considering local conditions when rooting Communism became a critical concern. The various emerging Communist parties “grappled with the distinctive problems of the class struggle of their own nations, and their policies were by no means carbon copies of those carried out in Russia.” Equally troubling was the required ideological discipline. Since the Bolsheviks “did not wish simply to create tiny sects, [the] dichotomy was therefore how to establish mass parties on the basis of a rigid discipline that was alien to the majority of European workers.”

Creating a mass party required ideological flexibility that the Bolsheviks were reluctant to accept. Given these criteria, it is not surprising that most Communist parties that emerged at the turn of the 1920s were a product of a split within national social democratic movements.

Lenin went further to emphasize three other important factors that would determine the use of nationalism for the promotion of Communism. Foremost, he asserted that “a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia.” On the one hand, this was a defence of the federal structure of the future union. It seemed that Lenin was selling the federal framework not only to the existing republics but also to all potential future

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854 Eventually, this contributed to the bureaucratization of the Comintern. Failure to comply with the Soviet models or to strictly follow Moscow’s instructions would not be tolerated. And given the Soviet penchant for periodical purges, it was simple to clean house of any “unreliable elements” that could not be fully trusted. Braunthal, History of the International 1914-1943, Volume 2, 172-4.
857 O’Connor believes that this was the single most important policy in determining the Comintern’s relationship with the member parties. O’Connor, Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919-1943, 30.
860 National parties emerged usually from a split between Right and Left wings of Social Democracy. The radical then constituted the new Communist party.
members. On the other hand, this also opened a door to the promotion of Soviet state interests in the name of Communism. And there was indeed a very fine line between these two objectives already in Lenin’s lifetime.

Secondly, Lenin once again revisited the notion of alliances (and accommodation) in the name of socialist progress. The more backward states and nations were directed to “assist the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement.” He qualified this tactic: “The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form.” On this point, Lenin clashed with Communists from colonial societies such as the Indian, M.N. Roy. The Roy-Lenin debate focused on whether Communists in colonial regions could cooperate with local bourgeois nationalist forces. Lenin believed that collaboration with radical nationalist elements was viable, even necessary in some instances.

In a broader sense, this push for cooperation was partly a reaction to the dogmatic approach amongst some Communists across Europe. Bela Kun’s insistence on doctrinal purity and refusal to compromise, for example, had seemingly doomed the Hungarian revolution.

Thirdly, nationalism was certainly perceived as a subordinate task of the world revolutionary movement but it had also now acquired a place in the corridors of the Third International. It had not only contributed to the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia, and not only served to civilize the more underdeveloped peoples, but it would now also serve as a formidable weapon of the Comintern’s battle with imperialism. Self-determination could be a revolutionary detonator especially amongst the colonized peoples of the world. This was especially applicable to colonies where national and colonial liberations went hand in hand. The Congress of the Peoples of the East (1920) and the later Congress of the Toilers of the Far East (1922) revealed not only a shift away from Eurocentrism, but also the benefits of nationalist politicking. But forging nationalism into a socialist weapon through the emerging national Communist parties was no easy task.

Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew maintain that the Comintern’s effectiveness as a voice of Communism and as an instrument of Soviet state interests has revealed a complex interaction between the center and periphery. “Strategy was defined in Moscow,” they assert, “but tactics, to a certain extent, could be elaborated on the ground by the [national] parties themselves.” The question of the degree of subordination to Moscow from 1919

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861 Communists in relatively close proximity to the Soviet Union (such as Poles, Hungarians or Germans) envisioned the establishment of ethnic Soviet Republics which would be federated (whatever that meant) with the Soviet Union.
863 Lenin, “Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions.”
864 Lazitch and Drachkovitch, Lenin and the Comintern, Volume I, 382-9. This became a prominent issue during the Second Congress and was debated extensively. For transcripts of the debate, see The Communist International in Lenin’s Time, 211-290. Lenin disagreed with several of Roy’s arguments. Firstly, Lenin countered Roy’s assertion that Communists in the colonies should never cooperate with radical bourgeois elements. Secondly, he rejected Roy’s conclusion that the fate of the revolution in the West (i.e., Europe) depended on the rise of the colonial peoples in the East.
866 Lazitch and Drachkovitch, Lenin and the Comintern, Volume I, 365-89.
867 Hallas, The Comintern, 51. Most of the delegates that arrived for the initial congress were actually nationalists who wanted to use Soviet power against British and Greek interventions.
to 1943 remains a highly debated issue amongst scholars.\textsuperscript{869} Traditional interpretations, like those of Fernando Claudin or E.H. Carr, assert that national sections were completely subordinated to Moscow, especially once Stalin won the intra-party struggle. But more recent scholarship has revealed a much more intricate interaction between the Comintern and its national sections. One thing remains clear: nationalism lingered as a powerful ideological and strategic tool of both the center and the periphery.

There is no doubt that the Comintern reflected the course of events within the Soviet Union. When debate and pluralism existed amongst the Bolsheviks of Russia, the same flexibility was afforded to the emerging national Communist parties. Yet, as ideological and organizational centralism overtook the RCP (later CPSU), the corresponding line was imposed on all loyal minions. The “Twenty-one Conditions” of admission to the Comintern, which were implemented at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, revealed the Bolshevization\textsuperscript{870} of the organization.\textsuperscript{871} But this process towards conformity and compliance was anything but simple and quick. The Soviets had to utilize funding and financial incentives, to disseminate agents, to apply coercion and mediation, and to carry out both direct and indirect interventions to mold various national parties into loyal and obedient subordinates.\textsuperscript{872} And even when the process was seemingly completed, Moscow’s control oftentimes remained inconsistent and difficult. “The ‘binding’ resolutions of world congresses on occasion remained confined to the paper on which they were written,” as McDermott and Agnew explain, with “cases of non-implementation of directives, ill discipline among party leaders, poor mutual communication between the ECCI [i.e., Executive Committee of the Communist International] and the national sections and rivalries between opposing party factions [perturbing] the Bolshevik leaders of the International.”\textsuperscript{873}

The struggles of creating a “united workers’ front” (engendering the question of cross-class alliances), of RCP’s internal leadership race, of the revolutionary potential, and of fluctuations between Leftist and Rightist approaches highlighted some of the Comintern’s various vacillations. Most obvious was the emerging dual foreign policy of the Comintern and the Narkomindel (People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs). On the one hand, the Comintern was to stimulate and direct revolutionary war against the capitalist world. Simultaneously, on the other hand, the Narkomindel extended a hand to the non-Communist world for trade and to assure the security of the Soviet state within the international community.\textsuperscript{874}


\textsuperscript{870} A systematic Bolshevization of the national Communist parties did not begin until the mid 1920s when Stalin began to emerge as the victor of the power struggle following Lenin’s death.

\textsuperscript{871} Braunthal asserts that “The Second Congress decided to create the instrument for world revolution—parties modeled on the Bolshevik type, strictly centralized, purged of reformists and center elements and subordinated to the authority of the Communist International Executive.” \textit{History of the International 1914-1943}, Volume 2, 229.

\textsuperscript{872} See, for instance, the difficulties that the Comintern encountered while controlling the member parties, such as the Irish: Emmet O’Connor, “From Bolshevik to Stalinism: Communism and the Comintern in Ireland,” in \textit{Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917-53}, 245-62; or his longer study \textit{Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals 1919-1943}.

\textsuperscript{873} McDermott and Agnew, \textit{The Comintern}, 26.

\textsuperscript{874} McDermott and Agnew, \textit{The Comintern}, 94-8.
In a broad sense, Communists everywhere were tasked with the struggle for national liberation and equality. But how exactly was this to be achieved? The “united workers’ front”—oscillating between cooperation with and war against bourgeois elements—was one of the most prominent and contradictory policies. Alliances with nationalist-bourgeois factions were created and discarded depending on Moscow’s exigencies. How the Comintern dealt with the events in Germany in 1923 highlights this flexible attitude.

Following the Ruhr Crisis of early 1923, Karl Radek (with Zinoviev’s approval) developed what became known as the “Schlageter Line” by offering “a political and spiritual home to the disoriented far-right nationalist, whose virulent anti-Weimar and anti-Versailles sentiment represented, so it was held, true revolutionary potential.” German Communists were to sell themselves as true liberators of the German nation and to stimulate action against the government. Following the October fiasco, the German Communists were essentially chastised for being both too radical (i.e., too antinationalistic to acquire the support of Social Democrats) and not radical enough (i.e., to stimulate workers’ revolutionary potential). A communist could be either too nationalistic or not nationalistic enough, depending on Moscow’s directives at any given moment. Labels of oppositionist, reformist, opportunist or simply deviationist were utilized habitually to mark shifts in policy. The zigzagged policy within the Comintern continued throughout the 1920s: “1924 marked a shift to the left; 1925-6 saw a tentative and uneven move back to the center under Bukharin’s tutelage, emphasizing a broader conception of the united front tactics and a differentiated approach to the transition from capitalism to socialism; and 1927-8 witnessed the beginning of the infamous ‘left turn’ that was to culminate in the sectarian dogmas of the Third Period.” Similarly to the German question, the nature of the united workers’ front moved beyond concerns of cross-class cooperation, into the realm of nationalist discourse.

As successor states emerged from the ruins of the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, the Communists faced the question of making or breaking nations. How should Communists react to the newly established states in East Central Europe? Communists were torn between two visions. On the one hand, they saw through the prism of Lenin’s self-determination that these nations had a right to existence, liberty and equality. On the other hand, however, these new entities remained artificial constructs of the Entente victory—mere reflections of capitalism and imperialism. As previously mentioned, the founding Congress of the Comintern had criticized Wilsonian self-determination as a limiting idea that could never ensure genuine national equality. But the Comintern had to face the reality of young nation-states across East Central Europe. Moreover, its constituent national parties had to circumvent national chauvinism all while avoiding the alienation of socialism from the emerging national

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876 Braunthal argued that it “was prepared in the Politburo of the Russian Communist party and was delivered to the Executives of the Communist International, ‘not just with the tacit approval of the Executive’s chairman but with his written agreement,’ and was ‘unanimously welcomed’ by the Executive.” *History of the International*, Volume 2, 277.
877 McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 36. McDermott and Agnew actually point out how the Communist parties became the voice of the unemployed and disenfranchised (62ff).
880 The Bolsheviks had rejected the decisions made in Paris in 1919.
discourse.\textsuperscript{881} Ironically, the Comintern remained silent on the proper Communist policy in Europe’s multi-ethnic states (like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia) or even states with large minorities (like Poland and Rumania). Many Western European Communists felt really uncomfortable with Lenin’s flexible take on self-determination, nationalism, and cooperation with radical nationalists.\textsuperscript{882}

Throughout the early 1920s, the Comintern remained indecisive on the proper approach to nationalism amongst its European members, especially those in East Central Europe. The Yugoslav Communists, representing several ethnicities, could neither agree on the most appropriate structure of the party nor of the state. “The centrists wanted to retain the existing federal structure of the party,” as Ben Fowkes explains, “while the left wanted more centralization.”\textsuperscript{883} Moreover, most Croat, Serb and Slovene Communists could not agree on the nature of the multi-ethnic state. Some Communists from the Left argued for Yugoslavia’s disintegration and the creation of independent states. Even pre-war dilemmas, such as the Macedonian question, plagued the Yugoslav Communists. The Bulgarians, in hope of gaining the territories, pointed to Lenin’s support for self-determination. Yet, the Yugoslavs were only willing to entertain the separation of Macedonia if it joined the wider Balkan Communist Federation.\textsuperscript{884} The Comintern’s frequent interventions to promote one or another course of action—depending on the existing requirements of the power struggle in Moscow at any given time—merely muddled the situation. A similar fate affected the second largest Communist party in Europe.

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (\textit{Komunistická Strana Československa}) had opted for the unity within the framework of Czechoslovakia, but some Slovak Communists were not quite content with the convenient omission of self-determination in Slovakia. When in 1924 the Comintern turned to the left, the KSČ was criticized for ignoring the national question. The leftist factions of the party, derived from the nationally discontented Slovaks, Magyars or Ruthenians, further stimulated the debates. The KSČ leaders attempted to defend the party’s line, arguing that that no uniform solution to the nationality question could be applied across Czechoslovakia as different regions would require distinct approaches. Hence, whereas Carpatho-Ruthenia could be added to the Soviet Union, the Slovakian territories had to be satisfied with national autonomy. As in the case of Yugoslavia, following the Fifth Congress of the Comintern (June 1924), the Czechoslovak Communists were instructed to promote Slovak independence (rather than autonomy which was considered a bourgeois construct). By the fall of 1924, the Comintern had once again cooled its radicalism, agreeing to a more moderate line of autonomy for Slovakia.\textsuperscript{885} The national Communist parties had not only to balance between the rightist approval for, and leftist rejection of existing nation-states, but also to contend with Moscow’s incessantly changing mood swings about nation making and nation breaking.

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\textsuperscript{882} A good example of this is the contribution of the Italian Antonio Graziadei at the Second Congress of the Comintern. See, \textit{The Communist International in Lenin’s Time}, Volume One, 239-42.
\textsuperscript{883} Ben Fowkes, “To Make the Nation or to Break It: Communist Dilemmas in Two Interwar Multinational States,” in \textit{Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern}, 209.
\textsuperscript{884} Fowkes, “To Make the Nation or to Break It,” 212-13, 219-20.
\textsuperscript{885} Fowkes, “To Make the Nation or to Break It,” 206-21.
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For the Comintern, the national question was a formidable weapon to foment revolution across the world. In Europe, the disenfranchised minorities found a home amongst Communists who promoted anti-governmental and anti-status quo ideologies. In the colonies, liberation from oppression became a catchall phrase for every kind of resistance to imperialism. National discourse was certainly useful at home and in world politics to promote Communism’s emancipatory principles. Moreover, nationalism clearly defined the leftist and rights policies amongst Communists and could be readily utilized as a yardstick of obedience and loyalty to Moscow. It delineated sides in power struggles and could be exploited to brand the opposing faction. Too chauvinistic and opportunistic or too radical, uncompromising and dogmatic—either label (or both) could be utilized to rid a party of its deviationist elements. This tactic became a trademark of the Communist discourse to control the content and direction of national sections. But nationalism remained a highly difficult phenomenon to handle.
CONCLUDING REMARKS TO PART III: SELF-DETERMINATION AS THE SWORD AND SHIELD OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION.

In the course of the October Revolution and the construction of the first socialist state, the Marxist conceptualization of internationalism and nationalism had undergone considerable transformation. Self-determination, War Communism, the growing bureaucratic ossification and authoritarianism, the use of violence and repression, and the emergence of the Soviet Union, had all stirred socialism towards statism. In this atmosphere, internationalism morphed into unconditional support for the Soviet state. But between 1917 and 1923, debate, indecisiveness and flexibility marked the evolution of the Bolshevik theories and practices. In those years, as the nationality policy underwent several changes, there was one constant: Lenin’s belief in the value of self-determination and nation-building. Even as the Bolsheviks opted for the centralization of the union, korenizatsiia ensured the growing nationalization of local elites, languages and territories; even as they called for ideological purity and discipline, cooperation with radical nationalist elements was viable; and even as they demanded universalization of their models, national peculiarities were accepted. It was a good thing that Lenin was a man of unshakeable conviction. “Once possessed of an opinion,” Gregor explains, “he defended it against all objections and all evidence—until he fixed on an alternative—which he then proceeded to defend with equal inflexibility and conviction.” It was even more fortunate, that self-determination and korenizatsiia remained one of the most lasting of his convictions, even though the Soviet nationality policy never resolved the difficult dialogue between internationalism and nationalism.

The Comintern hoped to export these same ideals to the Communists of the world. But as the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak examples above revealed, nationalism was an explosive issue in which socialist content and national forms could not be neatly separated or controlled. There were serious limitations to the value of the transplanting of the Bolshevik model outside of the Soviet Union. Many member states struggled with the oftentimes contradictory directives coming out of Moscow. The study of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland—which constitutes the fourth and final section of this study—reveals many insights about the national-international dynamics. The interplay of the party’s rich Luxemburgian (i.e., anti self-determination) heritage, its proximity to (and reliance on) the Soviet Union, belief in revolutionism, and complex ethnic composition offers a highly interesting case study of how the cumulative Marxist heritage on the nationality question remained a troubling dimension of interwar Communism.

887 Gregor, Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism, 118.
**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO PART IV.**

“Two parties: Polish Socialist Party (Left) and Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania united into a single Polish Workers Communist Party, which calls upon You to fight under its banner for the proletarian dictatorship, for a social revolution.”889 These were the opening words of the earliest declaration of the first Polish Communist party, which came into existence in December of 1918 on the heels of the reestablished Poland. The newly minted party came about as a result of unity rather than a split within Socialism, as was often the case elsewhere in Europe.890 But the union of the two leftist parties was achieved after a lengthy process, which began in late 19th century and was only completed in the postwar period. The most pressing question of the new party was its attitude towards nationalism and the Second Republic. After all, Poles had been fighting for statehood for more than a century, and now that it had become a reality, Marxists had to respond to these new circumstances. They had to decide whether the new state was a haven for Polish workers, or yet another venue for the bourgeoisie’s exploitation of the proletariat. If an imminent socialist revolution was to sweep away all vestiges of capitalism, was there any point in supporting the restored Poland? Would participation in the political life of the Rzeczpospolita amount to opportunism and reformism? These and many other questions troubled Communists when they gathered in Warsaw in late 1918 to consolidate their forces. The nationality question quickly became one of the most troubling dilemmas for the Polish Communists.

Polish Communism in the interwar era was certainly not a domestically popular movement. It never became a mass party akin to its Italian or French counterparts which garnered grassroots support.891 It was an illegal organization throughout the 1920s and 1930s. And it remained on the periphery of Polish political discourse, having little impact on the Second Republic’s policies. Given such a terrible record, what can Polish Communism tell us about the evolution of Marxism? An examination of KPRP’s history—its conception and early years—offers many insights into the struggle between nationalism and internationalism in the cumulative Marxist heritage on the nationality question. Two of these are especially important.

Firstly, Polish socialism’s pre-Great War debates about statehood, self-determination, and the role of the nation were a microcosm of the European-wide Marxism’s struggle with nationalism.892 More than any other movement in Europe, Polish socialism was defined by the effort to produce a Marxist response to nationalism. It

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889 KPRP, “Do proletariatu Polski,” Szta ndar Socjalizmu Nr. 1, 19 December 1918, in Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Warsaw, KPP, "I Zjazd,” 158/I-1 t.1, 15.
892 Part of my motivation for this study was to insert Polish socialism into the European-wide Marxism. Comparative studies of pre-1939 Marxism that have included Poland have been negligible in the scholarship. I hope to remedy that conspicuous historiographical vacuum.
was a battle between those who opposed Polish statehood (like Luxemburg) and those who embraced it (like Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz). The ensuing ideological war between these two positions dug deep trenches in Polish socialism, and even extended to the Second International. Arguments about independence (and autonomy), alliances (across territorial and ethnic lines as well as between classes), and revolutionary tactics (from terrorism to constitutionalism) never abated. Beyond sectarianism, these discussions revealed a rich heritage of Marxist polemics about nationalism—why it should be accepted or rejected as a component of socialist thought.

Secondly, a study of the KPRP’s evolution before 1924—right up to the Second Party Congress—contributes to our overall understanding of interwar Communism’s response to nationalism. While Lenin exploited self-determination and korenizatsia to reunify and reorganize the former Tsarist Empire, their Polish counterparts steadfastly held to the Luxemburgian rejection of nationalism. While the Bolsheviks practiced tactical and ideological flexibility, the Poles emphasized ideological purity, dogmatism, and party discipline. From its inception in 1918 until 1924, the KPRP remained reluctant to deal with the nationality question, which made the party weak and powerless. When the Second Party Congress in the fall of 1923 finally created a constructive resolution on nationalism and began to emphasize temporary tactical gains, Bolsheviks had already moved towards ideological rigidity. Furthermore, the group within the KPRP responsible for the new course in Polish Communism unfortunately sided with the wrong camp in the internal Soviet power struggles following Lenin’s death. Yet, before 1924, it was not Moscow’s interference that prevented the emergence of a successful Communist party in Poland. Indeed, the Kremlin and the Comintern worked hard to convince the Poles to adopt a more flexible strategy towards the Second Republic and her sizable group of non-Polish inhabitants. But the elites of Polish Communism remained unconvinced. Their dogmatism was shaped by the obsession with Luxemburgist internationalism, internal factionalism, illegal status (and the ensuing conspiratorial mindset), belief in revolutionism, and unwillingness to welcome minorities into the fold of the party (even though they were the only willing allies of the Communists).

The party’s inability to transform into a mass movement along with growing fractionalism (especially the ultraleftists’ victory with Stalin’s assistance), turned the KPRP into Moscow’s lackey by the latter half of the 1920s. In the aftermath of the Fourth Party Conference in late 1925—the last attempt by the moderate wing of the party to adopt a more flexible strategy—and until the demise of the party in 1938, the Polish Communist movement became defined by two characteristics: ultraleftist dogmatism and loyalty to Stalin. Paradoxically, the two currents never coexisted comfortably. The Luxemburgist legacy—hatred towards the restored Poland—was never abandoned. Ironically, by the 1930s, the KPP (as the KPRP was renamed in 1925) indiscriminately exploited self-determination of minorities in hope of dismantling Poland.

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893 This was not unlike what had happened to other Communist movements in Europe. Italian Communism experienced a similar fate in the latter half of the 1920s. The difference was that the Italians (under Gramsci’s leadership) made such a leap out of their own volition. The Poles, on the other hand, had completely succumbed to Stalinization by the mid 1920s. Richard Drake, “Italian Communism and Soviet Terror,” Journal of Cold War Studies 6, no. 2 (2004): 57-63; Thomas R. Bates, “Antonio Gramsci and the Bolshevization of the PCI,” Journal of Contemporary History 11, no. 2/3 (1976): 115-31.
CHAPTER 9: TO THE POLISH PROLETARIAT!:
THE SIX FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF POLISH MARXISM OF THE INTERWAR ERA

THE GHOST OF LUXEMBURGISM: SDKPiL’S LEGACY WITHIN POLISH COMMUNISM

The Polish Workers Communist Party’s (Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski, KPRP, and after February 1925, Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP)894 response to the nationality question throughout the interwar years, right up until its dissolution by the Comintern in 1938 was anything but consistent. Although historians highlight its anti-nationalistic rhetoric in the first few years and its subjugation to Stalinism by the late 1920s,895 the KPRP responded to the nationality question in a multitude of ways. Many issues related to nationalism demanded a response from the party leadership: shaping of Poland’s borders in the years after the conclusion of the Great War; treatment of minorities which constituted a third of the Polish population; Poland’s foreign policy (especially towards the Soviet Union); pogroms and anti-Semitism; or existing within a parliamentary system. Before delving into a chronological evaluation of the evolution of Polish Marxism’s ideas about and application of nationality policy, it is important to delineate six key factors that shaped its Weltanschauung: legacy of Luxemburgism; perception of the international order after World War I and Poland’s role within it; KPRP’s de-legalization; conception of the revolution; question of potential allies; and relationship with the Soviet Union and the Comintern (Communist International or the Third International).

The legacy of Luxemburgism was one of the most important dimensions of the Polish Communist mindset of the interwar years. Many leaders and ideologues of the KPRP emerged from the socialist battlegrounds of the prewar era, when every left-leaning Pole’s partisan loyalty was measured according to his or her position on the nationality question. Polish socialism was marked by a battle between those who supported and those who opposed the restoration of Poland. A socialist who supported Polish statehood was usually associated with the Józef Piłsudski’s PPS while a socialist who opposed such statehood was labeled as belonging to the Social Democratic camp. The perceived Luxemburgism of the latter group understood nationalism as the most dangerous disease that had to be attacked without reservations.896 The rejection of nationalism—especially opposition to Polish statehood—

894 Although the scholarship on the KPRP/KPP has been extensive, no single historiographical monograph has been produced. For more recent historiographical accounts, see the following: Gabriele Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929: A Study in Political Ideology (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 1-10; the collection of articles Między Wschodem a Zachodem: Studia z dziejów polskiego ruchu i myśli socjalistycznej, ed. Andrzej F. Grabski and Paweł Samuś (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1995), offers several interesting contributions—see especially Andrzej F. Grabski, Feliks Tych, Ludwik Hass, Michał Śliwa and Henryk Cimek. 895 See, for instance, Henryk Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939 (Białystok: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1990); Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929: A Study in Political Ideology; Krystyna Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością: Myśl polityczna Komunistycznej Partii Polski (1918-1938) (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Sklodowskiej, 2007); or Jan Alfred Regula, Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski, w świetle faktów i dokumentów. Wydanie drugie rozszerzone i uzupełnione (Warszawa: Drukprasa, 1934). For more traditional Marxist interpretations of the pre-1989 era, see for example, Antoni Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938): Zarys historii (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1985); Henryk Cimek and Lucjan Kieszczyński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938 (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1984); or Franciszka Świętlikowa, Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918-1923 (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1968). 896 For example, the writings of Henryk Walecki and Adolf Warski before the outbreak of the First World War reveal the degree to which an individual’s approach to the nationality question determined their branding after 1918. This narcissism of small differences created significant and lasting divisions between those affiliated with the PPS-Left and those who belonged to the SDKPiL. Adolf Warski, “Nacjonalizm,” originally published in Wolny Glos, 24
assumed the position of dogma already in the Social Democracy of the late 19th century. Such a deterministic approach had far reaching consequences for future KPRP elites who were hard pressed to ever abandon tenets that had so decisively distinguished their brand of Marxism before 1918.897

Until 1923, the KPRP believed that no state—least of all the Second Republic—regardless of its democratic leanings, could ensure the genuine freedom of the proletariat. Only an international socialist revolution, which would make nation-states obsolete, could bring about a real liberation of the working masses. The more the KPRP adhered to the Luxemburgist line, which it understood as national nihilism, the less likely it was to accept the restoration of Poland or Polish national interests. When national interests were acknowledged at the Second Congress (fall of 1923) and the Fourth Conference (late 1925), there was widespread reluctance to recognize the national past, or to acknowledge socialist patriotism from before and during the Great War.898 So even when national nihilism was seemingly abandoned, the nationality question remained a challenge.

Luxemburgism prevailed over all other ideological strains within Polish communism of the interwar era. Although the KPRP emerged from unity of two radical leftist parties of the prewar era, the SDKPiL certainly dominated over the PPS-Left.899 The latter’s loyalty to the communist cause was continuously questioned. Somehow, the Social Democrats (nicknamed the Esdeks—a shorthand for SDKPiL) engendered a superior brand of Marxism. Whenever factionalism within the party materialized, and when it intensified following the Second Party Congress, one of the common tactics was to accuse someone of opportunism stemming from their leanings towards or past affiliation with the PPS-Left.900 There is no doubt that this Luxemburgist-ultraleftist current contributed significantly to the sectarianism of the latter half of the 1920s and the eventual subjugation of Polish Communists to Moscow’s whims.

Equally detrimental was the acceptance of Luxemburgian dogmatic determinism. Independent thinking and debates only threatened the ideological purity of the party.901 This mindset extended far beyond the walls of the

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897 For the study of PPS-Left and SDKPiL during wartime, see Feliks Tych, PPS-Lewica w latach wojny 1914-1918 (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1960); Jan Kancewicz, “SDKPiL wobec zagadnień wojennych, rewolucji i niepodległości polskiej w latach 1914-1918,” in Ruch Robotniczy i Ludowy w Polsce (1914-1923), ed. A. Kozłowski (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1960), 107-193; or Piotr Górski, "Zagadnienie narodu w myśli socjalistyczno-niepodległościowej 1908-1914. Socjologiczna perspektywa badawcza," in Między Wschodem a Zachodem: Studia z dziejów polskiego ruchu i myśli socjalistycznej, 139-47.

898 Orzechowski, Rewolucja, socjalizm, tradycje, 121-49.

899 Świętekowa, Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918-1923, 10ff; Józef Kowalski, “Z zagadnień rozwoju ideologicznego KPRP w latach 1918-1923,” in Ruch Robotniczy i Ludowy w Polsce (1914-1923), 282-93; Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 11-21. Reguła is the only one to argue that although SDKPiL eventually prevailed, the PPS-Left was a powerful force within Polish Communism in the early years (especially the First Party Congress). See Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski, 28, 37ff.

900 See, for instance, any of Henryk Stein-Domski’s articles in the Nowy Przegląd in 1924. Eventually, Luxemburgism would similarly become a victim of ideological manipulation. From the late 1920s and especially after 1931, this ultraleftist current within Polish Marxism was branded as deviation by Stalinists, for its initial criticism of Leninism before and after the October Revolution. Reguła, Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski, 26-8.

KPRP, preventing cooperation with other socialists or working class movements. Everyone outside the inner Communist conspiratorial circle was suspect. Worst of all were socialpatriots\textsuperscript{902} who claimed to speak on behalf of workers but still supported national—seemingly bourgeois—causes. The party’s illegal status only fueled the need for vigilance and for ideological purity.

Although Luxemburgism was internalized within the interwar Polish Communism, it remained a double-edged sword for the Poles. Rosa Luxemburg’s polemics against Lenin and Bolshevism were never forgotten.\textsuperscript{903} Moscow remained distrustful of the Polish Communists’ independence.\textsuperscript{904} Secondly, given that the roots of Polish Marxism predated its Russian counterpart, ventures into the past could only be taken cautiously. Reguła and Trembicka point out how KPRP’s leaders were reluctant to reach back into this rich heritage in order to avoid outshining the Bolsheviks or revealing past disagreements between the Poles and the Russians.\textsuperscript{905} Lastly, unresolved debates over the role of Luxemburgism in the Polish Communist collective memory eventually allowed the Comintern to intervene in the Polish domestic squabbles.\textsuperscript{906} Under the guise of mediators between Communist factions, Moscow easily Bolshevized (and eventually Stalinized) the KPRP.

**Polish Imperialism: The Second Republic and the Post-War International Order.**

The second significant aspect that shaped KPRP’s ideological constellation was its perception of the *international order* after World War I and *Poland’s role within it*. Foremost, Polish Communists believed that in the era of imperialism, the nationality question had no chance of being resolved. Any scheme that purported to solve national antagonisms—such as for instance, reunification of displaced peoples—would merely create a new set of problems.\textsuperscript{907} Consequently, they rejected the Paris Peace Settlement and Woodrow Wilson’s self-determination. Looking at the settlement as completely unjust, they pointed out how the creation of new nation-states simply meant oppression for other national groups.\textsuperscript{908}

The Second Republic, perceived to be nothing more than a product of Entente manipulations, was a tool of the war’s victors.\textsuperscript{909} This had multifold repercussions: owing its existence to the Big Three (Britain, France, and the United States), Poland had no choice but to do their bidding. The Second Republic’s domestic or foreign policy

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\textsuperscript{902} The label of socialpatriots was utilized liberally and frequently. It denoted any sort of leftist deviations of leftist opportunism associated with Mensheviks and eventually with Leon Trotsky. Everyone on the leftist political spectrum but who was not within the KPRP was branded within this category. By the latter half of the 1920s, socialpatriots were also characterized as the left wing of fascism, the so called social-fascists.

\textsuperscript{903} Luxemburg remained critical of many of Lenin’s political beliefs, including his obsession with the party structure and discipline, with self-determination, and with the course of the October Revolution.


\textsuperscript{906} This was done overtly following the Second Congress of the KPRP and the Fifth Congress of the Comintern when those leaders of Polish Communism (the “Four Ws”) were dismissed for their nationalist (apparently ultrarightist) attitudes. This took place during fierce fighting amongst the Bolsheviks for the mantle of the Soviet state. The Poles simply aligned with the wrong side and paid dearly for their mistake.


\textsuperscript{908} “Przy podziale łupu,” *Sztandar Socjalizmu*, 15 January 1919, 16.

objectives were continuously distorted as byproducts of Western capital and influence. Initially, Poland was considered one of the French bastions of anti-Bolshevik warmongering. Eventually, it assumed the role of the Anglo-American capitalism’s puppet. And when the Second Republic was not being swayed by one of its masters, it was depicted as succumbing to its own imperialist chauvinism.

Poland’s battles over borders were seemingly fulfilling imperialist ambitions rather than resolving national security concerns. Communists believed that emerging from an oppressed condition, the *Rzeczpospolita* immediately began to oppress others. The blood of Polish workers was being spilled in the interest of bourgeois-capitalist expansionism and the drive for territory and profit. Through these unnecessary war campaigns, the young country had joined the camp of imperialist countries. The KPRP negated all of Poland's territorial struggles—with the Czechs in Cieszyn, with Germans in Upper Silesia, and with Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Russians in the East—treating them as imperialist adventures. Communists never attempted to understand these foreign policy decisions from the perspective of a young state trying to assert its position in the international states system. Some recognition to national interests was given at the KPRP's Second Congress and Fourth Conference, but that was an exception and not the rule. An objective assessment of the situation in Poland, the Soviet Union or across Europe eluded the Communist critics.

**A Besieged Fortress: The Conspiratorial Nature of Polish Communism.**

The KPRP’s *de-legalization* soon after the establishment of the party, followed by periodic suppressions, did not bode well for the party’s acceptance of the new Polish state. Believing that the Second *Rzeczpospolita* would collapse shortly and thus refusing to acknowledge the emerging government, the Communists failed to register the party according to the directives issued by the Jędrzej Morachewski's administration. Thereafter, periodical suppressions, confiscations of publications, closing of offices, and imprisonment pushed the Communists towards ever-growing conspiratorial mindset. By early 1919, the KPRP became an underground organization. And given its perceived and self-declared disloyalty to the Polish state, and its refusal to participate in the country’s political life, the police faced little opposition in suppressing everything Communist.

Thousands of activists, members and leaders were imprisoned throughout the interwar period. In 1923, Julian Marchlewski postulated that about 40% of the party’s budget was devoted to the support of imprisoned

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910 This belief was prevalent between 1918 and 1923.
911 Especially after 1925.
912 Anti-war campaigns were a staple of Polish Communist rhetoric of the interwar years. Pamphlets speaking against the government’s seemingly imperialistic foreign policy were published on a regular basis. See, for example, “Dość wojny!,” March 1919, AAN, KPP, "Sekretariat Krajowy 1918-1938. Odezwy 1918-1936," 158/VI-2 t.3, 28. Almost all of the resolutions, directives, and announcements finished with a call against Poland’s imperialism.
915 Reguła argues that this was the most important mistake of the Polish Communists. They refusal to participate in the political life of the Polish state set a precedent for the future, where the KPRP would remain alienated from the working masses. Reguła, *Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski*, 29-30.
916 In his study of the imprisoned Communists, Ławnik downplayed the previous statistical analyses. He postulates that on average, about 5000 were imprisoned between 1919 and 1922, rising thereafter to between 11,200 and 15,000 in the 1920s, and increasing in the 1930s to between 21,400 and 26,037. Hence, for instance, in 1923, more than half of the KPRP members were in prison. Józef Ławnik, *Represje policyjne wobec ruchu komunistycznego w*
Communists and their families.\textsuperscript{917} During and in the aftermath of the Soviet-Polish War—when Communists unconditionally supported the Bolsheviks and thus committed national treason—the party was decimated and in need of rebuilding.\textsuperscript{918} The authorities demolished its structure and leadership, and it lost appeal amongst the masses that perceived the Bolsheviks as invaders and not liberators. Given this atmosphere of hostility and alienation, the party quickly fell victim to what Paweł Samuś calls the \textit{syndrome of a “besieged fortress.”}\textsuperscript{919}

Within the walls of this besieged fortress, distrust became widespread. The rank and file were urged to maintain utmost \textit{Bolshevik vigilance}. This syndrome hindered acquisition of allies, as all newcomers were suspected of either collaboration or reformism. It constrained debate, since ideological dogmatism became the litmus test for loyalty.\textsuperscript{920} And it prevented effective work amongst the workers, as the party lacked an organizational structure and ideological appeal. Internally, party discipline and purges of questionable elements became rampant by the mid 1920s.\textsuperscript{921} Externally, hostility towards the government and its seemingly repressive apparatus, especially the army and the courts, made it difficult to work within the confines of the legal (parliamentary) system. Consequently, even the new state’s policies that improved workers’ livelihood were negated. Furthermore, this self-imposed alienation facilitated the Polish government's portrayal of Communists as a foreign element in Polish society—as agents of Soviet foreign policy.\textsuperscript{922} Ironically, Polish Communists were distrusted not only by the security organs of the Polish state but also by their Soviet superiors.\textsuperscript{923}

\textbf{THE REVOLUTION IS COMING: REVOLUTIONARY UTOPIANISM IN THE KPRP.}

The \textit{conception of the revolution} was the third critical determinant of the KPRP’s approach to nationalism. Polish Communists believed in the imminence of the revolution—what Gabriele Simoncini calls "revolutionary utopianism"—and jumped at every allusion, no matter how insignificant, of the upcoming upheaval.\textsuperscript{924} In the postwar era, as Marci Shore explains, “everything was now possible, a dizzying endlessness of possibilities. It was a time when the boundaries between Marxism in theory and communism in practice were not clear, when both meant revolution, and revolution meant consummation, an escape from nothingness.”\textsuperscript{925} If a revolution was imminent and would be victorious, there was little need to defend the nation-state (or even to develop a minimum program).\textsuperscript{926} Even when capitalism had stabilized in the young and problem-ridden Polish state and the prospects of a world

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{917} Julian Marchlewski, AAN, KPP, "Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna," 158/I-2 t. 1. \Lawnik argues that sometimes, Communists in prison outnumbered their free colleagues. \Lawnik, \textit{Represje policyjne wobec ruchu komunistycznego w Polsce 1918-1939}, 118ff.
\item \textsuperscript{918} Czubiński, \textit{Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938)}, 72ff.
\item \textsuperscript{919} Samuś, “Syndrom ‘obleżonej twierdzy’ w Komunistycznej Partii Polski,” 183-5.
\item \textsuperscript{920} Samuś, “Syndrom ‘obleżonej twierdzy’ w Komunistycznej Partii Polski,” 189ff.
\item \textsuperscript{921} Samuś, “Syndrom ‘obleżonej twierdzy’ w Komunistycznej Partii Polski,” 186-9.
\item \textsuperscript{922} This was especially highlighted during the Soviet-Polish War when Communists sided with the Bolsheviks against the Polish government. Thereafter, it was quite simple for the authorities to initiate anti-Communist policies. \Regula, \textit{Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski}, 36ff.
\item \textsuperscript{923} Trembicka, \textit{Między utopią a rzeczywistością}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{924} Simoncini, \textit{The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{925} Marci Shore, \textit{Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968} (new Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{926} Kowalski, “Z zagadnień rozwoju ideologicznego KPRP w latach 1918-1923,” 287-9.
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upheaval became improbable, many Communists still refused to abandon their activist approach.  

Only during periods of utmost stability in the mid-1920s did the Communists venture away from revolutionary determinism. It was during those moments of reprieve that the party accepted the potential of a two-stage revolution. And if democracy was to serve as a transition phase before the outbreak of the socialist revolution, there was room for parliamentary activity and piecemeal goals to better the daily lives of workers. But this abandonment of revolutionary utopianism was short-lived. As Engels had maintained, no matter what capitalism offered, revolution would have to be carried out. So how would this revolution be accomplished?

Foremost, lack of confidence in their own ability to initiate and carry out a revolution pushed the Polish Communists to seek salvation from the outside. Most popular was the idea of “importing the revolution” with the assistance of the Red Army. Such intervention had become a reality during the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1921), reinforcing the belief that Bolshevik help was instrumental. Moreover, the position of Poland between the Soviet Union and Germany made the state either a bridge to, or a dam against, the spread of Communism. It was hoped that the German revolutionary upheaval would sweep across the continent and would bring about the end of the Polish bourgeois rule. When German revolutionary fires waned, there was hope that capitalism in general was on its deathbed and that once unrest erupted in Poland, the Red Army would have no choice but to cross the border to complete the process. Throughout the first half of the 1920s, there was an ongoing debate amongst the Polish Communists and within the Comintern as to the former's ability to initiate a countrywide revolution. Long after the conclusion of the Soviet-Polish War, Polish Communists still sought a more active Soviet intervention than the Bolsheviks could or were willing to provide.

When the potential of Soviet intervention or German spark waned, Polish Communists turned eastward. Promising political troubles appeared in the eastern borderlands, where Ukrainian and Byelorussian partisans periodically exploded in armed unrest. Even if success was slim and the local Communists opposed partisan activity amongst the minorities, Polish Communists oftentimes insisted on pushing forward. When difficulties between the Poles and their eastern counterparts arouse, Warsaw remained adamant about a revolutionary solution.

ETHNIC AND CLASS PLURALISM: POLISH COMMUNISTS SEARCH FOR ALLIES.

Adjacent to the utopian belief in the prospect of a revolution was the question of potential allies in the socialist struggle. Communists debated over which elements within the state could be trusted in the final battle.

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928 Warski would be the first to promote this idea amongst Communists in 1922. He argued that before the socialist revolution was carried out, there would ensue a period of democratic rule during which Communists could gradually assume an important political role. By the late 1920s, the notion of stabilization became a political weapon in the factional struggle. For instance, party ideologues would ascribe promotion of stability as a sign of opportunism or alternately as representing an attitude of the oppositionists within Russian Communism. Piasecki, “Zagadnienie stabilizacji kapitalistycznej w Polsce w świetle dyskusji na IZ Zjeździe KPP w 1927 r.,” 247-8.

929 Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością, 101-6.


932 Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 20-3; Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością, 106-22.

933 Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938), 109-12.

Unfortunately, Luxemburgist dogmatism, conspiratorial phobia and revolutionism produced an imperative that “if you are not with us, you are against us.”\(^{935}\) Rejection of the national past, of statehood, and of government's authority, combined with emphasis on internationalism, considerably hindered the search for loyal followers in a young country striving to consolidate its identity and reassert its national prowess. Consequently, the difficult search for allies assumed two pathways.

Firstly, attempts were made in 1923, 1926 and 1937 with united front tactics.\(^{936}\) But cooperation even with other left-leaning parties was thorny for Communists who perceived them as reformers, chauvinists, opportunists, and traitors to the genuine socialist cause.\(^{937}\) In addition, Communists fluctuated between top-down (i.e., cooperating with leaders of other parties) and bottom-up (i.e., bypassing party leaders and going directly to the workers) tactics.\(^{938}\) Whenever it materialized, the result of collaboration within the Workers' Councils, trade unions, workers' celebrations, or general strikes was almost never fruitful and usually concluded with mutual accusations.\(^{939}\)

The second pathway simply engendered reaching out to anyone who felt oppressed or dissatisfied with the existing order. Although the initial platform of the KPRP called for a purely proletarian party, by the early 1920s, peasants and minorities were also identified as potential allies.\(^ {940}\) Collectively, the forces of the disgruntled could bring about a revolution. Besides the oppressed proletariat and the land-hungry peasants, the non-Polish ethnicities, which made up a third of the population, stood out as one of the most promising partners.\(^ {941}\) Having a taste of independence or even a neighbouring homeland, and feeling subjugated and mistreated by the Polish government, some of them were just as hostile to the Second Republic as the Communists. But common antagonism to the state did not automatically translate into cooperation. The gap between the opposition to the government’s mistreatment of minorities and the recognition of national aspirations of those minorities, between undermining the Polish state apparatus and supporting the emergence of other nation-states, was enormous. Optimally, the party elites would have liked to exploit the revolutionary energy of the discontented groups without getting bogged down by the concomitant national implications.\(^ {942}\) But an alliance with the Ukrainians, Byelorussians or the Jews—as powerful as it would be—could not be achieved without costs to the ideological and organizational principles of the party.

The minority question forced the KPRP to continuously reevaluate its position on the nationality question. Ideologically, the party had to recognize national aspirations of the various ethnicities and revisit the question of

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\(^{935}\) Tony Judt ascribes this phenomenon to the postwar Communist intelligentsia but the same could be applied to their interwar counterparts. *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

\(^{936}\) Ziaja, "Ewolucja założeń programowo-politycznych KPP (1918-1938)," 26ff.

\(^{937}\) See, for example, “Stosunek do PPS,” in *KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1*, 99-101. This was an attack on PPS’s approval of the government’s domestic and foreign policies. After all, it was considered the most powerful and thus dangerous leaders of social-patriotism.


\(^{939}\) Trembicka, *Między utopią a rzeczywistością*, 141-7.

\(^{940}\) This was part of the new tactics following the conclusion of the Soviet-Polish War. Czubiński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938)*, 71ff; Henryk Cimek and Lucjan Kieśzyński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1984), 69ff.


\(^{942}\) Czubiński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938)*, 75-6.
self-determination. By the Second Party Congress in 1923, the party accepted self-determination of Ukrainians and Byelorussians (and this was later extended to the Lithuanians and Germans). And at the Fourth Conference (in late 1925), they even recognized Polish national interests. This had tremendous implications organizationally.

The party had to give a voice and a place to the various non-Polish minorities within the framework of the party. Regional parties or special bureaus were created for the largest minorities (Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Germans and Jews). By the mid 1920s, the Jewish Bureau (amalgamated from a variety of radical Jewish elements) emerged and was followed by the Communist Party of Western Ukraine and the Communist Party of Western Byelorussia. Hence, an ethnically Polish KPRP of the early period had become, by 1923, a multiethnic party. Collectively, after the mid 1920s, the non-Polish members came to constitute the bulk of the party’s membership. Hence, a Polish Communist party was comprised of a non-Polish majority.

Such composition and continuous questioning of the legitimacy of Poland’s borders and Polish national interests did not win the party the support of Polish society. Moreover, even though these ethnic factions were amalgamated into the KPRP, they did not easily abandon their political heritage and organizational autonomy. Many Jews still toyed with Zionism and autonomism, while many Communist Ukrainians dreamt of independence. The KPRP remained a dysfunctional and divided party. It could satisfy neither the needs of the minorities nor of the mainstream Polish society. It was an outcast without and within.

AN AGENT OF MOSCOW? KPRP’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIET UNION.

The final defining characteristic, which affected the KPRP’s response to the nationality question, was its relationship with the Soviet Union and the Comintern. To what extent were the party’s policies and ideas dictated from Moscow? This debate is usually overshadowed by the events of the late 1930s when Stalin attacked the KPRP, eradicating the party and its elites who, if they survived the initial purges, eventually perished in the Gulags. There should be no doubt that the Communist International’s resolutions and directives had a tremendous impact on the ideological and organizational structure of its various members, especially the Polish faction. The Second Republic’s proximity to the Soviet Union was paramount. Poland’s position as a capitalist neighbour (with

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944 Trembicka, Między apologią a negacją, 137-48.
945 The establishment of these will be discussed in detail below.
946 See chapter 13 for details on the membership in the KPRP.
947 For example, throughout the 1920s, various ideologues of the KPRP questioned the allegiance of the left wing of Poale Zion and Ferajnigte to Communism. See, for instance, A. Wajsblum [K. Karolski], “Bołączki roboty żydowskiej KPRP I jak se usuwać,” Novy Przegląd nr. 3(13), December 1924, reprinted in Novy Przegląd (Reedycja): 1924-1925, ed. Felicia Kalicka and Eugenia Brun (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1959), 195-230.
expansionist aims that infringed on the Soviet sphere of influence) and a potential (revolutionary) doorway into Europe certainly played a role in the Soviet geostrategic worldview.\footnote{At times, the KPRP had to fall in line with the objectives of the Soviet foreign policy, especially when the young Communist state tried to normalize its relations with Poland in the mid 1920s. See, for instance, R.H. Haigh, D.S. Morris, and A.R. Peters, The Soviet Union: Interventionism and the Search for Peace 1918-1934 (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 1999).}

Although Luxemburg was critical of the Soviet tactics, Polish Communists glorified everything Soviet. There was no higher priority than the defence of the first proletarian state. “The Communist Party,” as one of its members explained, “like the SDKPiL before it, was oriented toward Russia. Notwithstanding all the reservations that the Polish Communists had about the Bolsheviks’ tactics—in no small degree a result of Luxemburgism—they were always convinced that the party must be ready to make the greatest sacrifices for the Russian Revolution, for Russia was the first country in the world (aside from the example of the Paris Commune) that had realized the dictatorship of the proletariat.”\footnote{Pinkus Minc, The History of a False Illusion—Memoirs of the Communist Movements in Poland (1918-1938), trans. Robert Michaels (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 35. Anatole C.J. Bogacki argues that the links between the Polish Social Democrats and their Russian counterparts before 1914 had created a special relationship between the two. Combined with KPRP’s illegal status, the party remained one of the most closely tied member of the Comintern. Anatole C.J Bogacki, A Polish Paradox: International and the National Interest in Polish Communist Foreign Policy, 1918-1948 (New York: East European Monographs distributed by Columbia University Press, 1991), 1-3.}

Self-sacrifice for Moscow became a fundamental dimension of Polish Communism, as indeed proven during the Soviet-Polish War.

Loyalty to the Communist homeland was facilitated by the belief that the Polish government was a counterrevolutionary weapon exploited by Western capitalism against the Bolshevik state.\footnote{The defence of Soviet Russia in the first years of the KPRP’s existence was extensive. Throughout the interwar years, it remained one of the party’s main slogans. It was a tenet that never wavered within the party press.} Even in the best light, the Second Republic remained a bulwark against the exportation of the socialist revolution. Protection of the first Communist state against its hostile neighbour remained a priority. The Soviet-Polish War\footnote{Norman Davies, Orzeł biały, Czerwona gwiazda: Wojna polsko-bolszewicka, 1919-1920, trans. Andrzej Pawelec (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2006).} and the various war scares forced Polish Communists to choose between their ideological and national homelands. Out of conviction and loyalty—and not due to external pressure from the Kremlin—the Poles wholeheartedly and consistently supported the Soviet Union. Such unabated criticism of the Polish state and unfaltering support for the Soviet Union contributed to the KPRP’s label as a national traitor and an agent of Bolshevism.\footnote{It also facilitated the police repressions against the Communists. Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938), 71-2; Ławnik, Represje policyjne wobec ruchu komunistycznego w Polsce 1918-1939, 117ff.} Moreover, such perceived lack of Polishness significantly hindered the party’s appeal amongst Polish workers.\footnote{It also facilitated the police repressions against the Communists. Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938), 71-2; Ławnik, Represje policyjne wobec ruchu komunistycznego w Polsce 1918-1939, 117ff. Orzechowski argues that the Polish Communists tried to promote their own brand of Communist nationalism which was oriented towards the workers. Nonetheless, the argument is somewhat unconvincing given the tremendous anti-nationalist rhetoric of the elites, especially after the Fourth Conference. Revolucja, socjalizm, tradycje, 121-49.}

Moscow’s direct influence over Polish Communism grew only after 1921 when regular communication was established between the Comintern and the KPRP.\footnote{Cimek and Trembicka argue that this loyalty to the Soviet ideal had emerged already in 1920. During that year, the NKVD made the first arrests of some Polish Communists in the Soviet Union with no objections from the KPRP. Cimek, Komuńscy—Polska—Stalin, 120; Trembicka, "The Communist Party of Poland (1918-1938)," 304. See also Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938), 72-74.} The Bolsheviks’ influence was applied through various channels: through the offices of the Comintern; through the International Organization for Help to the
Revolutionaries (Międzynarodowa Organizacja Pomocy Rewolucionistom, known in Poland as Red Aid in Poland [Czerwona Pomoc w Polsce]); through the Polish Bureau (attached to the Bolshevik party)\textsuperscript{957} as well as thousands of Polish Communists who lived in the Soviet Union;\textsuperscript{958} and through the KPRP's various autonomous organizations (e.g., Communist Party of Western Ukraine). The diverse institutions outside of the KPRP notwithstanding, various organizations and factions within its framework oftentimes bypassed the Central Committee (Komitet Centralny, KC) and initiated direct contact with Moscow. These groups would take sides in ideological disputes or quarrels between Moscow and Warsaw, thus weakening the cohesion of the Polish party.\textsuperscript{959} Moreover, Bolsheviks had no qualms in utilizing these elements to force the Polish leadership to fall in line.

Nonetheless, to merely paint Polish Communists as Moscow’s lackeys, especially before the early 1920s, would be a serious oversimplification. Assessment of the (failed) German revolutions, the development of tactics, Bolshevikization of the party or the intra-Bolshevik battle highlighted much ideological independence of the Poles. Although Soviet directions were almost always implemented, they were usually accompanied by much discussion especially in the initial years when contacts with the Comintern were limited.\textsuperscript{960} Such independent thinking within the Central Committee of the KPRP drew scathing reactions and even threats from Moscow on several occasions.\textsuperscript{961} Moreover, the factional fighting within the KPRP revealed how various factions within Polish Communism exploited the Comintern to their own ends. To a large extent, the Poles became agents in the destruction of their own agency. Different factions—especially the ultraleft—exploited Moscow in their domestic feuding and power struggles, by convincing the Bolsheviks to intervene on their behalf against their rivals.

The hostility to the Second Republic did not simply mean that Polish Communists in all instances and at all times rejected nationalism or that they were merely passive agents of Moscow. There is no doubt that bureaucratic ossification, obsession with iron discipline and obedience to Bolshevism were critical in the eventual demise of the party. But the Poles were equally to blame for this result. What internally destroyed the KPRP, turned it into a deterministic and inflexible movement, and made it an extension of Moscow by the late 1920s was factional

\textsuperscript{957} Polish Communists in the Soviet Union were a sizable group of activists who participated in the October Revolution and assumed some important positions within the Bolshevik institutions. They always perceived themselves to be far more superior in ideology and administrative experience than their counterparts in the Second Republic. Oftentimes, they attempted to pressure their comrades in the homeland to follow their directives. In his memoirs, Minc argued that the Polish Communists in Poland loyally and unquestionably followed the directives coming from their compatriots in Russia. In the summer of 1919, the Bolsheviks reorganized Polish Communists living and working in the Soviet Union. Rather than having a foreign section of the KPRP, they created a Polish Bureau of Agitation and Propaganda (Polskie Biuro Agitacji i Propagandy) next to the RKP(b). Cimek and Kieszczynski, Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938, 51ff.

\textsuperscript{958} See, for instance, Walentyna Najdus, Lewica polska w Kraju Rad, 1918-1920 (Warszawa Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe 1971). Ławnik, for instance, argues that in 1925, the majority of KPP’s members lived abroad; hence, 5,000 members lived in Poland while 10,000 lived abroad.

\textsuperscript{959} Given that the KPRP became a patchwork of various groups and organizations, factionalism and divisions persisted and disruptive the effective functioning of the party. The Ukrainian Communists, for instance, continued to follow an independent policy which often contradicted directives coming from Moscow. See, for instance, Solchanyk, “The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, 214-17.

\textsuperscript{960} Czubiński rightly argues that the Comintern came to play an important role within the ideology and policy-making of the KPRP only after the conclusion of the Treaty of Riga.

\textsuperscript{961} The Poles were critical of many decisions coming from Moscow. Conflicts with Lenin and later with Stalin continued into the late 1920s.
The nationality question was center stage in this sectarian struggle between those who called for a more conciliatory approach to the Polish state and those who refused to give an inch of their internationalism. The ideas promoted at the Second Party Congress—regardless of the instrumentalist motives behind their inception—were not simply a temporary tactical move but rather denoted a significant ideological shift for which many were not ready. The victory of the ultraleftist current over the nationality question—the rejection of the ideas of the Second Congress—led to the demise of Polish Communism already by the early 1920s. Once the turn towards nationalism was abandoned, the KPRP became merely an extension of Kremlin’s foreign policy. The fate of the KPRP had been sealed by 1924. Thereafter, it paid lip service to the nationality question, especially since it brought minorities into its fold as its main allies against the existing order. The aftermath of the Fourth Conference revealed that Luxemburgism—which now became identified with the Stalinization of the party—would define the ideology and practices of Polish Communism until its demise in the latter half of the 1930s.

Historiography of Polish Communism does not reveal enough the significance of the factionalism that existed practically since the inception of the party. Even historians writing in the post-1989 era have seldom given attention to this very critical dimension.
CHAPTER 10: NATIONALIZING SOCIALISM:  
THE FRAGMENTATION OF POLISH SOCIALISM BEFORE 1914.

After the bloodletting of the 1863 January Uprising in Congress Kingdom, many Poles became disillusioned with the insurrectionary tradition, which had sustained their national aspirations for independence since the 18th century partitions. After decades of intermittent armed struggle against the three foreign oppressors, no significant gains could be claimed. The young generation of upcoming intellectuals, usually with roots in the landless gentry, began to challenge the established leaders for the helm of the nation’s destiny. Amongst many alternatives, Marxism also made a home in the hearts and minds of young Poles. These youthful socialists became the flag bearers and prophets of the new ideology that promised to liberate the Poles from all forms of oppression and exploitation. But this was no easy task, given the multiple complexities of the socio-economic, political and ideological realities of the stateless Poles.

Foremost, Poland had been partitioned between three empires—Austrian, Russian and Prussian (eventually German)—producing regions with distinct socio-economic, cultural and political characteristics. Industrialization, urbanization and demographic changes took diverging forms in each partitioned part. These regional peculiarities were only sharpened with time as each territory was increasingly integrated into the life of its partitioning power. To speak of a common shared experience beyond national oppression was nearly impossible, especially as the 19th century emancipation of the peasantry and the advent of industrialization—initiated at different times and in different ways in each region—introduced new complexities into the landscape of the Polish situation. Any political movement emerging in the latter half of the 19th century faced insurmountable challenges: Should their program respond to conditions and interests peculiar to only one of the partitioned regions? Was inter-partition cooperation viable? What tactics would be most effective?

With the emergence of mass politics and the introduction of Marxism in Eastern and East Central Europe in the last few decades of the century, Poland had become the intellectual crossroads between various contending intellectual currents. Polish intelligentsia in each partitioned territory and its exiled wings in Geneva, Paris and London, mediated between indigenous ideas and those coming from the outside. Conditions at home sometimes sharply contrasted with the aspirations of activists and émigré groups abroad. Adapting imported ideas to the continuously evolving Polish realities was challenging. In the first half of the 19th century, Polish utopian socialists formulated a religio-mystical messianism, which propagated resistance against partitioning powers, and the eventual restoration of independence based on the Polish peasant commune and republican (democratic) values. Moreover, Poles fought on the barricades across the continent and their revolutionary zeal and seemingly universalistic desires received widespread acclamation. As previously mentioned, their revolutionary potential even received approval

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964 Wandycz, The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918, see chapters 10 and 11.
965 See, for instance, Kieniewicz, Historia Polski 1795-1918, chapter 10.
from Marx and Engels. Yet, by mid century, some began to link the mass struggle for democratic rights and independence with the social question. What became clear was that the liberation of Poland seemed impossible without widespread support of the masses. More importantly, the liberation movement—closely associated with revolutionary activity—became viewed as a potential socialist phenomenon (i.e., fighting for higher, universal goals). This became ever more immediate with the completion of the peasant emancipation in Congress Poland in 1864. For many Poles, the distance between national and economic oppression was short. Yet, working and living in an industrializing region was that much more complicated by the national question. To put simply, a socio-economic fight had many national implications. Struggling against the “other” could easily denote “us” (poor and exploited Poles) fighting against “them”–foreign (usurping) employers and national oppressors. Consequently, the conclusion of the insurrectionary period following the January Uprising and the socio-economic transformation led to a reevaluation of the Polish struggle for independence. As the gentry’s approach seemed no longer viable, new alternatives were sought.

**FROM POSITIVISM TO MARXISM: THE GENERATION OF THE NIEPOKORNI.**

In a study on the discourse of modernity amongst turn of the 20th century Poles, Brian A. Porter postulates that the modern Polish political *Weltanschauung*, which eventually split into distinct movements, had common roots in the generation of the “defiant ones” (*niepokorni*). Several characteristics informed their outlook. Foremost, this post 1863 generation began to formulate their mission not solely as leading towards national emancipation but also as a social transformation of Polish society. “Independence and social transformation” as Porter explains, became “two sides of the same coin, and both were aimed at ‘preparing the lud ([i.e., common masses]) to take an active and direct part in political life.’” Their main objective was to politicize and liberate the lud from all forms of oppression: externally, from the foreign yoke, and internally, from the old elites. The two struggles had to be fought simultaneously, with the latter assuming considerable importance. The young intellectuals rejected the gentry’s narrow definition of the nation and refused a simplistic interpretation of the Polish nation, recognizing its diverse components (such as its division into classes, multiethnic composition of the Commonwealth, and so forth). The Polish *lud* had been exploited and manipulated at the service of both domestic and foreign elements, and so “their goal was to change this, to place the nation at the service of the lud and ‘subordinate’ the old elites.”

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967 The peasants in Austrian and Prussian Poland had been emancipated in the first half of the 19th century.
968 This was much more prominent in Russian and Prussian Poland where signs of industrialization were clearly visible. Austrian Poland remained highly underdeveloped with industrialization scarcely reaching the villages and towns.
969 These young intellectuals of landless gentry extraction—whose lifestyle and livelihood had been destroyed by the post revolutionary repressions and the continuous attempts at assimilation—gathered around the publication of *Glos* (*The Voice*). Both the future Polish Left and Right emerged from these common roots.
970 The emancipation of the peasantry in Congress Kingdom in 1864 finalized the process of removing serfdom in all the territories of the former Commonwealth. Combined with industrialization, it ushered the social dimension to the forefront of nationalist debates.
971 This is a highly elusive term in the Polish language, and has no direct translation. It denotes the common masses of a people. And although it does not directly speak of a national group, it certainly does entail such connotations.
973 Porter, “Democracy and Discipline in Late Nineteenth-Century Poland,” 353. Porter’s main argument, as elaborated in his phenomenal study of Polish road through modernity, is that this attempt at formulating a more all-encompassing definition of national and social emancipation eventually transformed into a drive to master and
the 1870s (and beyond), these young radicals experimented with various roads to modern utopia. Many of them turned to socialism as the best solution to the conundrum of the Polish condition.974 As Jerzy Jedlicki insightfully describes it: “They were the romanticists of socialism who left their homes on a dark night to set out on a voyage of adventure with no guarantee of reaching their destination, but took with them for protection the mantle of scientific economics and its unshakable predictions.”975 The ideological fog of the 1870s gave way to specific and clearly defined socialist programs by the 1890s.

There is no doubt that the Polish road to socialism went through Warsaw Positivism (what Porter aptly calls “depoliticized liberalism”) and organic work, through Russian populism (Narodniki) and shades of anarchism, and through an admixture of Western European socialist thought (predominantly Marxist and Lassallean).976 Norman A. Naimark argues that “the positivist press cleared an intellectual path through Polish political thought for the emergence of Marxism.”977 At the very least, positivism opened the door to new alternatives based on rationalism and the scientific method. Equally important was the Russian influence. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, young Poles came into contact with Russian revolutionaries, especially in the corridors of universities. Their eastern counterparts’ revolutionary thinking, promotion of political action, and affinity for the peasantry, all worked to magnetize Poles towards the Left.978 Finally, Western socialist intellectual currents trickled into Eastern Europe and fell on fertile soil of poverty and oppression arising from industrialization (and from living under a foreign yoke). By the 1870s, all the ingredients were set for the emergence of a nascent socialist movement: industrial misery, oppression in every form, passion for activism and revolutionary change, and a rapid proliferation of potential intellectual currents to draw from. Yet, the Polish case followed neither the Eastern (Russian) nor Western patterns of development, clearing its own distinct pathway through the socialist forest. There were unique characteristics which reflected a particular context of the Polish road to socialism: firstly, in Polish territories, political

channel the forces of progress and national aspirations through order and discipline. Politicized masses had to be controlled and redirected towards oftentimes-contested (national) projects. In essence, as Porter explains, “young intellectuals and political activists reconfigured positivism so that it could fit within an agenda of action.” Brian Porter, When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76.

974 For a case study of this phenomenon, see the transformation of Ludwik Waryński who became one of the leading Polish socialists in the 19th century. Andrzej Notkowski, Ludwik Waryński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1978), chapters 1 and 2.

975 Jerzy Jedlicki, A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 251.


977 Naimark, The History of the “Proletariat,” 33. Naimark contends that the positivist press’ popularization of socialism and its effectiveness in Western Europe pushed young urban intelligentsia towards Marxism (47-57). Moreover, as Timothy Snyder reveals, many critics of positivism eventually became Marxists. Timothy Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe: A Biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (1872-1905) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press for the Ukrainian Research Institute, 1997), 15-17. Similarly, Porter argues that even though they became positivism’s critics, the ideology remained an important dimension of their thought.

978 See, for example, Peter Brock, Polish Revolutionary Populism: a study in agrarian socialist thought from the 1830s to the 1850s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).
organizations predated trade unionism and economic activity; secondly, even though Poland’s belated industrialization made it a prime candidate for anarchism (as in Spain or Italy), the ideology never took root on a large scale; and thirdly, the national and social questions were closely interrelated.979

The conversion to socialism amongst the Polish intellectuals was driven by the desire to eliminate oppression and democratize. The emancipation of the lud became the primary goal, but as soon as the socialist camp solidified, the new converts immediately began to quarrel about a variety of key issues: What sort of oppression were they fighting to eradicate? What were the appropriate means and strategy to carry out the struggle? Would terrorism be justifiable? Who was going to lead and participate in this struggle? Was the peasantry a viable partner in the coming revolution? Underlining all of these concerns was the national question. In the late 1870s, Ivan Frank wrote a brochure entitled Co to jest socjalizm (“What Socialism Is”). In it, he asked: “Does socialism go against our patriotic feeling?” Answering in the negative, he cautiously praised patriotism. Nonetheless, he warned that national independence without socialist reform would not be enough, as both would be required to bring about the true liberation of the Polish nation.980 Yet, could the working class contain the demands and aspirations of nationalism (and vice versa)? What should take predominance: national or social emancipation? Which should precede the other? Was international solidarity compatible with patriotism? How should the other neighboring ethnic groups be treated (especially the Ukrainians, Bielorussians and Lithuanians)?

These pressing questions came to the forefront already in debates leading up to the formulation of the first program of Polish socialists in the late 1870s. The growth of socialistically minded gminas (communes or circles)981 throughout the Vistula Lands,982 and the appeal of socialist ideas in Russian and Austrian Poland necessitated the development of a uniform set of goals and tactics. To that end, the pioneers of Polish socialism—including Ludwik Waryński, Stanisław Mendelson, Kazimierz Dłuski, Szymon Diksztajn, along with several others—produced in 1878 what became known as the Brussels Program.983 Program Socjalistów Polskich (The Program of Polish Socialists) was a standard Marxist call to agitation and change. It rejected political action and any concessions to national aspirations, subjugating everything to class orientation and the revolutionary struggle for economic emancipation. How it dealt with the nationality question—or rather how it purposely neglected to deal with it—revealed much about the tensions that existed in Polish socialist thought from its very inception.

From the very beginning, linking social and national objectives was a highly contested issue in Polish socialism. The Brussels Program intentionally downplayed the nationality question. Although it called for national equality, it maintained that “the liberation of workers is not a localized or national but rather a social task.”984 No mention was made of national oppression or the need for independence. It emphasized alignment with the Socialist

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981 The Polish socialists of the 1870s were active in Kiev, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Lvov, and Geneva.
982 Vistula Lands denoted the administrative name given to the Congress Kingdom following the January Uprising. Following the 1863 Uprising, the Congress Kingdom lost all of the remaining autonomy, which had been preserved after the November Uprising. The Polish territories were incorporated into the Russian Empire.
983 The published pamphlet specified Brussels as the place of publication. However, the actual location of the printing was Geneva. The former was used to confuse the authorities.
984 “Program Socjalistów Polskich (drukowano w Brukseli 1878),” in Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918, 68-69.
International and called for the unity of and cooperation with all socialists within the Tsarist Empire. Behind closed doors, however, the diverging views on the proper approach to the national question were debated fiercely. In its original draft, as formulated by Warsaw socialists Aleksander Więckowski and Józef Uziembło, the national question was actually given a lot more attention. “We deeply believe,” as the draft read, “that the Polish lud, rising in the name of social-revolutionary values will reveal invincible strength and steadfast energy in the struggle against the partitioning government, which has added to economic exploitation stupendous national oppression.” It perceived national oppression as an equally if not more important stimulus for political work than economic exploitation. And it reserved the freedom (and independence) of action for all nationalities within the empire, rather than amalgamating them into a single empire-wide party. The differences between the Warsaw draft and the Brussels Program exposed an important chasm between the internationalist and the nationalist orientations within Polish socialism, which only sharpened by the early 1880s, giving birth to diverse socialist parties: Lud Polski (Polish People) and the Proletariat (also known as the First or Great Proletariat).

Gathering around newspapers Równość (Equality) and later Przedswiit (The Dawn), the internationalists tightened their rank and file to oppose the nationalist tendencies within Polish socialism. Yet, although they negated the struggle for independence, they were certainly not national nihilists. They did recognize the significance of the national question in the Polish context. Nonetheless, The Program of Polish Socialists remained the only political platform before 1914 that failed to discuss national oppression and the need to eradicate it. This deliberate omission was most likely an attempt to draw all attention to the Marxist (i.e., internationalist) foundations of the group, in opposition to the overtly nationalistic organizations that were simultaneously emerging on the political scene. The Brussels Program asserted that “the triumph of socialist principles is a necessary requirement for the future prosperity of the Polish nation.” It went on to say that every Pole has a duty not only to participate in this socialist struggle but also to fight for the Polish lud against the interests of the bourgeois elites. Without directly enunciating it, the program stated that socialists were the only group with genuine “national” interests at heart. And they had the most viable blueprint for the future: the establishment of a federation of communes (gminas).

National or Social Emancipation? Polish Socialists Struggle with Self-determination.

The question of Poland’s self-determination remained one of the central bones of contention amongst Polish socialists right up to the end of the Great War. Throughout the late 1870s and early 1880s, Waryński and his

985 “Zasady socjalno-rewolucyjnego stowarzyszenia polaków”, in Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918, 62. The Warsaw draft also called for the establishment of separate parties for all of the different nationalities of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth such the Rusins, Bielorussians, and Lithuanians. For a discussion of the differences between the two programs, see Leon Baumgarten, “Pierwsze polskie kółka socjalistyczne a kwestia narodowa,” 899 ff.

986 The post World War II Marxist historiography on the issue of nationalism amongst the early Polish socialists is full of contradictions. On the one hand, some historians like Celina Bobińska have emphasized their national nihilism. On the other hand, in line with Leninist worldview where self-determination was an acceptable Marxist strategy, there has also been an over-promotion of national question where none actually existed. Neither of these two extremes shows effectively the complexities of the Polish socialist responses to nationalism.

987 All the other socialist programs, including those of the PPS, PPS-Left, PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna (PPS-Revolutionary Fraction), Second Proletariat, and Third Proletariat, SDKP and SDKPiL all discussed national oppression and its implications (even if only in a negative sense).

988 “Program Socjalistów Polskich (drukowano w Brukseli 1878),” 66. Wojciech Modzelewski argues that this was an overtly patriotic declaration as it made every individual responsible for the well-being of the nation. “Patriotyzm a świadomość klasowa w polskiej myśli socjalistycznej w latach 1878-1886,” Studia Filozoficzne 65-66, no. 4-5 (1970): 118-120.
supporters attempted to clarify and defend their position. More than anything else, the Równość-Przedświt group vehemently opposed the reconstitution of Poland’s independence, which they believed could only be resolved with the advent of socialism. But the matter was more complex than the mere question of statehood. In his article *Patriotyzm i socjalizm* (“Patriotism and Socialism”), Kazimierz Dłuski rejected the traditional definition of Polish nationalism which only provided for a narrow elitist viewpoint. Independence would not ensure the well-being of the masses, as it would merely replace one set of oppressors (Russians) with another (Polish gentry or bourgeoisie). Only the socialist project would be able to encompass patriotism of the nation within its fold and ensure the complete emancipation of the masses. Thus, Dłuski and his comrades did not oppose patriotism as an emotional tie that bound people together, but rather rejected its connection to the struggle for independence. For Dłuski, Waryński, and their Geneva entourage, combining socialism and nationalism amounted to an approval of self-determination. Patriotism was recognized as a modern reality but would have to be redefined through the socialist prism.

Foremost, many socialists did not know how to deal with the national past, even the achievements associated with the Left. Socialism needed to break even with the Polish leftist past, safe perhaps for the work of the few radical socialists of the 1830s (e.g., *Gromady Ludu Polskiego*) and a few Reds from the 1863 generation. As Mendelson declared, looking at the national heritage or even determining the ideological roots of Polish socialism was much less important than looking to the future—outlining objectives and formulating strategies. But Waryński and his colleagues did not outrightly dismiss the historical legacy of the nation. Instead, they offered a reinterpretation of the Polish historiography. The gist of their argument was that the insurrectionary age highlighted the great divide between two Polands or two distinct Polish nations: the *lud* (masses) and the gentry. The so-called *gentry democracy* was backward looking, elitist, reactionary and socially conservative, continuously trying to realize its class objectives rather than the interests of the masses.

The rhetoric against the gentry nation was widespread. In a brochure to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the November Uprising, the editors of *Równość* declared that “The Polish *lud* must realize, that the privileged classes never genuinely defended its interests, the Polish *lud* must realize that it shares nothing in common with the privileged classes: neither history—the history of Poland was never its history, nor motherland—the motherland of Polish gentry, was never their motherland.” The *lud*, which had traditionally been excluded from the gentry’s narrowly defined nation, was opposed to the elitist agenda, but, unconscious of its historical role, it remained an

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989 See some of their publications in *Równość* between 1879 and 1881, in *Pierwsze pokolenie markisitów polskich*, Tom I, 50-102.
991 Maria Orzechowski offers an interesting monograph on the various ways in which early Polish socialists attempted to interpret the past. *Revolucja, Socjalizm, Tradycje: Przeszłość narodowa i tradycje w myśli politycznej rewolucyjnego nurtu polskiego ruchu robotniczego* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1978), see especially chapters 3 and 4.
993 For an example of such an interpretation, see Dłuski, “Patriotyzm i socjalizm” as well as his deliberations on the 50th anniversary of the November Uprising.
inactive force.995 In the capitalist age, the profit-driven Polish bourgeoisie was foreign to Polish history (i.e., its interests were only capitalistic and not national), while the gentry abandoned its national pursuits for economic aims. For the Równość-Przedświt camp, the past had little to offer, the present was steered by capitalism, and only the socialist future would bring about a new Poland. Dwelling on the past merely diluted the contemporary class orientation of the Polish nation.996 Moreover, nationalism itself was a slippery and ambiguous concept that polluted the consciousness of the proletariat.

Unlike their Western European counterparts, even those Polish socialists who rejected nationalism were compelled to justify their position. They were not afraid to tackle the issue directly. In a lengthy study of nationalism, Mendelson postulated that there was no such thing as a uniform nation due to the conflicting interests of its constituent classes. National and ethnic solidarity, if it ever existed, was a product of the past and would steadily lose significance. The same ideas were highlighted in an article on the Irish Question, concluding that since the “time of national struggles has passed […] economic emancipation of all social movements should become the goal.” 997 Moreover, Mendelson juxtaposed patriotism against the nation-state. The feeling of belonging to a national group was a tolerable modern phenomenon, but the nation-state was not an effective framework to satisfy the cultural needs of people.998 What was required was a complete redefinition of nationalism along the more superior socialist and internationalist lines. What Mendelson called “class patriotism” was to replace “national patriotism” as internationalism—a feeling of solidarity amongst the working classes—would bring about an advanced set of values and traditions to the masses. All these leftist publications of Waryński’s clique drew a sleuth of criticism from the more nationally oriented factions.

In a brochure entitled Sprawy żywotne (Vital Issues) published in 1880, Adam Sąsiedzki (writing under the pseudonym Iks Bogomnos) wrote that “socialism is wholly compatible with a well understood and conscious patriotism of the masses [lud].” 999 A misunderstanding of definitions and perceptions was the only block to a natural unity between socialism and nationalism. Historically, as in the Paris Commune, Polish patriotism and socialist ideals came together and they could do so again if properly handled.1000 Yet, Sąsiedzki did not go as far as to openly support the struggle for independence. This task would be left to Bolesław Limanowski.

Limanowski personified the Polish road to socialism through self-determination. Traveling through democratic republicanism, Auguste Comte, positivist sociology and utopian socialism, he finally arrived at

995 Modzelewski argues that, similarly to Limanowski, they promoted patriotism of the lud (patriotyzm ludowy). Even though they did not want to frame their aims within the struggle for independence, they still saw great value in what Polska ludowa (Poland of the masses) offered.
996 Mendelson, “Narodowość i walka class,” Walka Klas 1884, nr. 1, reprinted in Pierwsze pokolenie marksistów polskich, Tom II, 265-270. See also Modzelewski, “Patriotyzm a świadomość klasowa w polskiej myśli socjalistycznej w latach 1878-1886,” 122-123. The Równość-Przedświt group believed that the insurrectionary tradition had hampered socialism in two important ways; it delayed the emergence and proliferation of socialism in Poland by stimulating insurrectionary tactics; and it hindered international working-class solidarity. Orzechowski, Rewolucja, Socjalizm, Tradycje, 73-74.
997 “Kwestia irlandzka,” Równość 1880, nr. 2, 1881, nr. 3 and 4, in Pierwsze pokolenie marksistów polskich, Tom I, 337.
998 Mendelson argued that it would be impossible to formulate a definition of the nation as it was composed of too many antagonistic interests. Mendelson, “Narodowość i walka class,” 265-293.
Lassallean ideals and Marxist socialism in the 1870s. From the very beginning of his involvement with the Równość-Przedwświt group in Geneva, he stressed the need for national liberation as a precondition for socialist reforms. In 1879, he penned his ideas in an article entitled *Socjalizm jako konieczny objaw dziejowego rozwoju* (Socialism as a definitive manifestation of historical progress). It was a direct response to Dłuski’s dismissal of nationalism. Limanowski defined socialism as a theoretical-pragmatic movement which, arising from a need for justice and equality—central pillars of his Weltanschauung—opposed all forms of exploitation. To put simply, socialism was a natural step in the progression of human history. In the case of Poland, socialist ideals were stimulated by the loss of statehood and the desire for justice. As the main warriors for justice and political freedom, as well as the most suitable emissaries of the Polish working *lud*, socialists should rightfully assume the mantle of the Polish patriotic tradition.

“Like Lassalle,” as Kazimiera Janina Cottam explains, “Limanowski considered the proletariat the most ‘moral’ class in society; he felt that it embodied the ideals of social justice and of the ‘general will’.”

Like his leftward comrades in the Równość-Przedwświt camp, he juxtaposed the masses against the gentry. Yet, unlike his colleagues, he did not reject the national traditions of the insurrectionary era. Instead, he embraced them for the socialist cause. For instance, he depicted the 1863 Uprising as making an important contribution to the overall historical progress of the Polish nation. “He believed,” as Cottam maintains, “that every true Polish patriot was bound to support socialism in the cause of national unity and that every true patriot was a potential socialist, due to his love of the people as an end in itself. Conversely, every true socialist was a potential patriot, because patriotism in Poland was also a means of establishing a regime of social justice.” He had no reservations of appropriating figures such as Adam Mickiewicz for the cause, proclaiming the romantic writer as a pioneer socialist. In the early 1880s, he reasserted this belief: “True patriotism turns to everything that encompasses the fundamental and genuine strength of the nation, to the working masses [*lud*], and hence it must be socialistic; sincere socialism, conversely, arising from national love, must be patriotic.” Since socialism was the new soul and conscience of the Polish nation (and a future Polish state)—by enhancing national unity—it could (even should) be utilized to stimulate the masses into the struggle for independence. Conversely, national and patriotic feelings could be harnessed for the socialist cause.

Limanowski’s criticism echoed throughout the Polish communities at home and abroad, stimulating much debate and eventually leading to a proliferation of perspectives. The first to diverge from the internationalism of the

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1001. The degree to which Limanowski can be considered a Marxist is certainly contestable. There is no doubt that he preferred Lassalle’s version of the socialist objectives and strategies to those of Marx and Engels. And he was never reluctant to criticize the fathers of scientific socialism if necessary. For a biography of Limanowski, see Michał Śliwa, *Bolesław Limanowski: człowieek i historia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe WSP, 1994); or Kazimiera Jenina Cottam, *Bolesław Limanowski (1835-1935): A Study in Socialism and Nationalism* (New York: East European Quarterly, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1978).


1003. Śliwa argues that the piece was the first Polish treatise on the modern theory of socialism. *Bolesław Limanowski*, 56-7.


1007. Bolesław Limanowski, “Patriotyzm i socjalizm,” 1881, reprinted in *Myśl socjalistyczna i marksistowska w Polsce w latach 1878-1939*, volume II, 131. He even asserted that the Równość-Przedwświt group negated nationalism solely because they were still under the influence of Russian anarchism.
Brussels Program were the Galician socialists who criticized the Geneva group for neglecting their local realities. Recognizing the dual challenge of existing under an oppressive regime and of operating in a multi-ethnic context, their first theoretical program from January 1881 devoted much attention to the national question.\textsuperscript{1008} Program socjalistów galicyjskich (Program of the Galician Socialists) stressed the need to eliminate national oppression and to establish wide-ranging autonomy (based on rights to language, to national institutions, etc.). By advocating the protection of distinct national identities of small peoples, it portrayed modern socialism as being both national and cosmopolitan—it was based on local realities even if it had universal aims.\textsuperscript{1009} The program also rejected the reconstitution of Jagiellonian Poland, which would only create national antagonisms. Instead, it called for a federation based on voluntary participation and equality.

The stage was set for an official division between Waryński’s internationalist and Limanowski’s nationalist orientations. First to emerge was Limanowski’s Stowarzyszenie Socjalistyczne “Lud Polski” (Socialist Association Polish People) in mid 1881.\textsuperscript{1010} It gathered an eclectic group of socially minded agitators and intellectuals who shared a belief in the necessity of Poland’s independence. In many ways, the first manifesto of the Polish People strayed far from the class-orientation akin to classical Marxism. Its abandonment of class rhetoric was surely intentional as a response to the internationalism of the Waryński camp. It opened with a praise of the Polish revolutionary tradition and defended Poland’s right to self-determination. Rather than emphasizing the role of the proletariat, it spoke to a broader audience of the Polish \textit{lud}, which was to pick up the socialist cause as the leading force in the realization of national interests.\textsuperscript{1011} Yet, as Limanowski pointed out, independence without social reforms would create an incomplete Poland. Besides the harsh critique from the Left,\textsuperscript{1012} the Polish People’s program triggered another debate within socialist circles: the future shape of the Polish state. This question became especially sensitive in Polish circles that were continuously challenged by the reality of ethnically mixed territories, a complex historical heritage, and the national awakenings.

The Polish People’s blueprint for the Polish state was vague: “independent national existence within voluntarily determined borders.” Although it meant to allow for tactical flexibility while avoiding offending any single faction, the ambiguous statement stimulated much criticism.\textsuperscript{1013} What Limanowski envisioned was a reconstitution of the historical Poland of 1772—an amalgamation of various peoples of the former Polish-Lithuanian

\textsuperscript{1008} In the opening paragraphs, the program outlined the multiethnic composition of Galicia and the challenges of establishing a united party. It recognized the right of each region to respond to its local conditions. And it proposed a federal model for a future socialist party. “Program socjalistów galicyjskich” (initially entitled “Program socjalistów polskich i ruskich Wschodniej Galicji,” also known as the “Program socjalistów polskich wschodniej Galicji”), 1881, reprinted in \textit{Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918}, 97-98. A later programmatic statement from May of the same year declared the national antagonisms are a tool of the Tsarist government and so must be used as a weapon against autocracy. “Program galicyjskiej partii robotniczej,” 1881, reprinted in \textit{Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918}, 120-137.

\textsuperscript{1009} The program even recognized Jews as a separate and distinct nation. “Program socjalistów galicyjskich,”102-120.

\textsuperscript{1010} Throughout the 1880s, Limanowski’s Lud Polski was associated with various publications: \textit{Przegląd Społeczny}, \textit{Głos}, and \textit{Pobudka}.

\textsuperscript{1011} Odezwa stowarzyszenia socjalistycznego ‘Lud Polski,’” 1881, reprinted in \textit{Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918}, 141-146.


\textsuperscript{1013} Blit argues that such a vague statement was included “to skirt the problem of where the frontiers of the future Poland should run.” \textit{The Origins of Polish Socialism}, 41.
Commonwealth based on voluntary participation. He rejected the gentry’s traditional (assimilationist) model, opting for democratic federalism of free and willing nations—Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Byelorussians, and Ukrainians. The blueprint combined the idealism of the Union of Lublin, the pragmatism of the Swiss political practices and the socialist foundations of equality and justice. Attacks on Limanowski’s vision of a historic Poland were multifold. Ukrainians, for instance, accused him of chauvinism. He responded by asserting that no nation had a right to oppress another, and that within his envisioned federation, every nation’s right to autonomy, self-government and even separation would be respected. But there were also those who, not content with Limanowski’s historical project, preferred a much more ethnic Poland.

The establishment of the Polish People finalized Limanowski’s break from the Równość-Przedświt group, intensifying the polemics between the two camps, triggering the latter’s need for organizational consolidation. The international congress of socialists in Chur in late 1881 marked the first open clash between the Waryński and the Limanowski’s blocs. Although the internationalists prevailed, Marx and Engels (and several other leading socialists) publicly championed Poland’s revolutionary tradition and struggle for independence. Dłuski tried to appease the wave of Western European Social Democratic criticism by clarifying that they were not renouncing their nationality, but merely the strive for independence. Within a year, Waryński and his cohorts established Partia Socjalno Rewolucyjna “Proletariat” (Social Revolutionary Party Proletariat, also known as the Great Proletariat or the First Proletariat).

Three critical issues distinguished the Proletariat from the Polish People: relationship with Russian socialists, the tactics to be utilized (especially the use of terror) on the road to revolution, and the nationality question. Cooperation with the working classes of the respective partitioned regions was a pillar of their program. The intention here was twofold: to disavow the nationalist tendencies and to underline the class orientation of the party. Not national bond but rather working-class solidarity, not a return to insurrectionary traditions but rather acceptance of socialist foundations, and not a nation-wide unity but rather cooperation with other working masses

1014 Bolesław Limanowski, Pamiętniki, Tom 2 (Warszawa: Ksiazka i Wiedza, 1957), 267. Juliusz Bardach argues that Limanowski’s ideas of a democratic federation predated his socialist thinking, and were the result of his roots outside of ethnographic Poland. “Inflanty, Litwa, Białoruś w twórczości Bolesława Limanowskiego. Studium z dziejów w kwestii narodowej,” Przegląd Historyczny 65, no. 3 (1974): 480-482.
1015 His stay in Switzerland had a tremendous impact on his belief in the federated model for a future Poland. “He concluded,” as Cottam explains, “that common history and common institutions tended to produce in Switzerland a similarity of outlook and aspirations, shaping a single ‘national character,’ in spite of the ethnic and religious diversities to the constituent peoples of this federal union.” Cottam, Bolesław Limanowski, 67-8.
1016 Bardach, “Inflanty, Litwa, Białoruś w twórczości Bolesława Limanowskiego,” 487-8; Śliwa, Bolesław Limanowski, 68-9; Żychowski, Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku, 118-121; Cottam, Bolesław Limanowski, 75-77, 80-81. To accuse Limanowski of chauvinism would be unwarranted as he abhorred the right-wing nationalists of the future National Democracy. In fact, he preferred Waryński’s internationalism to the chauvinism of some of his right-leaning colleagues and was not afraid to defend the socialism of the future Proletariat against nationalists.
1017 Zygmunt Balicki, the future leader of Liga Polska (Polish League), led this faction within the Polish People. Żychowski, Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku, 118; Bardach, “Inflanty, Litwa, Białoruś w twórczości Bolesława Limanowskiego,” 488-9.
1018 Żychowski, Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku, 111-116; Cottam, Bolesław Limanowski, 80-81; Blit, The Origins of Polish Socialism, 39.
1020 These issues were emphasized in both party statements: “List ‘Do Towarzyszy Socjalistów Rosyjskich,’” 1881, and “Odezwa Komitetu Robotniczego Sojalno-Rewolucyjnej Partii ‘Proletariat,’” 1882, reprinted in Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918, 175-181, 186-200.
within each partitioned region, would give people a sense of belonging, a new set of values and a comprehensive path to liberation.\textsuperscript{1021} Although the internationalist rhetoric prevailed, the Proletariat had learned from the past that ignoring the nationality question was not an option. If nothing else, nationalism had muddied and exploited the growing working-class energy. Moreover, Waryński, Dłuski and others realized that the nationality question was too important to the party’s constituents and so they offered a justification for the movement’s \textit{anational} position.

Even if nationalism had to be included, it would have to be clearly differentiated from its misguided predecessors. “They [the leaders of the Proletariat] bitterly attacked szlachta nationalism,” as Naimark clarifies, “but not the Polisheness of the workers, their language, their culture, or their national solidarity.”\textsuperscript{1022} Although the program rejected the insurrectionary heritage, the “illusion” of national unity, or the use of nationalism for socialist agitation, it recognized the consequences of national oppression in the Russian Empire. It concluded, for instance, that the lack of political freedom fueled national hatreds.\textsuperscript{1023} Yet, even though it mentioned the nationality question in several instances, it remained awkwardly silent on the issue of independence. A different version of the manifesto actually raised the question of self-determination as a potential long-term goal.\textsuperscript{1024} Baumgarten interprets this divergence of perspectives as highlighting the public as opposed to the private beliefs of the Proletariat’s members. In private, they debated and even held a positive outlook on the national question, but in public forums, they had to overstate their opposition to nationalism, lest it drained the socialist energies of the Polish workers or worst yet, turned their rank and file towards the Polish People.\textsuperscript{1025} The anational rhetoric persisted in the Great Proletariat’s publications and activities.

The Proletariat party press throughout the 1880s negated the Polish question—especially on the pages of the main periodical \textit{Walka Klas} (Class Struggle).\textsuperscript{1026} Although outright anti-nationalistic statements were becoming scarcer, the party did underscore the class orientation of their work. A central pillar of their strategy was cooperation with the Russians. But the position of their Russian counterparts on the Polish question put the leaders of the Proletariat in a bind. In response to the Proletariat’s position on Polish independence, the Russian \textit{Narodnaia Volia} (Peoples’ Will) stipulated that self-determination was a matter of national will. If the Polish nation wanted a state, even within its historic borders, it should have it.\textsuperscript{1027} The Russians’ persistent support for Poles’ right to sovereignty continuously disrupted their relationship with the Polish internationalists.

\textbf{FIN-DE-SIÈCLE POLISH SOCIALISM: TO RE-ESTABLISH A POLISH STATE?}

Once the partisan lines had been drawn with the establishment of the Polish People and the Proletariat, it was a matter of time before other socialist currents on the nationality question emerged in Polish socialism. Naimark’s assertion that “in contradiction to their earlier preoccupations with Lassalle and the \textit{narodnik} socialist

\begin{figure*}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure.png}
\caption{Diagram of social and economic structures in the 1880s.}
\end{figure*}

\textsuperscript{1021} “Odezwa Komitetu Robotniczego Sojalno-Revolucyjnej Partii ‘Proletariat,’” 192-194.
\textsuperscript{1022} Naimark, \textit{The History of the “Proletariat,”} 122. Baumgarten goes as far as to argue that Dłuski and his friends had a positive approach to fighting in the name of national liberation and were ready to participate in the struggle if it arouse. However, such an assertion goes beyond the prerogatives of this group. Although they acknowledged the revolutionary potential of the struggle for independence, they still believed that it would misdirect proletarian energies. “Pierwsze polskie kółka socjalistyczne a kwestia narodowa,” 904-6.
\textsuperscript{1024} Tych, \textit{Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918}, 196 note d.
\textsuperscript{1025} Baumgarten, “Pierwsze polskie kółka socjalistyczne a kwestia narodowa,” 906.
\textsuperscript{1027} “Redakcja pisma ‘Wiestnik’ Narodnoj Woli do redakcji pisma Przedświt w sprawie stanowiska partii Narodna Wola w kwestii polskiej,” 1881, reprinted in Archiwum Ruchu Robotniczego, Volume V, ed. Feliks Tych (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, ), 42-44. See also, Naimark, \textit{The History of the “Proletariat,”} chapter 8.
thinkers, the Poles, under the influence of Marx, were able to approach the national question in the flexible terms of the political realities of working-class consciousness” is accurate but must be further qualified in several ways.1028 Foremost, the leaders of the various socialist parties did not fully understand the realities of the working-class consciousness, which were far more complex than they had assumed.1029 In opposition to clear-cut perceptions assumed by party leaders, the social and national lines were blurred and continuously renegotiated. It is true that the two extreme positions (and each certainly had unyielding adherents) of nationalists and internationalists hardened into blind dogmatic rhetoric by the 1890s; nonetheless, and here Naimark is completely right, the two extreme positions aside, flexibility on the national question did persist. More broadly speaking, the entirety of Polish socialism can be characterized as personifying Marxist flexibility. Kołakowski, in his study of Ludwik Krzywicki, highlights this phenomenon. He states that “the flexibility and eclecticism of his [Krzywicki’s] approach was one of the reasons why Polish Marxism failed to take on orthodox forms and tended to dissolve into a general rationalist or historicist trend.”1030 This tactical-ideological plasticity was partly due to two important dimensions of Polish socialism: the complexity of Poland’s political landscape (e.g., regionalism) and the difficulty associated with bridging diverse (even if socially minded) interests; and the subjectivism peculiar to Polish intellectuals.1031

The above realities necessitated a degree of ideological elasticity, which produced two important peculiarities. Firstly, there was an acceptance of malleability of viewpoints amongst Polish socialists, as they frequently traveled across the spectrum between the nationalist and the internationalist orientations. For example, Mendelson moved away from internationalism towards the acceptance of a national road to socialism, while Feliks Dzierżyński, on the other hand, set off from a nationally oriented perspective only to become a hardliner internationalist. Secondly, with the proliferation of parties, groups, and organizations, a diverse array of ideas with ever-growing complexity materialized amongst the socialists. A rainbow of attitudes emerged between the anti- and pro-nationalist positions.

In the decade after the inception of the first socialist parties, Polish socialism experienced significant turmoil. In the mid 1880s, the Proletariat suffered massive repressions in Russian Poland, including the death of several of its leaders (including Waryński), which for all intended purposes destroyed the organization. Its successors, the II Proletariat (Second Proletariat, 1887-88) and the Związek Polskich Robotników (Union of Polish Workers, 1890-91), began to warm up to the nationalist ideas akin to Limanowski. Ludwik Kulczycki, the Second Proletariat’s mentor, had a much more positive approach to nationalism than his predecessors. Although he criticized the bourgeois conceptions of independence, he recognized the need to give more credence to national

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1029 Laura A. Crago, “The ‘Polishness’ of Production: Factory Politics and the Reinvention of Working-Class National and Political Identities in Russian Poland's Textile Industry, 1880-1910,” Slavic Review 59, no. 1 (Spring, 2000): 16-41. For example, very few socialists understood the complicated national interactions of the factory floor, where Polish workers lamented about their exploitation and treatment by the Germans as much if not more than the Russians.  
1030 Kołakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. II, 207. More recently, Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz points to the multiple positions that coexisted within the PPS; the same could be said of the entire Polish socialist movement. “Siły i słabości polskiego ruchu socjalistycznego,” in Polska Lewica w XX wieku: historia – ludzie – idee, ed. Tadeusz Ślężak and Michał Śliwa (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2004), 7-9.  
1031 Porter explains: “Even the niepokorni’s most ‘scientific’ socialists were unapologetic about the emotional side of their political philosophy.” Proud of their subjectivism, they believed that “the excessive objectivity of scientific determinism was a form of slavery, because it made it conceptually impossible to change anything that had received nature’s stamp of approval.” When Nationalism Began to Hate, 95
issues in the party program. Along with the usual internationalist rhetoric for working-class solidarity and the reliance on workers’ revolutionary energy, there was now mention of the fight for “self-rule.” Gradually, even uncompromising internationalists like Mendelson were coming around to the nationalist camp. The Second Proletariat even experienced serious splintering over the issue. Rejecting terrorist tactics, the Union of Polish Workers abandoned the Second Proletariat, coming closer to the ideas propagated by *Pobudka* (The Awakening), for which Limanowski wrote. The emergence of new groups stimulated a need for consolidation of Polish socialism.

In the late 1880s, the Second International called upon socialists in all countries to get organized. Henceforth, Polish socialists also began to toy with the prospect of unifying their efforts. In 1892, under the helm of Limanowski, representatives of the various groups met in Paris to formulate a socialist program for all of Russian Poland. Lack of revolutionary prospects combined with the feeble results from transnational working-class solidarity (e.g., cooperation with Russians) pushed adherents of proletarian internationalism towards more national solutions. The objective of the Paris gathering was to formulate a minimum program that would be vague enough to have something for everyone in an effort to unify all the groups. The initial draft, written by Edward Abramowski, called for full autonomy and complete political separation within the framework of the Tsarist Empire, but it stopped short of independence. This leftist version, in line with the traditions of the First Proletariat and Waryński was found lacking by most.

After much debate and negotiation, most participants agreed to include a “minimum” objective of independence. The *Szkic programu Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej* (Outline of the Program of the Polish Socialist Party, henceforth PPS) opened with an account of the various injustices caused by national oppression. As one of its first and most essential objectives, it called for an independent and democratic Poland—a federation of nations based on equality and voluntary membership. The *Szkic* followed Limanowski’s position that the working class should not be separated from the nation; rather, it should identify with the nation so that the working masses and the nation were treated synonymously. The central formula of “independence—democracy—socialism” pushed these socialists away from revolutionism and towards reformism. It postulated that sovereignty and political democracy would precede social justice. Through the democratic conquest of power, nationalism would engender and satisfy the demands of the working class. The program made a special point of promoting cooperation with Russians.

1033 *Pobudka* became the main periodical of the Gmina Narodowo-Socjalistyczna (National-Socialist Commune), which was a socialistically minded organization with heavily nationalistic undertones. It drew inspiration from Limanowski’s Polish People.
1034 Representatives came from Second Proletariat, Zjednoczenie Robotnicze (Workers’ Unity), Gmina Narodowo-Socjalistyczna (National-Socialist Commune, based in Paris), and the Union of Polish Workers. Some of these included Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, Aleksander Dębski, Feliks Perl, Edward Abramowski, Mendelson, and Stanisław Grabski. The discussions lasted from 17th to the 23rd of November. Eventually, they established the Związek Zagranicznych Socjalistów Polskich (Union of Polish Socialists Abroad), which became the mouthpiece and coordinator of all the PPS’ operations abroad and to some degree at home as well. Wojtaszak, *Idee narodowe w myśl politycznej socjalistów w okresie walki o niepodległość polski*, 21-27; Zychowski, *Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku*, 179-86.
1037 Ironically, as Śliwa points out, it was not the issue of independence that stimulated heated debate, but rather the use of tactics, especially that of terror. The latter issue created almost insurmountable divisions amongst the various participants. Bolesław Limanowski, 98-9.
Lithuanians and Jews in the fight against Tsarism. However, it warned against Panslavism, calling it “Panrussianism,” which it perceived as a tool of the Russian autocracy. Slav federalism was a much more effective weapon in the fight against both Russification and Germanization. Nearly fifteen years after the Brussels Program, most Polish socialists had agreed on the unity of the socialist and nationalist aims. But would this compromise last? Was unity within Polish socialism finally within sight?

The Paris Program, whilst reaching a degree of compromise, was unacceptable to many, especially the new generation of internationalists such as Juliusz Marchlewski, Adolf Warski (Warszawski) and Rosa Luxemburg. These young intellectual activists, who steadfastly held to their revolutionary-internationalist outlook, perceived support for independence as conciliation to the gentry-bourgeois outlook. They criticized the Związek Zagraniczny Socjalistów Polaków (union of Polish Socialists Abroad)\textsuperscript{1038}—the mouthpiece of the PPS—for underemphasizing the proletarian foundations of socialism. Independence would never ensure social justice in the new Poland, as it would merely give control to the privileged elites. Their response to the PPS was swift and decisive. Within a year, they consolidated their energy around a periodical Sprawa robotnicza (The Workers’ Cause) and eventually a party, Socialdemokracja Królestwa Polskiego (Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland, SDKP). Their initial party statement was vague but it did highlight fundamentals of the party: their main struggle was against Tsarist autocracy; their central objective was the acquisition of a constitution for all of Russia; and their strategy involved close cooperation with the Russian socialists.\textsuperscript{1039} The SDKP had reached back to Waryński and Dłuski’s formula, but it took a much tougher anti-nationalist position than its ideological predecessors. The leaders of Social Democracy perceived the establishment of the PPS as a victory of the nationalist tendencies in Polish socialism which had to be eradicated at all cost. “For Polish nationalism was not an alternative Socialist policy at all,” as Luxemburg claimed, “but the negation of one.”\textsuperscript{1040}

In the minutes of the first party congress in March 1894, which essentially outlined the SDKP’s political program, special attention was given to the nationality question.\textsuperscript{1041} The program declared that any socialist who supported the reconstitution of Poland was a nationalist disguising as a socialist. A lengthy explanation was devoted to the evils of nationalism and its chauvinistic implications.\textsuperscript{1042} Luxemburg’s anti-nationalist rhetoric was visible throughout. The issue of independence dug deep trenches in Polish socialism. Nettle aptly describes this process: “The national question was as much a means of differentiation as its cause; the reason for digging a moat and also the toll with which it was dug deep and insurmountable. Ends and means snowballed until the national question had become the accepted touchstone of their differences.”\textsuperscript{1043}

\textsuperscript{1038} For further study of the ZZSP’s activities, see Jan Kancewicz, “Związek Zagraniczny Socjalistów Polaków (organizacja i kierownictwo w latach 1893-1896),” Przegląd Historyczny 58, no. 1 (1967): 67-89.


\textsuperscript{1040} Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. I, 94.

\textsuperscript{1041} “Protokół I Zjazdu Socjademokracji Królestwa Polskiego odbytego w Warszawie 10 i 11 marca 1894 r.,” reprinted in Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918, 279-99.

\textsuperscript{1042} Żychowski interprets the minutes as merely denoting a rejection of the struggle for a democratic-bourgeois state. Apparently, the leaders of the SDKP did not oppose nationalism or even self-determination. They feared that such a project would be appropriated by the bourgeoisie for its own class interests. Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku, 200-1. Najdus argues that right from the inception of the SDKP, there were two currents within the party: one was internationalist and the other nationalist. “Poglądy SDKPiL w kwestii narodowej,” Z pola walki 3, (1962): 6-7.

\textsuperscript{1043} Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. II, 845.
The gloves finally came off when the PPS and the SDKP clashed on the stage of the Second International over the issue of self-determination. The London Congress in 1896 transposed the Polish context onto the European-wide socialist stage. The PPS, gathering support from all three partitioned regions, proposed that the international socialist camp recognize the special position of the Poles in their struggle for independence. Luxemburg, Warski and Leon Jogiches (Jan Tyszka) countered with a campaign of their own. No words were spared in Luxemburg’s attack on the PSS. She argued that “self-determination was not merely a wrong theory but a dangerous and misleading tactic as well.” Although Kautsky mediated between the two camps, trying to formulate a position that would avoid alienating either, the final resolution approved self-determination in theory without making any specific mention of Poland. Bitterly disappointed, both blocs claimed victory. Through this ordeal, the PPS leaders realized that they could no longer simply rely on Marx and Engels’ support for Poland’s independence. Concrete Marxist theoretical explanations would have to be devised to justify the struggle for self-determination.

KAZIMIERZ KELLES-KRAUZ: THE SOCIALIST PATHWAY TO POLISH INDEPENDENCE.

Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz emerged as the leading theorist of the PPS in defense of socialism’s compatibility with nationalism. Even though he was an ardent Marxist, he believed that “it was a mistake to interpret historical materialism as denying that the superstructure had any effect on the evolution of the base,” allowing for autonomous traditions and human freedom. Nationalism had come to play an important role in modern history and had a viable place in the socialist ideological constellation. Conversely, it became equally essential to “ground the goal of national independence in the class interests of the workers.” In opposition to the Polish League or the National Democrats, the PPS was a working class movement whose patriotic aspirations had to be channeled appropriately. To that end, and in opposition to both leftist radicals like Luxemburg and chauvinists like Roman Dmowski, he articulated a sophisticated Marxist position in support of a socially orientated nationalist cause.

In 1904, towards the end of his much too short life, Kelles-Krauz wrote on Jewish nationalism. The expose entitled “On the Question of Jewish Nationality,” not only offered a remarkable point of reference for the national question in the Polish context, but also marked the culmination of Kelles-Krauz’s progressive thinking on national formation. Discounting traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes, he aimed to understand the position of Jews within East Central Europe and especially Poland. Countering accepted attitudes (within the PPS and amongst his European peers), he identified Jews as a distinct nation with all attending rights and privileges. To some extent, this conclusion was formulated as a counterpoint to Luxemburg’s conception of the role of capitalism in modern

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1046 For the resolution, see Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. I, 98-99.
1047 Kołakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. II, 212.
1048 Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe, 2.
1049 Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe, 40.
1050 For an analysis of Kelles-Krauz’s thought on the Jewish question, see Michael Sobelman, “Polish Socialism and Jewish Nationality: The Views of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz,” Soviet Jewish Affairs 20, no. 1 (1990): 47-55; and Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe, 191-201.
Rejecting the notion of the centralizing tendencies of capitalism towards ever-larger states—and a supposed assimilation of small peoples such as Jews—he interpreted the socio-economic process as rather leading to national differentiation. The 19th century had given birth to nations everywhere and it was essential to understand this process. So how was capitalism responsible for the national awakening of the small and large peoples of Europe?

Historical roots certainly played an important role in the process. National leaders reached back into the past—the Golden Ages of their ancestors, to fortify their claims to national viability. Although Kelles-Krauz readily identified this critical component, he highlighted language and capitalism as the main driving forces in national awakening. “Strong spiritual bond” of a common spoken language offered a sense of belongingness in an otherwise disconnected world created by industrialization and demographic transformations. In “Polish Independence and the Materialist Conception of History,” Kelles-Krauz dismissed geographic boundaries as central organizing principles of people. He argued that only lingual unity led to the consciousness of national unity and national distinctiveness. In essence, language was the grease in the vehicle of capitalist development: Communication between producers and consumers who spoke the same language was easier than between foreigners. But the process did not end there. People in close economic relations desired their own political voice and security. As a nation entered the public sphere, it acquired a desire for democratic recognition and equality, and for control of its own fate. Such aspirations quickly led to the spread of national culture via education. If for no other than economic reasons, culture, which was hitherto the domain of a handful of national leaders, was carried to the masses. Culture thus became more and more national and inclusive. Although Kelles-Krauz placed this process within the framework of capitalism, he could never be accused of economism.

Most of his writing on the national question—especially in defence of PPS’s promotion of Polish independence—was a response to what he perceived to be Luxemburg’s deterministic economism. In a broad sense, Kelles-Krauz simply refused to disregard the superstructure or the human agency in the historical process. The geography of language unified peoples while mobility of populations led to a realization of lingual interconnectivity, which in turn created a mass culture. Moreover, production and exchange of goods fashioned a unified market, which required the protection of a national government. These processes of social change were stimulated by capitalism but were not solely byproducts of inevitable economic laws. Human volition played an important role. In the Jewish case, Kelles-Krauz intentionally downplayed the economic factor for more important ideological and cultural components. Ideas of equality and human dignity, and the spread of education pushed Jews to recognize

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1052 When exploring the motives of any PPS’s leaders, it is important to acknowledge the relentless partisan battles that characterized Polish socialism before the Great War. As one of the main theoretical generals of Polish socialism, Kelles-Krauz’s writings were in many instances polemics against his rivals, especially Luxemburg’s entourage whose incessant attacks on self-determination turned her into PPS’s nemesis.


1055 Kelles-Krauz, “W kwestii narodowości żydowskiej,” 20-21. This is not unlike the theory of national formation espoused by Miroslav Hroch (a Marxist theoretician of nationalism).

1056 In a comprehensive biography, Snyder reveals that Kelles-Krauz completely rejected determinism, promoting a “subtle explanation of historical change which allowed generous room for autonomous traditions ad human freedom.” Moreover, he “refused to focus exclusively on the economy” and “preferred to discuss the alienation of modern man within capitalist society.” Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe, 2.

1057 Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe, 204-5.
their distinctiveness and self-worth. It led them to the realization that they spoke a similar jargon and to an idealization of a potential national future. Small and large groups with lingual affinity had at the very least equal right to national recognition. But if recognizing national groups was the answer, why could the Poles not settle for autonomy within Russia, as Luxemburg suggested?

Luxemburg’s central tenet against Polish independence was a belief that Poland’s separation from the Russian Empire would have detrimental consequences for the former. Kelles-Krauz rejected this notion of organic incorporation, claiming that capitalism and proletarian consciousness flourished best within the nation-state. Foremost, Poland’s confinement within foreign empires hindered capitalism:

No scholar of public welfare in the Polish regions would deny that the lack of their own government, to care for Polish industry, secure its national market, represent and defend it against external markets, as well as the existence of tariff barriers between the three sections of Poland and the different legal and monetary systems in each of them—are standing in the way of a complete economic development of Poland.

Only the reconstitution of Poland could ensure the advent of mass scale industrialization throughout the Polish territories. Reunification of the three partitioned regions would not lead to isolation and backwardness but rather to the establishment of strong economic foundations, both on domestic and international scale. To prove this point, Kelles-Krauz pointed to Lombardy and Venetia’s beneficial incorporation into Italy.

To counter another of Luxemburg’s assertions, Kelles-Krauz explained that the Polish bourgeoisie’s acceptance of the status quo did not symbolize its economic ties to the respective partitioning powers. Rather, it exposed its fear of potential political instability and revolutionary turmoil (resulting in another wave of repressions akin to those following 1863), as well as dread of the growing power of the workers, and a prospective (national) government’s conciliation of proletarian aspirations. To do nothing about or even act against the natural tendencies of people to unite under the national banner fulfilled the economic needs of the bourgeoisie rather than the working masses. Kelles-Krauz maintained that the evolution of the proletarian class-consciousness and political action should never be dictated by the needs of capitalist markets. Moreover, large, centralized, multiethnic states, which Marx and Luxemburg envisioned as the best midwives of capitalism, were anachronistic entities that delayed industrialization and hindered the strength of the proletarian consciousness. Romanov or Habsburg absolutism did not create good conditions for either industrialization or the emergence of a working class. Only the nation-state offered an environment in which the working classes could impose socio-economic change. Luxemburg reasoned

1059 „Żaden badacz gospodarstwa publicznego w krajach polskich nie parzeczy, że brak własnego rządu, bezpośrednio dbającego o przemysł polski, zapewniającego mu rynek narodowy i reprezentującego oraz broniącego go w stosunkach z rynkami zewnętrznyymi, a także istnienie granic cełnych między trzema dzielnicami Polski i różnych prodawstw i systemów monetarnych w każdej z nich—stają na przeszkodzie pełnemu rozwijowemu ekonomicznemu Polski.” Kelles-Krauz, “Niepodległość polski a materialistyczne pojmowanie dziejów,” 407.
Elsewhere, Kelles-Krauz argued that Poland class structure was so different from its Russian counterpart that no degree of economic cooperation could erase these differences. Waldenberg, Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej, 252-3.
1062 Kelles-Krauz, “Niepodległość polski a materialistyczne pojmowanie dziejów,” 408-412, 416-7. He believed that rulers of large multiethnic empires preferred to rely on bureaucracy and the army rather than capitalism to control their citizens. Indeed, they would hinder capitalism which usually disrupted their traditional channels of power. Most of all, they feared capitalism’s adjoining byproduct—democracy—which would eventually lead people to a struggle for both national and political liberation.
that if a nation was strong enough to initiate a revolution for national liberation, then it should also be capable of launching a socialist revolution.1063 But Kelles-Krauz dismissed such conclusions as simplistic and obsolete dogmatic Marxism, which did not account for variations on the road to socialism.

Kelles-Krauz refused to measure East Central Europe by the Western European yardstick. He was critical of his Western counterparts’ ignorance of the conditions east of the Elbe, which he believed required a distinctive response. “For while Luxemburg held that meaningful political and social change would take the form of a sudden international revolution carried out by parties organized against existing (imperial or nation-) states,” as Snyder explains, “Kelles-Krauz believed that meaningful political change would take place in stages, that the character of these stages depended upon local conditions, and that most of these stages required the nation-state.”1064 In Western Europe, through the French Revolution and national unifications of the 19th century, the bourgeoisie had eliminated the feudal heritage and established the two foundations of modernity: the nation-state and democratic politics. The latter was of critical importance:

Democracy and a national state are for the proletariat as much a necessary thing as for the bourgeoisie, with a difference though, that the proletariat needs a complete democracy, consequently extended to its furthest extent, whereas the bourgeoisie in certain circumstances can stop at only a limited degree of democratization… The proletariat needs freedom and national unity for its own sake, as it is the only thing that enables freedom of thought between all sections and layers of the nation, necessary for the growth rather than hindrance of educational and cultural development, which are essential conditions for economic and political victory of the working class.1065

Once independence and statehood were achieved, and the advent of democracy allowed socialist participation in national politics, as Kelles-Kauz lamented, the Western comrades quickly forgot the attending hardships of living in national and political oppression. They took the nation-state and political stability for granted. Worst of all, they expected that the road to socialism would take the same forms elsewhere.

In the Polish case (and this was true of Hungarians and others as well), the bourgeoisie and the nobility had abandoned both nationhood and democratic practices. Hence, it was the proletariat’s responsibility to pursue national statehood and democracy simultaneously. This process of socialist maturity, which Kelles-Krauz called the

1063 Luxemburg criticized the PPS as nothing more than a chauvinistic party of patriots devoid of working-class roots. Yet, while defending the national orientation of the party, Kelles-Krauz continuously strove to ground the goal of independence in the class interests of the proletariat. Ironically, while fighting right-wing tendencies within the party, he simultaneously defended them from outside criticism. For example, he was disliked for advocating that non-socialist patriots be expelled from the party. Snyder, *Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe*, 66, 74-5.

1064 Snyder, *Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe*, 70. “For Polish socialists like Kelles-Krauz,” as the author elaborates elsewhere, “living under Russian tsarism, bourgeois democracy looked like a stage on the way to Socialism. French socialists living within a bourgeois democracy, were inclined to see their present political system as the antithesis of the future socialist order, and to regards all ‘bourgeois’ political issues with indifference. *Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe*, 96.

1065 “Demokracja i państwo narodowe są dla proletariatu tak samo niezbędnymi rzeczami, jak były dla burżuazji, z tą tylko różnicą, że proletariat potrzebuje demokracji całkowitej, doprowadzonej do ostatnich konsekwencji jak naczystszej, gdy burżuazja może w pewnych warunkach poprzedzić na niewielkim stopniu demokratyzację… Proletariat potrzeb-stuje wolności i jedności narodu dla siebie samego już dlatego, że ona jedynie umożliwia swobodny obieg myśli między wszystkimi częściami i warstwami narodu, należyty nie tamowany rozwój oświaty i kultury, które są koniecznymi warunkami zwycięstw ekonomicznych i politycznych klasy robotniczej.” Kelles-Krauz, “Niepodległość polski a materialistyczne pojmowanie dziejów,” 411-412.
theory of “revolutionary retrospective,” involved several stages that could vary depending on circumstances.\textsuperscript{1066} Since “Marxism consists in the constant dialogue between means and ends, with the ethical ideal of socialism serving to light the path from one step to the next,” Kelles-Krauz argued that experience “taught socialists to think in political terms, to close this gap between reform and revolution by thinking of tactics in terms of stages.”\textsuperscript{1067} This pragmatic approach should not be simply interpreted as Bernstenian revisionism. For Kelles-Krauz, socialist work was to be empirical and idealist, reformative and revolutionary—all linked in a complementary manner.

Reform, revolution, national liberation, and democratic practices—these were all interconnected steps of socialist progress. In optimal conditions, the establishment of the nation-states preceded the advent of democracy. The expansion of democratic practices—most visible in the extension of the franchise—stimulated the growth of class-consciousness and eventually would empower the proletariat to take control through reform and revolution.\textsuperscript{1068} This formula did not take the same form everywhere and it was deterministic to assume that it would or should do so. Socialist strategy, whether in the form of the general strike or self-determination, was open to interpretation according to local circumstances and appropriate timing. As Snyder aptly put it, “political programs are not simply what we desire, but also a means of preparing for all eventualities.”\textsuperscript{1069} In a nutshell, socialist strategy had to be flexible to accommodate for both reformatory and revolutionary tactics.

Following the same line of reasoning, Kelles-Krauz argued that while it was acceptable (even justifiable) for early socialists to reject everything bourgeois (including nationalism) in order to highlight their ideals, in early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, such a practice was naïve at best and counterproductive at worst. To outrightly reject everything bourgeois was to miss out on effective tools that Marxists could exploit for the socialist cause.\textsuperscript{1070} And nationalism was certainly an important instrument of empowerment that socialists could not afford to discard. Moreover, how could Western Socialists, who for all intended purposes had already accepted the power of nationalism by organizing along national lines in the Second International, and by adapting nationally oriented practices within the respective parties, deny the same right to their East Central European counterparts?

The struggle for national recognition or statehood of the smaller nations was not a reactionary act detrimental to the socialist cause. Rather, it was a modified version of the Western European process customized to the indigenous environment of East Central Europe. East of the Elbe, the social and national issues were intertwined inseparably, with national and class consciousness emerging side by side: “The Polish proletariat must strive for independence, as it is the only means to realize complete democracy and freely propagate education and thought;

\textsuperscript{1067} Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe, 145.
\textsuperscript{1068} Kelles-Krauz never excluded either the potential for reform or revolution. Dismissing both revisionists and radicals, he believed that both were viable strategies. Reform ensured appropriate conditions for the growth of the working masses. Simultaneously, as peaceful change reached its limits, he knew that only revolutionary transformation could usher in the final victory.
\textsuperscript{1069} Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe, 92.
\textsuperscript{1070} Kelles-Krauz, “Niepodległość polską a materialistyczne pojmowanie dziejów,” 417-9. Kelles-Krauz placed much emphasis on differentiating between two working class conceptions: the early primitive and reactionary class orientation, and the other mature and sociological-scientific. In the first phase, the rejection of everything bourgeois was a positive tactic. In the second phase, when working class consciousness advances and matures, it must abandon it previous stance in order to take advantage of all the various tools offered within capitalism. Moreover, he believed that holding on to the initial ideological conceptions, as practices by dogmatists like Luxemburg, was highly detrimental to the evolution of the socialist cause.
and since democracy for him [i.e., worker] is a medium for solving social questions, then it obviously leads him to Polish socialism rooted in the new socio-economic foundations. Even if socialism was not immediately implemented with the establishment of the nation-state, at the very least, it would contribute to further capitalist development and the strengthening of the working class. When Luxemburg claimed that calls for independence caused ruptures between workers from different nations, Kelles-Krauz declared that if they cannot accept the national desires of their neighbours, they are themselves too chauvinistic. A keen observer of modern nationalism, he realized its appeal and socialism’s vulnerability when working outside of its framework. Was statehood then a mandatory rung on Kelles-Krauz’s socialist ladder?

Once again, the Jewish case offers valuable insight. Like every other European nation, the Jews moved through a similar process and reached the same realization: they were a nation that required a state. But Kelles-Krauz believed that neither Zionism nor assimilation could acquiesce to the national aspirations of the Jews. Assimilation simply played into the hands of the national-democratic camp. The creation of a state in Palestine, on the other hand, was an unrealistic utopia, with Zionism as nothing more than a reactionary version of Jewish national democracy. If they were to retain a national identity (and he believed that they would) without ever achieving statehood, what options remained open to the Jews? Although he chastised the Jews for breaking with the Polish nation and cooperating with the partitioning powers, he believed that they could have a viable national life within a future Poland: "Jews, who have been settled in Poland for centuries, accomplishing in this country so much diverse work, suffering so much, having here their graves and cradles for generations, find themselves here at home as much as the Poles, and they have the right to demand from Poles consideration for their needs and interests, as much as the Poles can demand the same from of them." Common interests and complete national equality—in education, courts and bureaucracy—would offer Jews security and eliminate the need for territorial aspirations (autonomy or statehood). To that end, he called for the PPS to publish in Yiddish and to cooperate more closely with their Jewish comrades.

**The Age of Ideological Wars: Polish Socialism Before the Great War.**

Although Kelles-Krauz offered a formidable defence of patriotic socialism, his strong theoretical foundation did not save the PPS from factionalism over the nationality question. From 1892 onwards, debates about independence (and autonomy), alliances (across territorial and ethnic lines as well as between classes), and revolutionary tactics (from terrorism to constitutionalism) never abated amongst Polish socialists. Indeed, after the

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1071 "[Polski] proletariat musi dążyć do niepodległości, ponieważ w niej jedynie urzeczywistnić może całkowicie demokrację i swobodny rozwój myśli i oświaty; a ponieważ demokracja dla niego jest środkiem rozwiązania kwestii społecznej, więc dąży on rzeczywiście do Polski socjalistycznej, opartej na nowych podstawach gospodarczych.” Kelles-Krauz, “Niepodległość polskie a materialistyczne pojmowanie dziejów,” 415.
1074 “Żydzi, osiadłszcy w Polsce od tylu stuleci, wykonawszy w tym kraju tyle pracy rozmaitej, przecierpiawszy tyle cierpień, mając tu swe groby i kolebkę od szeregu pokoleń, są w nim tak dobrze u siebie, jak i Polacy, i że mają prawo żądać od Polaków tych samych względów na swoje potrzeby i interesy, jakich Polacy mają prawo żądać od nich.” Kelles-Krauz, “W kwestii narodowości żydowskiej,” 29.
1075 Kelles-Krauz believed that a Russian constitution could never afford Jews the same rights and privileges as a future Polish state. Moreover, if given equal treatment, Jews would actively participate in the cultural exchange with Poles and would contribute to the overall cultural life of the state. With time, a significant Polish-Jewish contingent would arise in the country to further link the two nations.
turn of the century, they actually intensified as the young generation’s radical idealism (and internationalism) came against the growing nationalism of many circles. The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in early 1904 and the ensuing year of revolutionary turmoil in the Russian Empire seemed to vindicate Luxemburg’s predicted interpretation of events. As mass strikes spread through the empire, the revolutionary potential of the Russian masses seemed unstoppable. Although the National Democrats (under Dmowski’s leadership) emerged as the most victorious of all in the constitutional era, the SDKPiL—the successor of the SDKP that now also encompassed Lithuania—had to a degree eroded Polish socialism’s adherence to independence. Nonetheless, the struggle for statehood (whether in the form of autonomy, federation or independence) did not abate amongst socialists. To the contrary: feeling betrayed by the leftist radicalization, many socialists of the rightist persuasion turned to even more nationally oriented solutions and tactics. More than any other issue, nationalism remained the most contested dilemma of Polish socialism. In the years before the outbreak of the Great War, it led to a complete fragmentation of socialism.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 became a critical ideological battleground within the PPS. Denying cooperation with Russian socialists and workers had produced the initial schism within the party. At the Paris Conference in the Fall of 1904, several Polish revolutionary organizations agreed to a common program.\textsuperscript{1076} Amongst several issues, they promoted national rights of all the peoples of the empire and called for the right to self-determination.\textsuperscript{1077} Seeing the revolution as a prospect for independence, the party leaders opted for armed resistance and cooperation with the bourgeoisie. The ensuing Martial Law (imposed in Russian Poland) quickly revealed the futility of armed resistance. With the failure of militarism, and infatuated with the Russian revolutionary fervor and by the promises engendered in the Constitutional Manifesto, the left leaning “Young” wing of the PPS converted to Luxemburg’s position.\textsuperscript{1078} It seemed that the proletariat’s battle with absolutism was bearing fruits (i.e., leading to democracy), and so Polish statehood was not necessary. Moreover, cooperation of Polish socialists with the SDPRR and SR was certainly viable. No longer a distinct myth, Polish autonomy within the confines of the constitutional Russian framework seemed within reach. Conversely, independence and nationally oriented policies appeared obsolete. After achieving a majority at the party congress in 1906, the Young wing expelled the “military” faction (under Piłsudski’s leadership).

Following the split, the \textit{PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna} (PPS-Revolutionary Fraction) moved away from radical tendencies within Polish socialism. Nonetheless, most of its leaders refused to abandon the leftist solutions to the Polish question. Debates between Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, Feliks Perl and Władysław Gumplowicz over the new party program revealed the diverging opinions within the nationally oriented camp. While the latter wanted to abandon the class orientation of the movement,\textsuperscript{1079} the former two wanted to retain it.\textsuperscript{1080} The \textit{Program Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej [frakcji rewolucyjnej]} (Program of the Polish Socialist Party [Revolutionary Fraction]) called

\textsuperscript{1076} The conference gathered several different Polish socialist groups and organizations in hope of developing a common program for action. The PPS controlled much of the debate and direction of the final program. The SDKP refused to participate in the talks.
\textsuperscript{1078} Żychowski, \textit{Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku}, 248-9, 305-24.
\textsuperscript{1079} Gumplowicz argued in support of an ethnographic orientation. He wanted his colleagues to abandon all historical conceptions of Poland (those including the Lithuanians and Rusins). Żychowski, \textit{Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku}, 342.
\textsuperscript{1080} Żychowski, \textit{Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku}, 248-9, 330-7.
for all work to be achieved on firm Marxist foundations.\textsuperscript{1081} The first half of the program outlined the central political and national objectives including elimination of national oppression through the establishment of an independent democratic Polish republic. Only in a liberated and independent state, could the working class achieve its full strength and democratize all national instruments of power. The new program compromised by rejecting the sum game of independence. Statehood became a maximum goal. Even if self-determination was not achievable in the immediate future, any inroads towards statehood would be acceptable. And so democratization and decentralization of the Russian Empire (even its transformation into a federation) were now viable goals. In addition, recognizing the fruitless results of an all-Polish socialist agenda and the growing influence of the Polish socialist parties in Austria and Germany, the program focused exclusively on the Russian partition.

The remaining years of the PPS-FR before the outbreak of the Great War were spent on two central tasks: defending the national orientation against attacks from the left (both the PPS-Left and the SDKPiL), and preparing the proletariat (and the broader masses) for armed struggle. In his \textit{Zadanie ruchu rewolucyjnego w zaborze rosyjskim w chwili obecnej} (“The current objectives of the revolutionary movement in the Russian partition”), Jodko-Narkiewicz criticized his leftist counterparts’ belief in the democratization of the Russian Empire following 1905. He argued that an illusory constitution could never satisfy the needs of the Polish proletariat. Autonomy would only bring benefits to the Endeks (National Democrats). A workable constitution would have to ensure self-administration of political institutions as the proletariat required political freedoms and security to affect government and legal institutions.\textsuperscript{1082}

In a much more concentrated attack, and in the ideological spirit of Kelles-Krauz, Perl\textsuperscript{1083} wrote a lengthy critique of Social Democratic theories and strategies.\textsuperscript{1084} Piece by piece, he deconstructed the various elements of the Luxemburgian paradigm. If socialism was to eliminate all forms of oppression including the national brand, why should the proletariat not agitate against all of these forms of oppression including national?\textsuperscript{1085} To him, it was obvious that at the very least, national oppression hindered socio-economic development of Poles. Perl envisioned the state as a vehicle for working class interests of every nation. It was not an oddity reserved for the bourgeoisie, but rather a product of the democratization process which workers could (and should) appropriate.\textsuperscript{1086}

Perl spared no punches in attacking what he saw as Luxemburg’s uncompromising economic and historical determinism. Accusing her of distorting Marxism, he refused to sacrifice subjectivism to the iron laws of historical progress. Marxism was not a cookie cutter of historical patterns, least of all when it came to the nationality question. It offered insight into the historical process, which circumstances could mould into a variety of forms.\textsuperscript{1087} Hence, regardless of size, all nations had a right to a democratic state that would ensure its proletariat’s economic progress.

\textsuperscript{1081} “Program Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej [frakcji rewolucyjnej],” 1907, reprinted in \textit{Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918}, 463-73.
\textsuperscript{1082} Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz (writing under the pseudonym A. Wroński), \textit{Zadanie ruchu rewolucyjnego w zaborze rosyjskim w chwili obecnej} (Kraków: Drukarnia Narodowa Życie, 1907).
\textsuperscript{1083} For an analysis of Perl’s thought following the PPS split, see Michał Śliwa, \textit{Feliks Perl} (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1988), 164ff.
\textsuperscript{1084} Perl’s work was a direct response to the SDKPiL’s publication of \textit{Kwestya polska a ruch socjalistyczny}, a compilation of Social Democratic writings on the national question in Poland.
\textsuperscript{1085} Perl also pointed out that there was a disconnect between Luxemburg’s call for colonial peoples to rise and her denial of the same right by the European nations.
\textsuperscript{1086} Feliks Perl, \textit{Kwestya polska w oświetleniu “Socjaldemokracji” polskiej} (Kraków: Drukarnia Narodowa Życie, 1907), 20-31
\textsuperscript{1087} Perl, \textit{Kwestya polska w oświetleniu “Socjaldemokracji” polskiej}, 26-38.
Germany and Italy were unified in the name of economic progress and the same principle applied to every other peoples. The general notion of political centralization (and the emergence of increasingly larger states) was unrealistic given the diverse forms of nation-states. The unity of provinces into what became France had equal viability to Finland’s separation from Russia—both produced environments conducive for the working masses. Similarly, democratization—what Luxemburg envisioned to be a central task of the proletariat—could assume many forms as well. In the Polish context, it simply entailed a fight for political separation. Echoing Kelles-Krauz, he argued that self-determination, autonomy, democratization, abolition of absolutism and constitutionalism were equally viable objectives and strategies—simply different steps in the process. The proletariat, reflecting the most genuine form of nationalism, should not shy away from these strategies but rather embrace them for the socialist cause.

In 1908, when tensions were rising across Europe and the specter of conflict was looming, PPS-FR decided to establish Związek Walki Czynnej (Union of Active Fighting), a paramilitary wing of the party that would prepare the rank and file for armed insurrection. Its establishment was received with much distrust from the party leadership in fear that the movement would lose its class orientation. Perl worried that turning to a military solution would degrade agitational-organizational work, would isolate the party from workers, and would open the movement to non-socialist elements. Consequently, he organized PPS-Opozycja (PPS-Opposition) as a separate entity that would preserve the symbiosis of the national and class principles. As he wrote in 1909, only in combination can socialism and nationalism create the most genuine form of patriotism and an effective platform for social transformation.

Although Perl attempted to establish a middle ground between socialism and nationalism, he was certainly not the first to attempt such a daunting task. Already in 1900, Ludwik Kulczycki created a small splinter group from the PPS called III Proletariat (the Third Proletariat). For him, the nationally minded leaders of the PPS in the late 1890s had gone too far to the right, while the internationalists had unjustifiably rejected nationalism. Kulczycki’s Program Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej “Proletariat” (program of the Polish Socialist Party Proletariat) from 1902, outlined the third way between the PPS and the SDKPiL. Aspiring to insert genuine Marxism back into Polish socialism, he criticized the PPS for rejecting cooperation with Russians (as well as Bundists and Lithuanians), for overemphasizing armed insurrection, and for ignoring economic work. He believed that nationally minded socialists should accept piecemeal gains—such as a Russia-wide constitution—on the road to complete liberation. Obsessed with statehood, some had diverged too far from the class-proletariat principles. Simultaneously, he chided Luxemburg for rejecting the struggle for independence and trying to impose Western European models on East

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1088 Perl, Kwestya polska w oświetleniu “Socjaldemokracji” polskiej, 40-44.
1089 In his work, Perl echoed and even referred directly to many of Kelles-Krauz’s ideas (as well as those of Limanowski). Hence, he assumed that the reconstitution of Poland and the abolition of absolutism were not exclusive—as Luxemburg attempted to conclude on behalf of the PPS-FR—but rather complementary.
1090 Śliwa, Feliks Perl, 176-8.
1091 Śliwa, Feliks Perl, 195-6. This entailed a broader debate on the appropriate socialist response to militarism, war and armed fighting as a revolutionary tactic.
1092 Feliks Perl, “Patriotyzm a socjalizm,” 1909, reprinted in Myśl socjalistyczna i marksistowska w Polsce w latach 1878-1939, volume II, 257-69. Eventually, once the war broke out, the two factions reunited in a common platform.
1094 Żychowski, Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku, 252-3.
Central Europe. National oppression was a reality in Poland which socialists could not afford to neglect. Moreover, a liberated Poland would offer the best political springboard for the socialist struggle. By 1906, Kulczycki accepted the impossibility of independence and came closer to the position promoted by the PPS-Left.1095 Poland’s existence was only viable within federative confines of one of the partitioning powers. Self-determination would only become a reality in a distant future.

Rosa Luxemburg’s partisan nemesis was certainly not the only casualty of Polish socialism’s trouble with the nationality question. Luxemburg certainly felt vindicated by the splits within the PPS, but was not untouched by schisms within her own ranks. Just before the turn of the 20th century, the Polish internationalists finally overcame the losses of the 1890s to reconstitute Social Democracy.1096 In 1900, Stanisław Trusiewicz and Feliks Dzierżyński established the Scojaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania).1097 From the very beginning of the party’s reconstitution, the approach to the Polish question was a highly divisive issue. With Luxemburg outside of Russian Poland and busy with the SPD, the party drew its ideological mentorship from Cezaryna Wanda Wojnarowska, who did not object in principle to self-determination. Throughout 1900, debates ensued on the position towards nationalism. Even some of the radical socialists saw the importance of nationalism amongst the working masses. Representing the outlook of a noteworthy group of exiles, Wojnarowska envisioned the restoration of Poland as a long-range objective of the proletariat that could be achieved after the abolition of absolutism.1098 If nothing else, tactical flexibility dictated some recognition of nationalism’s power. Consequently, Trusiewicz developed a federated model for the party. Even Dzierżyński, who eventually accepted Luxemburg’s internationalism, initially argued in support of regional and national self-government.1099 To achieve a degree of compromise and to avoid alienating radical elements, the leaders did not outrightly support independence but merely stated that they were not rejecting it. A statement published in 1900—the closest declaration that resembled a party program—simply mentioned the struggle for self-government. Emphasis was placed on the acquisition of a constitution in Russia as the first and most important step.1100

By the Second and Third Congresses of the SDKPiL (in 1900 and 1901), the trenches between the pro- and anti-nationalists were dug deep. As Luxemburg’s influence within the party grew so did the number of adherents who felt repulsed at even the slightest compromises to nationalism.1101 Leading the anti-nationalist charge, Dzierżyński, Warski and Leo Jogiches (Tyszka) managed to slowly isolate Wojnarowska and her supporters. Finally, the Third Congress in the fall of 1901 completely abandoned the earlier provisions about independence. A

1096 The SDKP was hit by mass arrests in 1894 and 1895. With the leadership in disarray and the rank and file disorganized, in January 1896 the SDKP ordered the remnants of the party to join the PPS.
1097 In 1899, the two men, especially the latter, gathered social democratic circles in Warsaw into a Workers’ Union of Social Democracy. In 1900, with the help from other socialists he was able to convince the reluctant Lithuanians to a common program.
1099 Blobaum, Feliks Dzierżyński and the SDKPiL, 67-71. In his early socialist days, Dzierżyński was influenced by Lithuanian socialists and Bundists who did not adhere to internationalism a la Luxemburg. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that he quickly converted to Luxemburg’s rejection of everything national at the turn of the century. Thereafter, he remained a loyal lieutenant.
1101 For a detailed account of the infighting, see the first three chapters of Norbert Michta, Rozbieżności i rozłam w SDKPiL (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1987).
special resolution was issued: “Recognizing the principle of national independence, but assuming that the achievement of such independence depends on the economic relations in any given country and on a specific historical period, the Congress, in accordance with the party’s viewpoint, recognizes that the achievement of Polish and Lithuanian independence is impossible in the near future.”1102 The resolution even opposed independence as a prospective long-term goal. The attack on nationalism and especially the PPS was relentless. Several articles of Czerwony Sztandar (Red Flag), the leading party periodical, proclaimed that concessions to nationalism, especially an armed insurrection, could never bring about freedom and would only lead to the strengthening of absolutism in Russia.1103

The final stage of the ideological struggle over the orientation towards independence took place in the period before the outbreak of the 1905 Russian Revolution. In 1903, unification talks began between the SDKPiL and the Rossiiskaia Sotsial-Demokraticheskaia Rabochaia Partiiia (Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party, RSDRP). The negotiations revealed Luxemburg’s inconsistent and inconsequential approach to the nationality question and her borderline obsession with the negation of the PPS. Two central issues emerged in the ensuing discussions between the Poles and the Russians. The first surrounded the organizational question of the position of the SDKPiL within the All-Russian party. Although fully supportive of coordinated socialist work within the Russian Empire, Luxemburg vehemently guarded her party’s independence. Paradoxically, she chastised the Bund for retaining autonomy while defending such a right for the Polish section.1104 She argued that the more developed socialist parties should subdue the immature Jewish and Lithuanian socialists. Moreover, while she rejected nationalism at the all-Russian party level, she realized the importance of the local orientation of the party activity. There was probably some fear that amalgamating into the all-Russian party would remove the SDKPiL as a legitimate representative of Polish workers’ interests especially vis-à-vis the PPS. It was the second issue, though, that created all the controversy and became the central culprit in the failure of unity between the Poles and the Russians.

The seventh point of the RSDRP’s program called for the self-determination of all nations of the Russian Empire. This tactical position—formulated by Lenin and supported by the Russians—was unacceptable to Luxemburg who had been fighting patriotic tendencies in Polish socialism for more than a decade. At the Fourth Congress, the SDKPiL agreed on seven conditions, which the Russians would have to accept before formal unity was achieved. Nonetheless, only the first three—those pertaining to the organizational autonomy of the Polish section—were determined to be requisite for the merger.1105 Meanwhile, concerned with the vagueness of the

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1102 “Uznając najzupelniej zasadę niepodległości narodowej, lecz wychodząc z założenia, że uzyskanie tej niepodległości zależy od stosunków ekonomicznych w danym kraju i w danym kresie historycznym, Zjazd zgodnie z dotychczasowem zapatrywaniem partii uważa uzyskanie niepodległości Polski i Litwy w bliskiej przyszłości za niemożliwe.” “Uchwały III Zjazdu Socjaldemokratycznej Partii Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy odbytego w dniu 28 i 29-go listopada 1901 r.,” reprinted in Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy: Materiały i Dokumenty 1893-1904, ed. B. Szmidt (Moscow: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Robotników Zagranicznych w ZSRR, 1934), 275.


1104 Michta, Rozbieżności i rozłam w SDKPiL, 86ff; Blobaum, Feliks Dzierżyński and the SDKPiL, 90-2. Luxemburg feared Lenin’s notion of conspiratorial centralism and subordination to a Russian central committee.

1105 Protokoły IV Zjazdu SDKPiL: Sprawozdanie ze Zjazdu IV SDKPiL,” reprinted in Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy, 360-76.
RSDRP’s endorsement of self-determination, Lenin penned an article to clarify the Russians’ position. Perceiving this as a backhand slap, Luxemburg went behind the party’s back to impede unity.

Hijacking the talks, Luxemburg directly instructed the SDKPiL’s representatives, Warski and Hanecki, to thwart the merger. Even more revealing was her duplicity of urging them to pretend that the apparent dispute centered on organizational issues rather than self-determination: “Do not conciliate in any way on [point 7]. Avoid an overt defeat. In such an instance, break the talks, but on the basis of organizational issues.” In a subsequent letter, she explained her position: “You ought to tell the Russians that following [Lenin’s] Iskra article, the moral value of our joining the Russians (a means against the PPS) is for us minimal, and only the moral aspect was relevant [emphasis in the original].” In subsequent negotiations, Warski was directed to substitute self-determination for “institutions, guaranteeing complete autonomy of cultural development to all nations comprising the state [Russia].” Cultural autonomy was preferable to independence. There is no doubt that a merger with a party that believed in self-determination would give clout to the PPS’s campaign. Lenin understood these concerns and actually suggested that a resolution could be inserted against the PPS. However, Luxemburg believed that even such a firm statement would not be enough to alleviate potential fallout from aligning with a party that supports Poland’s self-determination. This became a defining moment, as Luxemburg would thereafter define all her work according to the negation of social patriotism as personified in the PPS. The slightest conciliation to nationalism was unacceptable even at the cost of the most important element of Luxemburg’s Weltanschauung—an all-Russian party. No ideological principles could be spared in the moral battle against the PPS.

In the aftermath of the failed attempt at unity, Luxemburg came under attack from Wojnarowska for the last time. The latter, as Blobaum explains, “characterized the declaration of the Polish delegates [Warski and Hanecki] as a new subordination of the positive tasks of the party to the negatively and narrowly focused campaign against the PPS.” Wojnarowska demanded an explanation not only of the Polish delegates’ failure to follow the prerogatives as determined at the party congress, but even more fundamentally, of why socialists had to abandon self-determination. She rejected Luxemburg’s theory of organic incorporation as inaccurate and her tactics of

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1108 “Deklaracja delegacji SDKPiL złożona do prezydium II Zjazdu SDPRR 6 sierpnia r. 1903,” reprinted in Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy, 401.

1109 Ironically, Luxemburg had criticized cultural autonomy as another illusory strategy that should be avoided. She would later attack Bauer and Renner on their conceptions of cultural autonomy in the Austrian Empire.

1110 Lenin understood these concerns and actually suggested that a clause could be inserted negating any work associated with the PPS. However, Luxemburg believed that even such statement would not be enough to alleviate potential damage from agreeing with a party that supports Poland’s self-determination.

1111 Najdus, SDKPiL a SDPRR 1893-1907, 157. Nettl contends that Lenin “went out of his way to explain that this [his article on self-determination] was in no sense to be interpreted as support for nationalism in general or the PPS in particular.” Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. I, 277.

1112 Blobaum, Feliks Dzierżyński and the SDKPiL, 101.
negating everything associated with the PPS (including nationalism). Concentrating all activity on a war against the
PPS simply took away from more productive endeavors amongst the working masses.\footnote{1113} Besides, nationalism was a
valuable tool that socialists should use to rally the Polish workers. Marchlewski sided with Wojnarowska’s support
of independence, but the latter was eventually pressured to resign from the party. Her departure finalized the turn to
internationalism. An even more important shift was that the “overriding political purpose of the SDKPiL” centered
on the isolation of the PPS—to “weave contradictions around it and make it look ridiculous.”\footnote{1114} Warfare against
social patriotism took priority, regardless of ideological or pragmatic costs.

Overtaken by the enthusiasm of the Russian Revolution, many European Marxists turned leftward in the
aftermath of the 1905 events. Poland was no exception. Luxemburg believed in the permanence of this leftward
shift, hoping that the nationality question would disappear permanently.\footnote{1115} A widespread revolution was close at
hand. Moreover, with the Tsarist promises of a Duma and a bill of rights, Russia was on the doorstep of
democratization, and historical progress would push her forward. Luxemburg felt even more vindicated when the
revolution triggered a split in the PPS. Although the program of the PPS-Left did not outright reject independence, it
wholeheartedly aligned with the notion of Poland’s autonomy within the Russian Empire.\footnote{1116} The proletariat’s main
objective was to fight for the democratization of Russia and a constitution.

The Eighth Congress of the PPS in February 1906 marked a shift away from independence. The final
resolutions rejected the reconstitution of an independent Poland, calling for the establishment of a political system in
Russia based on republican-federalist principles.\footnote{1117} Throughout the following year, the radical splinters tried to
justify their actions. Yet, it was not until Marian Bielecki’s lengthy article in the \textit{Myśl Socjalistyczna} (Socialist
Thought) that the PPS-Left outlined the reasons for abandoning the struggle for national liberation.\footnote{1118} Critical of
both Kelles-Krauz\footnote{1119} and Lenin, Bielecki argued that independence was an obsolete strategy and goal for the Polish
proletariat. In the 1880s and 1890s, when the West appeared on the brink of a revolutionary outbreak, and Russia
was economically backward, the struggle for liberation was the most effective program for political change. Yet, the
events of 1905 had proven that Russia was democratizing and was quickly becoming the best vessel for that socio-
political transformation.

In these new circumstances, the reconstitution of an independent Poland as a political ideal had simply lost
currency. Moreover, separatist movements across Russia and the potential for a cross-class alliance also lost appeal.
Abolition of absolutism and decentralization outlined the most effective path for the achievement of national
interests of the Polish working class movement. Even if by some miracle an independent Poland could be carved out

\footnote{1113} Michta, \textit{Rozbieżności i rozłam w SDKPiL}, 101-14; Najdus, \textit{SDKPiL a SDPRR 1893-1907}, 160-6.


\footnote{1115} Nonetheless, this did not prevent the SDKPiL from utilizing national appeals amongst certain groups, especially

\footnote{1116} "Program Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej," 1908, reprinted in \textit{Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918}, 477-
88.


\footnote{1118} Marian Bielecki [M. Kowieński], “Hasło niepodległości Polski dawniej a dziś,” \textit{Myśl Socjalistyczna}, May 1907,

\footnote{1119} Bielecki takes much care to dismantle Kelles-Krauz ideas about the role of Western Europe in Poland’s struggle
for political change.
of the Russian partition, it would not survive against three powerful and aggressive neighbours. But why could independence not be retained as a long-term goal or an agitational tactic? Bieliecki explained:

Above all, our program must include the political and social resolutions for which we will fight on this land (i.e., within the borders of the Russian state). Participation in the rebuilding of Russia on new foundations will be the new political discourse of the Polish proletariat in the Russian partition in the foreseeable historical period, whereas the struggle for independence lies somewhere beyond the horizon. Such a struggle we can neither prepare for nor propagate today. Placing independent democratic Polish republic at the head of the program would create an illusion that the current revolutionary struggles of the Polish proletariat have as their objective the acquisition of such a political shape, and that only within such a framework would creative work follow [emphasis in the original].

The road to proletarian success no longer went through nationalist insurrections. The rebuilding of a democratic Poland could only take place in the broader historical progress: in the democratic and republican spirit of a wider transformation of Europe into a federation of liberated peoples (not artificially constructed states).

The struggle for the abolition of Tsardom and the achievement of autonomy (and a degree of self-rule) within a decentralized or even federative Russian framework remained a contentious issue within the PPS-Left. When Bielecki, Maksymilian Horwitz and Paweł Lewinson called for a strict orientation towards autonomy (rather than a federalist solution), and a complete denunciation of independence, dissenting voices emerged in the party. For instance, one such nonconforming voice argued that autonomy could never satisfy the needs and desires of the Polish working classes. Besides, growing democratization would only lead the workers towards nationalism—a reality that socialists could not neglect. These discussions raged through the pages of *Myśl Socjalistyczna* throughout 1907 and 1908. It is thus not surprising that the political resolutions issued during the Tenth Congress of the PPS-Left did not directly mention anything about the Polish national question since no consensus could be reached. Although some of the party leaders aimed for autonomy, many elements refused to reject federalism (or even independence) in order to, at least, retain a degree of tactical flexibility. Ironically, the party attacked SDKPiL’s seemingly inconsistent and vague approach to autonomy. In a scalding article, Horwitz demystified the SDKPiL’s self-proclaimed legend of consistently promoting autonomy for Poland. He demanded a clarification of the Social Democrats’ position on the nationality question. The same year, PPS-Left offered their own definition: a

1120 “Nasz program musi przede wszystkim zawierać te postulaty polityczne i społeczne, o które walczyć będziemy na tym gruncie (w granicach państwa rosyjskiego). Bo udział w przebudowie Rosji na nowych podstawach będzie treścią polityki proletariatu polskiego w zaborze rosyjskim w ciągu najbliższego okresu dziejowego, zaś walka o niepodległość leży gdzieś daleko poza tym widokręgiem. Walki tej ani przygotować, ani propagować dziś nie możemy. Postawienie niepodległej republiki demokratycznej polskiej na czele programu stwarzałoby iluzję, że obecne wysiłki rewolucjonie proletariatu polskiego mają na celu zdobycie tej właśnie formy politycznej i że dopiero w jej ramach rozwiniemy prace twórczą [emphasis in the original].” Bielecki, “Hasło niepodległości Polski dawniej a dziś,” 256.


decentralization of Russia with a “broad autonomy, based on a Legislative Assembly (Sejm)” for Poland.1125 The author claimed that neither silence (or negation) offered by the SDKPiL nor the overtly nationalistic position of the PPS-FR satisfied the needs of the Polish workers.

Although differences between the PPS-Left and the SDKPiL persisted, the former began to promote a unification of Polish ultraleftists. Already in early 1907, Julian Bruna called for unity of the two parties (along with the III Proletariat). Recognizing the difficulties associated with the diverging conceptualizations of autonomy, he believed that socialists could move beyond these disputes. Federalism or centralism, federalism as a federation of democratic states or as a democratic federated state, an all-Russian constitution or a separate constitution in Warsaw—these were all tactical questions that could be resolved at a unity congress.1126 The Social Democrats were unimpressed especially as the PPS-Left’s program smelled too much of reformist federalism (a la National Democracy). Nonetheless, PPS-Left continued to lobby for unity with the SDKPiL, and by the latter half of 1908 they even included the Bund as a potential partner. Autonomy was presented as denoting self-dependence of the Kingdom of Poland with an autonomous constituent assembly (Sejm).1127

Luxemburg remained unconvinced about PPS-Left’s intentions. Her position was partly justifiable given the PPS-Left’s refusal to completely reject the importance of the nationality question. Yet, it was her obsessive distrust of the PPS that prevented the unity of PPS-Left and the SDKPiL before the Great War.1128 The former was always perceived as a potential Trojan horse of social patriotism. “Far from being potential allies,” Nettl clarifies, “[PPS-Left] had now become mere opportunists who vacillated between various unsatisfactory policies.” From the very beginning of the split in the PPS, “the only acceptable solution was for the PPS-Left […] to embrace the Social-Democratic programme of [the SDKPiL] without reservation.”1129 But even those who wanted to enter the ranks of Social Democracy did not receive a warm welcome. Luxemburg insisted that “PPS workers should only be permitted to join the SDKPiL by recanting their errors individually and by condemning their former leaders.”1130 Hence, due to stubbornness, obfuscation, and dogmatism, the victory of the leftist orientation following the 1905 Russian Revolution never translated into concrete gains. Social Democratic phobia of everything national doomed the cause of international socialism in Poland—it prevented the establishment of a united front, and demeaned socialism’s influence amongst the workers.

Although unity of leftist Polish socialists was unattainable, the prospect of a merger with the Russians did become possible once again in 1906. At the Unification Congress in Stockholm, the SDKPiL (along with the Bund and the Lithuanian Social Democracy) joined the All-Russian Party. “To avert public wrangling over the contentious ‘national question,’” as Abraham points out, “each of the parties simply pretended that the other had changed its views.”1131 This fragile arrangement was most evident when the SDKPiL refused to adopt the RSDRP’s political

1125 “Kwestia narodowości a nasz program,” Robotnik, 15 May 1908, reprinted in PPS-Lewica 1906-1918: Materiały i Dokumenty. Tom Pierwszy 1906-1910, 458-62. The author claimed that neither silence (or negation) offered by the SDKPiL nor the overtly nationalistic position of the RSDRP satisfied the needs of the Polish workers.
1128 Michta, Rozbieżności i rozłam w SDKPiL, 187.
1130 Abraham, Rosa Luxemburg, 97.
1131 Abraham, Rosa Luxemburg, 80.
program. To further mark the organizational and ideological differences between the two parties, Luxemburg insisted on a separate program. The lengthy treatise, entitled *Czego chcemy?* (What do we want?), was a multifaceted and meticulous attack on Polish nationalism.\(^\text{1132}\) After this comprehensive statement, nobody would dare suspect the SDKPiL of any nationalist leanings.

Although SDKPiL had certainly rid itself of all elements that supported Poland’s independence, there still was a lack on consistency of the party’s definition of autonomy. At the Fifth Congress in 1906, the delegates could not agree on a coherent explication. For instance, they disagreed on whether Poland should have a separate constitution from that of Russia. After a split vote, the resolution was shelved on Luxemburg’s promise to provide a definitive clarification in the near future.\(^\text{1133}\) But even Luxemburg’s *The National Question and Autonomy* (published in 1908) did not resolve the debates. Recognizing the power of nationalism, she refused to give ground to socialism’s most threatening nemesis. In her sum-all-game, there was no room for compromise; only one side could emerge victorious. Alignment with the Russian socialists and avoidance of nationalism’s appeal eventually demanded a high price. By the outbreak of the Great War, the SDKPiL had lost much influence on both the domestic and Russian fronts. Workers simply were not interested in a movement that negated their primary concerns.

The Polish socialist landscape before World War I was rampant with a variety of views that ranged between the overt anti-nationalism of the SDKPiL and the armed struggle for independence encouraged by the PPS-FR. Although this study does not specifically touch upon the evolution of socialism in either Austrian or German Poland, a few words are in order. The *Polska Partia Socjaldemokratyczna Galicji i Śląska Cieszyńskiego* (Polish Social-Democratic Party of Galicia and Silesia, henceforth PPSD)\(^\text{1134}\) was a component of the Austrian-wide Social Democracy. Its leader, Ignacy Daszyński, closely cooperated with the Austrians. Yet, the nationality question produced several paradoxes within the party’s principles. Although he remained fairly loyal to his Austrian colleagues, he believed that Galicia could become Poland’s Piedmont. At the very minimum, Daszyński called for autonomy, and at the maximum, for independence. Consequently, from its inception, the party continuously struggled for far-reaching autonomy for Poles within the Hapsburg framework. He did not overtly call for separation from Austria but fully supported the right of self-determination for all nationalities of the empire. He demanded the freedom of action from Austrians in order to promote inter-partition cooperation, but refused the same rights to other nationalities (such as the Jews).\(^\text{1135}\)

*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna zaboru pruskiego* (Polish Socialist Party of the Prussian Partition, henceforth PPSzp), similarly to its Austrian counterpart, became a section of the SPD in 1893. It quickly encountered problems at both levels: ideological (e.g., how to approach the question of Polish nationalism) and tactical (e.g., how to

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\(^{1132}\) Rosa Luxemburg, “*Czego chcemy? Komentarz do programu SDKPiL,“* 1906, reprinted in *Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918*, 314-76.


\(^{1134}\) Was initially established in 1890 as the *Robotnicza Partia Socjalno-Demokratyczna* (Workers’ Social-Democratic party).

According to the accepted arrangement, all areas with a Polish majority were to be under the PPSzp’s jurisdiction. However, the SPD’s refusal to relinquish control over Silesia and persistently vague position on Polish nationality question created an insurmountable chasm. By the late 1890s, Polish socialists in Germany began to call not only for separation from the SPD but for Poland’s independence as well. They argued that the SPD was not doing enough to protect the interests of the Polish workers. The party leaders attempted to reconcile the objectives of the Erfurt and the Paris Programs, but relations with the SPD were finally broken off in 1913 when overt nationalism of both became transparent.\footnote{The SPD had already become an independent party in 1903. Wojtaszak, Idee narodowe w myśl olitecznej socjalistów w okresie walki o niepodległość polski, 75-81; Walentyna Najdus, Partia Socjalno-Demokratyczna Galicji i Śląska 1890-1919 (Warszawa: PWN, 1983); Krzysztof Rzepka, Socjaliści polscy w Niemczech do 1914 r. (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1988); Żychowski, Polska myśl socjalistyczna XIX i XX wieku, chapter 9.}
CHAPTER 11: UNITING THE RADICAL LEFT: 
THE ESTABLISHMENT AND EARLY YEARS OF THE KPRP, 1918-1921.

THE ROAD TO UNITY: THE SDKPiL AND PPS-LEFT BEFORE UNIFICATION.

Only a month after the restoration of Poland, the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski) emerged on the political landscape. The unity of the SDKPiL and the PPS-Left was certainly distinct in the European environment where Communist parties usually emerged from a schism within Social Democracy. 1138 And even when the merger was finally achieved, it was an uneasy amalgamation of diverse elements with distinct points of view. Factionalism remained an enduring characteristic of the movement throughout the 1920s. The unification process was a complex ordeal that took more than a decade to complete. Although both the Social Democrats and the ultraleftist faction of the PPS stood on common ground already after the split within the PPS in 1906, unity between the two parties would not come until more than a decade later.1139 The nationality question remained the most divisive issue between the two parties.

Telling examples of this incongruence were two articles written before 1914 by the two central ambassadors of the respective parties: Adolf Warszawski (Warski) and Maksymilian Horwitz (Henryk Walecki). Speaking on behalf of the SDKPiL, Warski published an article in June of 1911 entitled “Nationalism.” He identified nationalism and anti-Semitism as the two pillars of the counterrevolution that ensued in the aftermath of the 1905 Russian upheaval. Aligned with Luxemburg, he argued that Poland’s independence was not only unrealistic, but it went counter to the goals of Polish capitalists whose fortunes had become closely tied to the Russian Empire. Nationalism had become a demagogical tool directed against the class struggle and international proletarian solidarity. Hindering cooperation between the Russian and Polish workers merely prevented autonomy of the Congress Kingdom and hurt national development. Whence, the battle for class-consciousness amongst workers had to, by necessity, become a fight against nationalism.1140

Speaking on behalf of the PPS-Left, Walecki also pointed out the damaging role of nationalism. Yet, his main point of departure was criticism of Social Democracy’s inability to clearly define autonomy or to offer alternatives. The Esdeks had limited the nationality question exclusively to the battle against the independence slogans, which had blinded them to the realities of national oppression. Their attack on Polish nationalism amounted to loud but vague and meaningless catchphrases devoid of any concrete analysis of the subject matter. Even when they attempted to define their position, they offered little beyond ambiguous ideas. Their proposed constitution or


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local diet\textsuperscript{1141} would never ensure autonomy for Poland or any other ethnicity within Russia. Administrative reorganization of the empire would not create autonomy but rather a federation.\textsuperscript{1142}

The PPS-Left’s criticism certainly did not fall on deaf ears. The Esdeks did not like to be criticized. At its Sixth Congress in 1908, the SDKPiL called for unity of workers’ parties but refused to cooperate with the PPS-Left. The latter took a much more conciliatory line and at its Tenth and Eleventh Congresses (in 1908), decided that unity was the best course of action.\textsuperscript{1143} Talks began in 1910 but formal collaboration did not begin until two months before the outbreak of the First World War, when the two parties committed to a common paper for theoretical dialogue.\textsuperscript{1144} Only the beginning of the Great War stimulated unity on an anti-war platform.\textsuperscript{1145} But within a few months, the Interparty Workers’ Council (\textit{Międzypoartyjna Rada Robotnicza})—a forum set up to facilitate the partnership—fell apart due to differences of opinion on some key issues, especially the nationality question.\textsuperscript{1146}

Although Rosa Luxemburg toyed with different conceptions of autonomy, and Julian Marchlewski was even ready to accept certain aspects of the national cause, the SDKPiL vehemently refused to give any credence to national aspirations, believing that the national question could only be resolved through the socialist revolution. In their main treatise on the topic, the Social Democrats reasoned that in the era of imperialism, establishment of national states was reactionary and any form of activism (i.e., cooperation with one of the partitioning powers) was meaningless. The unification of Poland under a single Great Power or either camp of belligerents (Central Powers or the Triple Entente) would only make it a tool in the war. Neither Germany and Austria\textsuperscript{1147} nor Russia would be willing to give Poles genuine national freedom. The Esdeks were convinced that once the war was over, Poles would once again be subjugated.\textsuperscript{1148} Capitalistic interests would not allow for the rise of an independent Poland. SDKPiL’s uncompromising position was most visible in the split within its own ranks, which was not healed until the fall of 1916.\textsuperscript{1149}

The PPS-Left, on the other hand, refused to take such an uncompromising position. The party was unopposed to a dialogue with a broad spectrum of organizations and movements. In late 1915, it went as far as to

\textsuperscript{1141} The idea that an autonomous Poland (in the framework of the Russian Empire) could perhaps have its own constitutions or even a local diet.


\textsuperscript{1143} Janina Kasprzak, \textit{Ideologia i polityka PPS-Lewicy w latach 1907-1914} (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1965), 280ff.

\textsuperscript{1144} In June of 1914, SDKPiL issued a letter to the PPS-Left, encouraging unity in the name of workers’ interest. Świetlikowa, \textit{Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918-1923}, 12; Feliks Tych, \textit{PPS-Lewica w latach wojny 1914-1918} (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1960); Simoncini, \textit{The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929}, 12-13.

\textsuperscript{1145} The two parties along with Bund called for a mass strike and widespread demonstrations.

\textsuperscript{1146} The Interparty Workers’ Council existed from August 1914 until March of 1915. Its main aims were to support the process of unification of all the various leftist (i.e., revolutionary) parties and movements. This cooperation fell apart due to the PPS-Left’s belief in collaboration with Citizens’ Councils (\textit{Komitety Obywatelskie}). These local units wanted to improve the daily lives of people. The SDKPiL viewed them as nothing more than venues for nationalistic propaganda.

\textsuperscript{1147} The German promise of the restoration of Poland in 1916 was attacked by both parties.


\textsuperscript{1149} The split existed from 1911 until 1916 between the Warsaw Committee, known as the “splitters” (rozlamowcy), and the Central Committee. The splitters objected mainly to the heavy-handed approach of Tyszka towards the party line. Świetlikowa, \textit{Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918-1923}, 12.
accept self-determination as one of its key ideological policies.\textsuperscript{1150} Such a violation of one of their most sacred tenets pushed the Social Democrats to distrust their socialist counterparts for the remainder of the war and beyond. On the eve of the unification, while reflecting on the difficult road to the merger, Warski pointed out the nationality question as the most divisive issue between the two parties: “Thus the fear that the [PPS-]Left had not yet discarded its habits of nationalist thinking, remained the central reason why our party for so many years rejected the thought of unification.”\textsuperscript{1151} Leon Domski, Zofia Unszlicht-Osińska, or Jerzy Krasny relentlessly attacked the perceived opportunism of the PPS-Left.\textsuperscript{1152} Even cooperation within the Zimmerwald Left did not narrow down the ideological gap. Although in 1917 feelings were exchanged between the two parties,\textsuperscript{1153} vicious polemics continued.

The February and October Revolutions offered new hope to Marxists everywhere, but amongst the Polish socialists, they only introduced another layer of complexity. The SDPKiL supported the Bolshevik cause unquestionably (Luxemburg’s disapproval notwithstanding), but the PPS-Left was much more critical. In the simplest of terms, the latter initially did not believe that the revolution in Russia would succeed. Even when it became obvious that the Bolsheviks would be able to maintain power, and the two parties agreed on the importance of the dictatorship of the proletariat,\textsuperscript{1154} the socialists remained worried about the hegemony of the Bolshevik party and the revolutionary stages (especially in the Polish context).\textsuperscript{1155} The Bolshevik party was moving towards ever more centralized power structures that barely tolerated debate. There was some fear that this would strangulate democratic principles within the party.\textsuperscript{1156} Furthermore, PPS-Left still adhered to a two-stage revolution in Poland. Ironically, the most contentious issue though was Lenin’s slogan of self-determination.

Lenin’s encouraging attitude towards Poland’s independence\textsuperscript{1157} produced discomfort amongst the Polish Social Democrats whose opposition to the restoration of statehood was a fundamental dogma. \textit{Self-determination of the proletariat} was the only acceptable form of this policy. Nonetheless, some began to revisit the nationality question. For example, the Moscow and St. Petersburg factions of the SDKPiL called for an independent Poland within the federation of free European peoples.\textsuperscript{1158} But the old guard—the hardened ideologues like Julian Leszczyński (Leński) and Unszlicht (along with Feliks Dzierżyński)—tried to tighten the reins of the party by rejecting Lenin’s self-determination. While connecting the national question to the struggle for peace, Unszlicht argued that only the spread of the Russian Revolution could ensure a genuine independence for Poland. Most agreed that the revolution would be instrumental in resolving the nationality question.\textsuperscript{1159} However, what they could not agree on was the actual manner in which this question would be resolved—as a result of the revolution or in its

\textsuperscript{1150} Kancewicz, “SDKPiL wobec zagadnień wojny, rewolucji i niepodległości polski w latach 1914-1918,” 145-8.
\textsuperscript{1152} Kancewicz, “SDKPiL wobec zagadnień wojny, rewolucji i niepodległości polski w latach 1914-1918,” 146.
\textsuperscript{1153} For example, at the end of 1917, the Moscow section of PPS-Left offered unity to SDKPiL.
\textsuperscript{1154} The PPS-Left issued a special resolution in December 1917 for unconditional support for the October Revolution.
\textsuperscript{1155} Feliks Tych, \textit{PPS-Lewica w latach wojny 1914-1918} (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1960), 116ff.
\textsuperscript{1156} Most notably, these concerns were expressed in Luxemburg’s writings on the October Revolution: “The Russian revolution” (1918).
\textsuperscript{1157} “The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia” was issued on November 2, 1917.
\textsuperscript{1159} They believed that the settlement of all outstanding social and political problems would be achieved through a single, widespread socialist revolution. Tych, “Polski ruch robotniczy wobec Rewolucji Październikowej. SDKPiL i PPS-Lewica,” 111.
aftermath, or perhaps at a much later stage on the road to the socialist utopia. Mieczysław Broński (Warszawski), for instance, approached the debate by analyzing the potential stages of national development in Poland. He maintained that the socio-economic problems of a future Poland would have to account for the minorities who had to be accommodated.1160

The hardliners were able to channel these debates into a final resolution that rejected solving the national question through self-determination.1161 All problems would simply be resolved when the revolution spread from Russia across the entire continent. In this highly dichotomist Weltanschauung, there were no shades of gray—for the progression of democracy, for degrees of justice, or for categorization of oppressed and oppressive states. In this zero-sum game, there was only revolution and counterrevolution and no room for anything in-between. Nationalism was a bourgeois phenomenon and by association was labeled as counterrevolutionary. Even when during the talks leading up to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in the early months of 1918, Karl Radek and Stanisław Bobiński suggested the unification of the three partitioned parts of Poland, the PPS-Left and the SDKPiL were moving away from self-determination.1162 By April of 1918,1163 despite Lenin’s disapproval, both parties rejected the self-determination of nations for the more acceptable self-determination of the working masses.1164 Lenin would never forget the stubbornness of the Polish socialists.

With a few exceptions,1165 the leaders of both parties decided that the reestablishment of Poland would be harmful to both the spread of the socialist revolution and the growth of the Polish proletariat. Their determination was based on three assumptions. Firstly, as explained above, all socialists believed that revolutionary upheaval was about to sweep across Europe. There was simply no need to give attention to individual problems—least of all to nationalism—since an imminent worldwide revolution would resolve them all in a single swoop.1166 Secondly, the Great War had revealed not only the destructive character of imperialism but also capitalism’s demise. Exhausted and without any further potential for stabilization and development, it would not be able to recuperate from the calamity of the global conflict. Capitalism and its most formidable form—the nation-state—were destined for the dustbin of history.1167 Thirdly, nationalism was the propaganda of the bourgeoisie and it harmed the class-consciousness of the proletariat. Polish communists assumed that workers were not interested in national aspirations, which could never improve their daily struggles. Moreover, the nation-state was not the proper form of social

1160 Najdus, “Poglądy grup SDKPiL I KPRP w Rosji w latach 1917-1920 na kwestię narodową,” 120-1. Such a nuanced understanding of nationalism did not prevent Bobiński (and Leński as well) from envisioning a somewhat utopian society in which peoples would exist in a world without any borders.
1161 „Tezy w sprawie polskiej” (Theses on the Polish question) were accepted during a party conference in January 1918.
1163 The SDKPiL had done so already in January 1918.
1165 Marchlewski, for example, recognized the importance of nationalist slogans and of nationalism in general to the working classes. M. Czernych, “Marchlewskiego wizja niepodległości Polski,” Z Pola Walki 1, (1969): 182ff.
1166 Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością, 93-140.
1167 All the political assessments of international capitalism, which were authored by the KPRP/KPP, pointed out the various signs of trouble and weakness. No matter how the economic situation stabilized, it was always perceived to be volatile and on the brink of collapse. Lauer-Brand and Stefan Klonowicz (Leon Kotowicz) were amongst a tiny majority who were brave enough to write in the late 1920s that Piłsudski’s government was stabilizing rather than collapsing. Piasecki, “Zagadnienie stabilizacji kapitalistycznej w Polsce w świetle dyskusji na IZ Zjeździe KPP w 1927 r.,” 249-51; Stefan Pomorski and Janusz Radziejowski, “Przyczynek do kształtowania się programu narodowego w KPP (1928-1930),” Z Pola Walki 52, nr. 4 (1970): 208-9.
organization. As the Bolsheviks had shown—and their models had universal application—workers’ councils were the only way to restructure society. All three had lasting effects on the future KPRP and caused harm to the popularity of Communism in the Second Republic. Most of all though, not recognizing the importance of the national cause to the working masses and treating it as an obsolete remnant of the past would significantly hamper the growth of the party.

**AGREEING TO DISAGREE: THE KPRP EMERGES.**

By March of 1918, both the SDKPiL and the PPS-Left had come to support the October Revolution. Although the latter still felt uncomfortable about the growing hegemony of the Bolshevik Party, both decided to enter the Russian Communist Party to comprise the Polish Section. As they realized that their cooperation on the ground improved, especially in some of their endeavors amongst the workers, the ideological division between them began to blur. Although the disagreements continued, the leaders realized that standing together reaped more benefit. By the fall of 1918, they began to experiment with the Workers’ Councils (*Rady Delegatów Robotniczych, RDR*),\(^{1168}\) launched a campaign against pogroms and anti-Semitism, and called for a socialist revolution in Poland. By November of 1918, both were ready to consolidate their collaboration in a more formal manner. The Social Democrats pushed the thorny issue of Poland’s independence aside and focused on the RDRs. Once again, an Interparty Council was established to work out the details leading up to unification.\(^{1169}\) The Twelfth Congress of the PPS-Left and the National Conference of the SDKPiL completed the process with the establishment of the Communist Workers’ Party of Poland on December 16.\(^{1170}\)

From the inception of the new party, it was clear that the SDKPiL would dominate over its partner.\(^ {1171}\) In its brief unification resolution, the party disingenuously made a point of highlighting anti-nationalist stance as a pillar of the common creed of the two parties.\(^ {1172}\) The Social Democrats simply concluded that the PPS-Left had abandoned its opportunistic characteristics. Antoni Czubiński takes the argument even further, stating that many Social Democrats perceived the unification as nothing more than the PPS-Left’s admission into the ranks of the SDKPiL.\(^ {1173}\) Although the two parties agreed to disagree for the sake of united cooperation, tensions persisted.

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1170 The two parties initially met separately and each made a decision to unify with the other. On December 16, over 200 delegates from both parties met in Warsaw in their First (also known as Organizational) Congress. This was certainly not visible in the Central Committee which was divided equally between the two parties: from the PPS-Left, the six members included Walecki, Waclaw Wróblewski, Henryk Iwiński, Józef Ciszewski, Wera Kostrzewa, and Stefan Królikowski. From the SDKPiL, the six members included Henryk Stein-Domski, Władysław Kowalski, Adolf Zalberg-Piotrowski, Szczepan Rybacki, Franciszek Grzelszczak, and Franciszek Fiedler. Krystyna Trembicka argues that KPRP’s inspirations on specific issues can be ascribed to either Marchlewski or Luxemburg. The former’s influence lay in the areas of agrarian and peasant questions while the latter’s in the character of the revolution as well as the national and Polish questions. *Między utopią a rzeczywistością*, 23ff.
This friction was pointedly revealed in Warski’s article at the dawn of the merger.\textsuperscript{1174} In an assessment of wartime activity, he accused his own party of playing a passive role during the Great War. The Esdeks’ unwillingness to adapt to the changing circumstances of Polish realities prevented the party from garnering control over revolutionized elements, from developing partial demands, and even from creating a minimum program. The PPS-Left, though taking a somewhat overly nationalistic position, managed to at least insert itself into the ensuing events, taking a stand on concrete issues. Two additional important conclusions of Warski foreshadowed the party’s evolution in the early 1920s. Firstly, unlike most of his counterparts, he believed that the upcoming revolution in Poland would be of a bourgeois-democratic nature rather than socialist kind.\textsuperscript{1175} By extension, he was insinuating that during such a transitional phase, the struggle on behalf of workers might take other than revolutionary means. But the KPRP was a revolutionary party that would bring genuine socialism to Poland—not the illusory socialism of the Moraczewski government.\textsuperscript{1176} Secondly, he explained that he did not fear the wartime errors of the PPS-Left, but that he worried much more about the accepted view amongst elites that the SDKPiL had not made any sort of mistakes. If Social Democrats were beyond reproach, the purity of their ideological tenets could never be questioned. He feared that such dogmatism set a dangerous precedent, which indeed would haunt the KPRP throughout its existence.\textsuperscript{1177}

The first party congress revealed much about the new party’s ideology and policies on the nationality question. The party’s “Manifesto: To the Polish Proletariat” subjugated all to the revolutionary struggle. The imminent global upheaval would give power to the Workers’ Councils, would prevent further warfare and bloodshed, and would bring about socialism. “An era has opened,” the manifesto proclaimed, “for direct fighting in the realization of the socialist system.”\textsuperscript{1178} Revolution was the only viable pathway for the proletariat. And since this revolution would be international and widespread, everything national could be dismissed. Focusing on local peculiarities seemed meaningless in the ensuing global turmoil. Polish Communists were working hard to neglect the reality of new states that emerged across East Central Europe in the aftermath of the collapsing Romanov, Habsburg and Hohenzollern Empires.

In its “Political Platform,” the KPRP concluded that the new states, which emerged from the disintegration of the old empires and with direct intervention of the Entente powers, would only stimulate further bourgeois competition.\textsuperscript{1179} Even the victorious side of the Great War would continue to spiral into global conquest and oppression of peoples. In this international atmosphere, the emerging Poland was rejected as a capitalist tool of the Entente, ready to fight a counterrevolutionary war against the proletarian Russia and the revolting Germany. England, France and the United States wanted Poland to forcefully conquer her neighbors in order to build a

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\textsuperscript{1174} Warski, “Niezbyżyjegozjednoczenie.”
\textsuperscript{1175} By 1923, Warski was able to promote this notion even further. Along with the other more conservative leaders of the KPRP, he promoted the policy of democratic policies within Poland. The two-stage revolution became an acceptable pathway for Polish Communists.
\textsuperscript{1176} Jędrzej Moraczewski was nominated by Piłsudski in November 1918 to establish the first government in the reestablished Poland. He held the seat of the Prime Minister until the beginning of 1919.
\textsuperscript{1177} Regula argues that SDKPiL considered itself to be beyond any reproach. Moreover, in the initial years, the Social Democrats considered themselves to be far more superior (or “civilized”) than the “Asiatic” and barbarian Bolsheviks. See Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski, 28-9.
\textsuperscript{1179} "Platformapolityczna,” AAN, KPP, "I Zjazd," 158/I-1 t.1, 30.
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counterrevolutionary bastion against Russia. Most visibly, this policy could be witnessed in the fighting in Eastern Galicia and Ukraine, where workers and peasants were slaughtered to protect the possessions of magnates and to expand Poland’s borders. Beyond serving the Big Three, the Polish government’s second, but equally important objective, was to prevent revolution at home. The peoples’ government, marketing itself as a socialist regime, was a scheme of social-patriots. Using a socialist facade, these bourgeois deceivers were only interested in spreading war to forestall the socialist revolution. This rendition of Poland’s domestic and foreign policies made it nearly impossible to accept anything that remotely touched on national interests.

In this state of uncertainty, when revolutionary utopia seemed to be within grasp, and when nation-states were nothing more than counterrevolutionary bastions, nationalism could be abandoned, even opposed. “In this period of international socialist revolution, which destroys the foundations of capitalism,” one of the party’s main messages announced:

the Polish proletariat rejects all political slogans such as autonomy, sovereignty, self-determination, that are based on political forms developed during capitalism…; for the international camp of the socialist revolution there is no question of borders; based on the principle of common interests of the international working class, it eliminates every kind of national oppression and removes the roots of all conflicts based on national or lingual reasons.

Why pay attention to any specific weed, when the entire garden was about to be replanted. In these initial pronouncements and well into the 1920s, the national interests of the Second Republic were almost never acknowledged. The party elites almost never attempted to understand how nationalism affected workers’ aspirations. It was wrongly assumed that the matured proletarian consciousness of the Polish urban worker had no room for nationalism and that the Polish state had nothing positive to contribute to the daily lives of workers. For example, they believed that a Polish worker would not care about the nationality of his employer. Conversely, the KPRP projected its image as a movement for global revolution rather than a party representing the interests of the Polish workers. These rigid ideological convictions and unpopular image not only limited its appeal to the Polish society but also gained it very few allies even amongst like-minded organizations.

BUILDING THE BESIEGED FORTRESS: KPRP GOES UNDERGROUND.

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1183 Several historians of the post-Communist era have pointed to this issue: Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939; Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929; Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością and Między utopią a negacją; or Regula, Historia Komunistycznej Partii Polski. Nonetheless, some historians, such as Marian Orzechowski, have attempted to justify the political line of the KPRP as a somewhat distinct brand of nationalist rhetoric. Revolucja, socjalizm, tradycje.
1184 This issue was raised in two important historiographical debates on the pages of the flagship Communist journal Z Pola Walki. The first focused on the KPP’s influence in the Second Republic while the second dealt with the importance of the reestablishment of Poland to the working masses. In the former, the KPP’s sporadic influence was recognized as a product of uneven support from the workers due to the party’s inability to appeal to the masses. The latter debate pointed out the KPP’s inability to properly respond to the recreation of the Rzeczpospolita. It was not until the 1930s (sic!) that Polish Communists began to adapt to the new situation. “Rok 1918. Znaczenie powstania niepodległego państwa dla klasy robotniczej w Polsce,” Z Pola Walki 43, nr. 3 (1968): 45-133; “Zasięg wpływów KPP w II Rzeczypospolitej,” Z Pola Walki 4, nr. 84 (1978): 85-126.
1185 Moreover, as Józef Kowalski argues, such a hardline approach alienated many radicalized but nationally minded workers. “Rok 1918. Znaczenie powstania niepodległego państwa dla klasy robotniczej w Polsce,” 72.
The KPRP’s negation of the Polish state was reinforced in early 1919, when the government decreed a state of emergency in Warszawa and Zaglebie. Rather than conforming to the emerging political framework, the Communists still held on to the utopia of upcoming revolution and went underground. The party’s rank and file immediately felt the police repressions. In this atmosphere of anti-Bolshevik rhetoric, Communists were accused of national treason. Membership in the party amounted to participation in a conspiracy against the state; its press was viewed as anti-state agitation to subvert stability and order; and support for Soviet Russia denoted collaboration with the enemy. 1187 Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, leaders and prominent members often found themselves in prison. The delegalization of the party had far-reaching consequences not only for its structure but also for its ideology and policies.

Foremost, the widespread suppression of the party facilitated the rejection of a state that was trying to destroy Communism at home and abroad. “Under the cover of the night’s shadow, the ferocious animals of counterrevolution come for their prey,” as one Communist article lamented. “Polish gendarmes beat as the Tsarist gendarmes,” it continued, “because in the peoples’ Poland only the bourgeoisie can bare arms, while the working masses remain defenseless. Is this independence, this ‘peoples’ Poland’, this republic, which was sold to the workers by the bourgeoisie’s henchmen? Is this freedom, independence?” 1188 The KPRP’s leaders came to believe that independent Poland was reserved for the bourgeoisie—it was a white Poland—from which the workers would be excluded. 1189 Moreover, they came to perceive the attacks as a sign that the authorities feared their growing influence amongst the workers. 1190 The party’s raison d’être consolidated around the self-image of Polish Communists as eternal revolutionaries, duty-bound forever as the illegal opposition within the Second Republic. 1191 Four general repercussions stemmed from this mindset.

Firstly, with each wave of arrests, more and more party elites moved aboard, weakening the organizational structure of the party. Eventually a Foreign Section (Wydział Zagraniczny) was established to coordinate between the leaders at home and those living in Gdańsk (Danzig), Germany or the Soviet Union. In September 1919 there was a Polish Bureau created as part of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia parti [boshevikov], RKP(b)). The main members of the Bureau included Stefan Heltman, Stanisław Bobiński, Julian Leszczyński-Leński, while Marchlewski, Feliks Kon, Józef Unszlicht and Dzierżyński were added in the early 1920s along with Edward Próchniak (as direct representative of the KPRP). 1192 Although Minc’s appraisal of their influence is far too exaggerated, it is worth noting: “Very often the Communists of Polish descent in Moscow

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1186 Although arrests and intimidation tactics were used on the Communists already in late 1918, the official decree was implemented on 5-6 January 1919.


1188 „Pod batem żołdackim,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 28 December 1918, 1.

1189 See, for instance, “Komu służy ten rząd?“, Sztandar Socjalizmu, 29 December 1918, 1.


1191 I would agree with Samuś that this was a critical characteristic of the KPRP and defined the party’s ideology for years to come. See, for example, “Wobec prowokatorskiej roboty,” an announcement issued in early 1919 by the KPRP, in ANN 158/VI-2, t. 4.

1192 Moreover, it should be mentioned that a considerable section of the party existed next to the Bolshevik Party. An Executive Central Committee (Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy) was created with members from both SDKPiL and PPS-Left. It is estimated that by the mid 1920s, upward of 10,000 official members of Polish Communism resided outside of the Second Republic. Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 35-6; Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski, 30-2.
decided the most difficult political questions. A letter from Radek to a member of the Central Committee, a personal conversation with Felix Dzierzhinsky or Unszlicht was of great and often decisive importance for the party’s Central Committee.”

Secondly, Polish communists were pushed towards closer cooperation with their Russian counterparts. For many, the Soviet Union became a refuge and a homeland. Having to choose between a bourgeois republic and the first Communist state forced them to rely more heavily on their eastward neighbours for practical and financial reasons. Minc maintained that even when they were critical of Moscow’s policies, many Communists remained fairly submissive to the Soviet political line due to “the conditions of clandestinity.”

Thirdly, isolated and threatened, the KPRP’s modus operandi entailed distrust and vigilance within and outside of the party. Externally, this made it difficult to cooperate with other leftist movements whose motives and aims were continuously questioned. Given their difficult position and hardships, they were reluctant and often unwilling to compromise even on the most insignificant issues. Conciliation amounted to the desecration of the memory of fallen comrades and those lingering in prison. Internally, the party slowly succumbed to ideological rigidity and extremism. All who failed to follow the strict party line were opened to attacks or were forced to engage in self-criticism. Rather than solidifying the party, this struggle for dogmatic purity eventually stimulated factionalism.

Lastly, given the restrictions placed on their legal existence, their preferred solution lay in the revolutionary struggle. Excluded from the political process, they assumed that they could only improve the workers’ livelihood through a social revolution. Consequently, none of the Second Republic’s coalition governments were tolerated. And all of them were evaluated according to the perceived degree of harm they inflicted on the working masses. Ironically, the more the authorities suppressed the party, the closer the party elites felt they were moving towards a revolution.

The result of the KPRP’s illegal status and its attempt to disavow everything the state offered created a vicious cycle. Given the atmosphere of suppression, the party refused to acknowledge any positive developments stemming from statehood or to accept patriotism as a component of the workers’ reality. Such an attitude facilitated the authorities and other parties’ attacks on the Communists. The views of one contemporary highlighted this prevailing attitude: “‘Polish’ Communism is nothing; it was developed far beyond our borders and there it is animated with artificial life; there it looms along with international communism and with its headquarters in

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1194 Cimek, *Komuniści—Polska—Stalin*, 17. Moreover, many Poles had already become integral players in the emerging Soviet power structure. For further study, see Najdus, *Lewica polska w Kraju Rad, 1918-1920*.
1196 Jerzy Holzer argues that the illegal status and extremism went hand in hand, affecting the popularity of the party amongst the masses. Simultaneously, this form of extremism actually attracted young members who were infatuated with radicalism. “Problemy i dyskusje. Zasięg wpływów KPP w II Rzeczypospolitej,” 94.
1197 Radziejowski points out how this became a source of apprehension amongst the Ukrainian Communists who faced dire consequences if they stepped out of line. As one Communist lamented: “We must remember that all the former [Communist Party of Western Ukraine] members who are now outside the party once belonged to our labour-union movement…and their expulsion, sometimes for petty reasons, does grant harm to our movement…. In Przemyśl alone there were several examples of scandalous expulsion from the party…our comrades think that if anyone criticizes the organizational structure, then he is dangerous and must be expelled.” *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine 1919-1929*, 47-8.
1198 No government of the interwar years was ever praised in the Communist press.
1199 Ławnik, *Represje policyjne wobec ruchu komunistycznego w Polsce 1918-1939*, 129-34.
Moscow for any signs of weakening of our [Polish] national organism.”

The party press continuously reported on accounts of supposed Communist subversion that were promoted by mainstream media. For example, Communists were accused of creating unemployment, setting factories and trains on fire, or plotting assassinations. The reality was that Communists had isolated themselves to such a degree that they could easily be branded as agents of Moscow without being able to offer any reasonable defence in mainstream press.

For the Dictatorship of the Proletariat: Parliamentarism versus Workers’ Councils.

At the beginning of 1919, Communists were optimistic about the upcoming revolutionary struggle. Signs of the impending global upheaval were found everywhere. “The [First World] War produced a need,” as one article from the Sztandar Socjalizmu explained, “for the direct struggle for socialism as the only solution in the epoch of imperialist catastrophes.”

Polish Communists were not the only ones who believed in the impending global transformation. Well into the 1920s, the majority of Bolsheviks and their followers maintained that Communism could only last in Russia if it spread elsewhere. The October Revolution was supposed to be merely a prelude to a global transformation. Only if it engulfed the entire continent, would the Marxist utopia in Russia be safe. Given the postwar demobilization, economic problems and radicalized atmosphere, it seemed that Europe was ripe for revolution. “An era of direct fighting for the realization of the socialist system has been opened, an era of social revolution.” —the “Political platform” of the KPRP declared. The emergence of new nation-states further stimulated instability, bringing the world ever closer to collapse.

The German proletariat, by rejecting the government’s promises of a constitution and a nationwide parliament, and through its iron determination, would serve as a detonator. Throughout the 1920s, the KPRP refused to give up the hope in a German revolution, continuously seeking signs of instability in the Weimar Republic. In the upcoming struggle, given the geostrategic location of the Second Republic, Poland would play a decisive role as a bridge between Russia and Germany. It was merely a matter of time before Poland was swept away by a continental revolution.

In the early years, sought-after guidance was hard to come by. The messages coming out of Moscow were perplexing and even contradictory especially during the years of the Civil War. Although the Bolsheviks called for self-determination of nations, they subjugated that policy as part of their revolutionary strategy. Polish Communists had trouble squaring this circle, especially given the legacy of Luxemburgism. Such muddy principles allowed member parties of the Comintern, at least in the first few years after the Great War, to pick and choose whatever they felt to be most applicable to their circumstances.

1200 Reguła, Historja Komunistycznej Partii Polski, 6.
1201 Nowiny Krajowe i Zagraniczne devoted quite a bit of room to the reprinting of these attacks.
1202 „Wobec prowokatorskiej roboty.”
1207 For a study of the early years of Soviet nationality policy, see, for instance, James E. Mace, Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933 (Cambridge: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute and the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S., 1983).
For the KPRP, the dictatorship of the proletariat was the most immediate task and the end goal. Although the political platform did not specify how the revolution would be carried out or what exactly would follow in its aftermath, and although the party was uncertain about many issues (e.g., proper approach to the peasants), they were convinced about their rejection of the restored Poland.\textsuperscript{1208} Nonetheless, they were compelled to respond to the various aspects associated with the national question. In the years following the First World War, the young Poland struggled with the shape of its borders; it had to deal with questions of plebiscites; with national uprisings in Wielkopolska and Upper Silesia; and with ensuing wars with her neighbours.

Since the KPRP envisioned Poland as being reserved for the bourgeoisie, the workers had absolutely no stake in its existence or political life. To that end, in January of 1919, the KPRP decided to boycott the parliamentary elections. “Unconditional advocates of the Sejm [diet],” one article clarified, “are only the most foolish indecisive forces, that, while serving the cause of counterrevolution, attempt to convince themselves and others, that the Sejm will be a genuine expression of the peoples’ ‘will,’ that this ‘freely elected representation of the entire nation’ will resolve everything.”\textsuperscript{1209} The government was no more than a tool of capitalist interests, ready to fulfill the needs of both the domestic bourgeoisie and the Entente coalition. “Revolution and the restructuring of society based on socialist foundations,” one political statement declared, “can not be a task of the Sejm.”\textsuperscript{1210} The Sejm would only shed the blood and life of workers and peasants in their perpetual wars to destroy Bolshevik Russia and to expand borders.\textsuperscript{1211} By assuming that participation in the elections had no value for the proletariat, they had missed an important opportunity. If nothing else, the elections were an important symbol of the restoration of Polish statehood and an expression of its democratic values.

The party’s refusal to partake in this first act of national assertion amounted to a rejection of the rebuilding of independent Poland and all the accompanying national traditions and struggles. This had several repercussions, and as Czubiński rightly points out, was a critical mistake of the KPRP. Firstly, the party chose to stand outside the political process, losing the ability to directly impact the shaping of the emerging government and its policies. Secondly, since the elections were to some extent a test of one’s patriotism, it became clear that the KPRP’s loyalty lay outside Poland’s national interests. Thirdly, and most ironically, it strengthened the Communists’ rivals who did not need to compete with them for votes.\textsuperscript{1212}

The uncompromising attitude towards the elections stemmed from two beliefs. Firstly, since revolution was imminent, there was no point of propping up a government that was about to collapse. Equally important was the party’s belief in the Workers’ Councils (RDRs) as the future organs of power and influence. They would not only organize the working masses, but also stimulate revolutionary activity and eventually replace the state machinery.\textsuperscript{1213} By early 1919, about 100 RDRs operated in the former Congress Kingdom, but Communists

\textsuperscript{1208} Kowalski argues that the Polish Communists did not necessarily want to abolish the Polish state but rather wanted to radically transform it. This is unconvincing for several reasons. Firstly, their writings on the Polish state in 1919 and 1920 all focused on the destruction of the existing state and not on its transformation. Secondly, their conception of the future Polish state was vague and ambiguous. They believed that an international proletarian framework would make individual countries obsolete.

\textsuperscript{1209} “Sejm czy Rady?,” \textit{Sztandar Socjalizmu}, 11 January 1919, 14.

\textsuperscript{1210} “Projekt platformy politycznej Rad Delegatów Robotniczych,” AAN, KPP, “I Zjazd,” 158/1-I t.1.


\textsuperscript{1212} Cimek, \textit{Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939}, 9ff.

\textsuperscript{1213} Czubiński, \textit{Komunistyczna Partia Polski}, 42-5.
achieved a majority in only a few of them. In most instances, they came up against and lost the popularity race to other parties such as the PPS, Bund or National Workers Party (Narodowa Partia Robotnicza, NPR), which were not afraid to play the patriotic card. The KPRP’s political statement on the RDRs limited their function to the promotion of the revolutionary struggle. By the middle of 1919, it became clear that the RDRs were torn apart by partisan rivalry. They could never be used to overthrow the existing order. Several problems contributed to their demise.

The Communists took a highly radical view of the Workers’ Councils, seeing them predominantly as a tool of revolutionary work. The “Project for the Political Platform of the Workers’ Councils” during the First Party Council (I Rada Partyjna) in February 1919 send a clear message: “Into the hands of these Councils, through the path of peoples’ revolution, must pass all the legislative and executive power of the state—they are to be the organs of future proletarian dictatorship.” This dogmatism led to policies that were unappealing to workers. This was especially apparent in the KPRP’s approach to nationalism. For example, in February, the Communists called for amalgamation of all councils regardless of national affiliation. They believed that class-consciousness superseded everything else and that workers aspired to nothing less than complete proletarian unity. When separate Jewish or party specific RDRs emerged, they were to be eradicated and replaced by broadly based councils. Yet, as Henryk Zieliński argues, the concept of the Workers’ Council was an external and foreign mechanism that had no roots or appeal in the Polish national-political tradition. Nonetheless, the party elites believed that to function properly, the RDRs had to cut across all lines of division—especially national and political—to become a united front of cooperation. Moreover, once the councils spread throughout the country, their activities could be coordinated in an effort to assume power.

The reality of the RDRs was that they emerged in an era of the Rzeczypospolita’s restoration when patriotic fever was ever-present amongst the masses. The PPS and other socialist parties wanted not only to operate within the parliamentary framework but also to focus on economic work. The overthrow of the existing order was not a priority. In such circumstances, the KPRP could either conciliate on the question of Poland’s independence or else

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1214 Cimek and Kieszczyński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938, 22-36.
1215 Established in 1920 through unity of National Union of Workers (Narodowy Związek Robotniczy) and National Workers Party (Narodowe Stronnictwa Robotników). It united the notions of class warfare and patriotism. Hence, for instance, it supported and participated in the Third Silesian Uprising in 1921.
1216 Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski, 42-52.
1217 The RDRs were apparently the best road to achieving power in the state. Moreover, when the Polish army operating in Ukraine seemed to be destroying the councils, the KPRP took it as a sign that the councils were an important phenomenon. If they were not an effective mechanism, why would the army be destroying them? KPRP, “Do ludności pracującej Litwy i Białorusi,” June 1919, in ANN 158/VI-2, t. 6.
1219 “R.D.R.” Nowiny Krajowe i Zagraniczne, 15 May 1919, 3. They were hoping that the RDRs would simply bypass issues such as party or national affiliation. Workers were to cross all sorts of boundaries in order to make the councils the stronger organizing units in society.
1220 “Rada Delegatów Robotniczych,” Gromada, 1 March 1919, 4-5.
1221 Zieliński’s assertion created a controversy amongst Polish Marxist historians as many believed that the councils did have a history within Polish political traditions. See Zieliński’s contribution to this debate in “Rok 1918. Znaczenie powstania niepodległego państwa dla klasy robotniczej w Polsce,” 50-67. Similarly, Cimek and Kieszczyński argue that neglecting to include support for Poland’s independence has especially detrimental effects on the popularity of the RDRs amongst the peasantry. Cimek and Kieszczyński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938, 29-30.
abandon the hope of collaboration with other parties. By April of 1919, at the First Party Council, the Communists thought of a solution that would appease everyone. Their political aim would now be the establishment of a new Polish Republic of Workers’ Councils of City and Countryside—a Polish Soviet Republic. But this was nothing more than a tactical move, and was perceived as such. Besides, most Communists felt very uncomfortable with the acknowledgement, however faint or disguised, of Poland’s statehood. Reflected on this struggle years later, Walecki explained how the notion of creating a republic, even one based on the councils, seemed to stink too much of nationalism to most KPRP members. In the end, socialists were not interested in using the councils for political aims or to stimulate mass strikes, while Communists were not content with partial demands. The PPS opposed the Communists with a slogan that called for an independent socialist republic.

The main problem lay in that Communists were not looking to find a middle ground, as nothing short of a revolution and the overthrow of the government was satisfactory. In assessing the councils, Marchlewski wrote that “if the goal of a state is the security of capitalist exploitation, then the proletariat cannot simply take over the state machinery and allow for its continued functioning while aiming to acquire power and eliminate exploitation.” In such a system, there was no room for parliamentarism or negotiation. It quickly became obvious that collaboration with other organizations within the councils required dialogue and compromise, for which the KPRP was not prepared.

Instead, all other workers’ parties that were active within the RDRs were labeled as social-patriotic organizations that merely betrayed or distorted the genuine needs of the proletariat. The KPRP’s strongest competitor, the Polish Socialist Party became a special target of attacks. The socialists were labeled as the worst traitors of all—they claimed to speak on behalf of workers while betraying them to the bourgeoisie: “The leaders of the PPS, while appearing under the banner of independence, in reality strive to establish a force that would strangle the Polish nation, as they did in the first years of the war when, by supporting German imperialism in the name of Poland’s independence, they were in fact offering a new Prussian domination!”

The Bund was painted in similar colors, as an organization that promoted the nationalist agenda amongst the Jewish workers. The PPS was eventually blamed for the collapse of the RDRs. In the aftermath, scathing words for socialists only intensified. The First Party Conference in February 1921 even produced a special resolution against the PPS. The pre-Great War hostility between the PPS and the SDKPiL had fallen on fertile soil of the interwar era.

FOR YOUR FREEDOM AND OURS: ESTABLISHING BORDERS OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC.

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1222 “Projekt platformy politycznej Rad Delegatów Robotniczych,” AAN, KPP, "I Zjazd," 158/I-1 t.1. The notion of the Polish Soviet Republic was promoted in an official resolution only during the Second Party Council (in September 1919). It became a thesis only at the First Party Conference (in May 1920).


1225 A. Michalkowski (Warski), “Rozbicie RDR,” Nowiny Krajowe i Zagraniczne, 24 June 1919, 2. The attacks on the social-patriotic parties in the Communist press were relentless; see, for instance, “Nazgorski Wrogowie,” Czerwony Sztandar, 23 January 1921, 2.

1226 “Projekt platformy politycznej,” in ANN 158/V-1 t.1.


When at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month the Great War ended, and a ceasefire was reached, fighting certainly did not stop in the Polish territories. For the next several years, the Second Republic came into conflict with most of her neighbours to determine the shape of the young state’s borders. From the onset, the KPRP depicted the restored state as an expansionist empire that followed the commands of her Entente patrons. “Nobody should be under the illusion that the coalition is interested in Poland itself, in this ‘small nationality question,’” one article explained. “The coalition is interested in one thing: the battle against bolshevism, a war with Soviet Russia, and only if Poland completely offers itself in the service of this war, will it obtain some measly benefits.” The postwar peace settlement was illusory. It only revealed the true motives of the Entente powers. “The orgy of their [Entente’s] expansionist appetites” was exposed in the treatment of Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. Communists were convinced that mutual antagonisms and competition, which led to the First World War, had not be resolved and would eventually push imperialism to its inevitable bankruptcy. In this environment, Poland was only a small pawn on the international chessboard. In perpetual debt for its restoration, it would always be obliged to do the bidding of the Big Three. Furthermore, as a counterrevolutionary tool, it would be directed against Bolshevism, even if that contradicted or threatened its own existence.

If not a pawn of the victorious coalition, Poland’s national interests were alternately ascribed to the republic’s bourgeoisie and its aggressive imperialist foreign policy. “Why do they spit at the Bolsheviks with so much hatred?” one article asked. The capitalists opposed anyone who wanted to better the lives of the poor and the disenfranchised. Before 1918 they aligned with the Tsarist regime and now they attempted to manipulate the young government into suppressing the workers and the peasants. The Communist press frequently compared the newly established Second Republic to the Russian Empire—an expansionist state with boundless imperialistic hunger. Barely liberated, Poland immediately attempted to follow its own imperialist agenda of subjugating other peoples. Communists concluded that two forces guided Poland’s domestic and foreign policies: the interests of the global counterrevolution against Bolshevism and the imperialistic ambitions of Polish capitalists. The external front involved the expansion of Poland’s borders and the war against Soviet Russia. The internal front entailed the

1229 For a diplomatic history of interwar Poland, see Henryk Batowski, Między dwiema wojnami 1919-1939: Zarys historii dyplomatycznej (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1988, 2001).
1230 “Koalicja czy rewolucja?,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 20 December 1918, 1.
1231 “Przy podziale łupu,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 15 January 1919, 2.
1232 There was a contradiction is some of the Communists’ writings about the factors that contributed to the restoration of Poland after the First World War. On the one hand, they claimed that the Second Republic emerged as a result of the decisions made in Paris. On the other hand, they also pointed to the Russian Revolution as the most important event.
1233 “Z wrogami niepodległej Polski rząd Polski,” Gromada, 15 May 1919. Some Communists believed that if the counterrevolution succeeded and White Russia was restored, an independent Poland would once again disappear from the European map. It would be divided by the restored Tsarist Russia and the Weimar Germany. After all, both had detested the outcome of the Great War and followed revisionist foreign policies. Dawid Jakubowski, Julian Marchlewski—bohater czy zdrajca? (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy “Książka i Prasa,” 2007), 125ff.
1234 “Bolszewicy,” Gromada, July 1919, 3.
1235 “Komuż służy ten rząd?,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 29 December 1918, 1. They explained how Tsarist administrators simply changed their loyalty to now serve the Polish state. P. W—ski, “W ’nowej, odrodzonej’ Polsce,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 12 January 1919, 3.
suppression of proletarian desires and a barrier to gaining workers for the revolutionary cause. Whether doing the bidding of the Entente or its own bourgeoisie, the state would remain a sworn enemy of international proletariat. The Second Republic’s battles with the Germans, Czechs, Lithuanians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians or Russians to determine the shape of the country were viewed through that narrow prism. Borders were determined not by self-determination or national will of the Poles but rather by the interests of the Great Powers and the use of force. The fruits of such expansionism would only line the pockets of the capitalists.

The Polish-Ukrainian conflict in 1918 and 1919, the crisis over Cieszyn (Těšín), the plebiscite in Upper Silesia (1921) and the three regional uprisings (between 1919 and 1921), the Polish-Lithuanian conflict (1920), and finally the Soviet-Polish War of 1919-1921 defined the first few years of the Second Republic’s existence. The KPRP interpreted all these struggles as a reflection of either bourgeois class interests or Entente directives. Polish capitalists and landowners were trying to fulfill the agenda of the counterrevolutionary camp and to obtain more profits. They exploited nationalist rhetoric and spoke of the defense of the motherland to rally the nation behind their endeavors. “They hassle you,” one proclamation explained, “to snatch power away from the hands of a Lithuanian and Ukrainian worker and peasant, to bind them into new chains and return them to the bloody reign of Polish landowners.” They lamented that all those who opposed these wars were unjustly branded as unpatriotic and as traitors. This climate merely hardened the Communists’ resolve to reject everything national. “The working people,” one announcement stated, “do not recognize wars for national borders. Where the working people are victorious, all workers are free regardless of their nationality or the country to which they belong.”

Piłsudski’s federalism and the Endeks’ integral nationalism were both rejected as unacceptable schemes. Nonetheless, there were some Communists who tried to move beyond mere anti-nationalist slogans, to explain why incorporating more territories into the Polish state was simply impractical.

Marchlewski argued that the dream of restoring the historical Poland, when it ruled over vast territories, was unrealistic and even harmful. In most of these areas, Poles constituted a minority that would always vote and act against the Second Republic, which was oppressing them. Nonetheless, and unlike many of his comrades, he accepted the need for a Polish state even if only during a transitional phase when the proletariat took over the reins of power. He believed that if Poland was to survive, it needed access to iron ore and coal. In January of 1919, he concluded that the new country should encompass the following territories: former Congress Kingdom (without the Suwałki area but with the Białystok region), western Galicia, parts of Austrian Silesia and sizable portions of former

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1237 “Wojna na szystkich frontach!,” Sztrand Socializmu, 5 January 1919, 1.
1238 France was pained as the worst culprit of this counterrevolutionary camp. Given the degree of French capital invested in the Russian Empire, its restoration was of highest priority. The main objective was to restore a Great White Russia. P. Ziel., “Ku wielkiej Rosji,” Nowiny Krajowe i Zagraniczne, 22 May 1919, 1; “Precz z wojną!,” June 1919, AAN, KPP, "Sekretariat Krajowy 1918-1938. Odezwy 1918-1936," 158/VI-2, t.6.
Prussian partition (including Poznań region, and parts of western Prussia and Upper Silesia).\textsuperscript{1243} It is interesting that unlike most of his colleagues, Marchlewski depicted Upper Silesia as an ethnographically Polish area, which should be incorporated into the Second Republic. Without it, Poland would remain a predominantly agrarian state with little hope of industrialization. Another benefit of including Upper Silesia was that it would stir much competition between states in Central Europe, thus destabilizing the international situation and hastening the downfall of capitalism.\textsuperscript{1244}

Poland began military operations in late 1918 in an effort to control parts of Ukraine and expand the eastern borderlands. The KPRP immediately began to criticize what it considered a war of imperial expansion. The party elites believed that Ukraine was in a peculiar situation where only alignment with Soviet Russia would ensure its survival. The workers of Ukrainian territories were mostly Russians who did not want to get involved in any nationalist discourse. The greater majority of the masses of peasant extraction were indifferent to the national struggle of liberation.\textsuperscript{1245} And only a small faction of Ukrainians, who claimed to speak for the nation, attempted to fulfill the dream of self-determination by selling themselves to the bidder with most promises. Since aligning with Poland or Germany would mean domination, and restoring White Russia would only bring back Tsarism, Ukraine had little option but to side with the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{1246} Ironically, Polish Communists dismissed the opinions of their Ukrainian counterparts who in these years organized themselves into the Communist Party of Eastern Galicia.\textsuperscript{1247}

Once again, Marchlewski seemed to offer one of the most comprehensive statements by supporting a smaller ethnic Second Republic that would be devoid of minorities and would establish its eastern border along the River Bug.\textsuperscript{1248}

By the summer of 1919, the Poland was able to claim victory in the conflict, and eventually convinced the Entente powers to grant Eastern Galicia to the Second Republic.\textsuperscript{1249}

A similar position was taken to the Poland’s ventures into Lithuanian territory (and by extension into Byelorussian as well) in 1919 and 1920.\textsuperscript{1250} Communists denounced the government’s justification of national defence:

Everywhere on all roads, on corners of all streets they call to us: Lvov is threatened, let’s save Vilno! Motherland is in danger! […] And a loud cry runs across the Polish lands. A desperate cry blared from the lips of landowners: let’s rescue Vilno! Lithuania is perishing! Yet, the only thing that is perishing there is the rule and property of landowners.\textsuperscript{1251}

Selling themselves as the liberators, arriving in the name of peace, order and brotherly cooperation, and making all sorts of promises, the Polish armies were nothing more than aggressors akin to the Germans and Russians before

\textsuperscript{1243} Marchlewski, ”Przyszłość polski pod względem ekonomicznym,” 441.
\textsuperscript{1244} Marchlewski, ”Przyszłość polski pod względem ekonomicznym,” 442, 444-6.
\textsuperscript{1245} K. Romański, ”Wobec nowych walk na Ukrainie,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 19 December 1918, 2; 20 December 1918, 2; 21 December 1918, 3.
\textsuperscript{1246} K. Romański, ”Wobec nowych walk na Ukrainie,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 20 December 1918, 2 and 21 December 1918, 3.
\textsuperscript{1247} Solchanyk, ”The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938,” 99-117.
\textsuperscript{1248} Marchlewski, ”Rosja proletariacka a Polska burżuazjarna.” Although he believed in the ethnographic boundaries, Marchlewski believed that Eastern Galicia was historically drawn towards Poland.
\textsuperscript{1249} This complicates situation was seemingly resolved when the Great Powers granted Poland control of the area in the summer of 1919 for a period of 25 years, with the Polish government ensuring autonomous rights for the region.
\textsuperscript{1250} ”Wyprawa na Litwę,” Sztandar Socjalizmu, 24 December 1918, 4.
\textsuperscript{1251} ”Ratujmy Lwów i Wilno, czyli ziemię polską,” Gromada, 1 March 1919, 2-3.
The debate between the Piłsudskites and Endeks over Lithuania’s incorporation into the republic was a mute point—a “pernicious play on words.” All the fighting on the eastern front was nothing more than aggrandizement. No Lithuanian, Byelorussian or Ukrainian worker would be free until the Polish worker is free: “They promise You the right to determine Your fate. They promise You Councils of Delegates, deceiving You with a pledge of calling a Constitution.” Large parts of Lithuania were eventually absorbed into the Second Republic but Communists continued to reject their incorporation.

The questions of Upper Silesia and Cieszyn met with similar derision. In regards to the latter, a combined declaration by the Czech and Polish Communists stated that “we do not want to slay each other in the interest of capitalism.” Beyond this vague statement, neither party actually offered a formal position on which country had the right to annex the territory. For the KPRP, territorial issues merely determined who would get to exploit the workers. Nationalism was a cover which all sides—German, Czech and Polish—utilized to justify their claims to the disputed areas. The Big Three’s solution to these ethnic dilemmas—the use of plebiscites—was viewed once again with contempt by the Communists.

“Self-determination through any voting or plebiscites—especially during times of war and revolution,” one article explained, “is in the best of situations a naïve utopia. Oftentimes, it is a cover, disguising explicit expansionist tendencies.” The First Party Conference in April 1920 explained that:

The practice of “plebiscites” and “self-determination”, organized by the bourgeoisie, completely reveals in the eyes of the masses the real meaning of the “national” and “democratic” slogans. This practice, in both the kresy [eastern borderlands] and in western territories is marked by the establishment of brutal dictatorship of some sort of bourgeoisie and by the suppression by ruthless means of all free speech of the working masses.

Even in the most optimal circumstances, genuine self-determination (even in the form of plebiscites) was simply impossible in the capitalist system. There was a pervading assumption that the outcome of a plebiscite had been predetermined. Consequently, plebiscites for Warmia, Mazury or Silesia were rejected as tools of nationalist discourse or of Entente politicking. Nationalism merely allowed factory owners to blame authentic working class demands on chauvinistic bickering. At the very least, plebiscites were one of the worst impediments to the solidarity of German and Polish proletariat. And since Silesia was one of the heartlands of Polish working classes, which would serve as the bridge between the Russian and German revolutions, the preservation of close proletarian

1258 “Ważniejsze uchwały Partii od Zjazdu Zjednoczeniowego w grudniu 1918 do Konferencji Partyjnej w kwietniu 1920. Położenie Polski,” in KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1, 93.
collaboration became that much more critical. Moreover, believing in the immediacy of the German revolution, Polish Communists did not want to act in any way that would hinder the realization of that revolution.

The Communists refused to officially support the uprisings that broke out in Upper Silesia (in August 1919, August 1920, and May 1921), depicting them as artificial machinations of the Polish government. This attitude was reaffirmed by the Communist Party of Upper Silesia (Komunistyczna Parżia Górnego Śląska), which emerged in December of 1920. The party was so concerned with the perceived growth of nationalism that all four “Immediate tasks of the party,” conceived during its first congress, pertained to its rejection. The first mandate urged the party to “expose reactionary and imperialist essence of slogans, promoted by bourgeois parties, which, at the present time as during the war, are trying to restrain the masses with national and patriotic phrases.” All agreed on attacking the concept of plebiscites, and only disagreed on how to reject it: whether to boycott it altogether or call for the establishment of a Soviet republic. These views were reinforced by a conviction that the Polish workers were indifferent to the question of borders and would be unwilling to participate in any sort of voting. Apparently, they did not care whether Upper Silesia belonged to the Polish state. Only a few lone voices called for a different approach.

Marchlewski refused to dismiss the nationality question in Silesia. In his work, he emphasized that even with all the Prussian oppression of the 19th century, the region still retained its Polish character. Moreover, he believed that national identity was important to workers. Likewise, Warski asserted the need to include Upper Silesia in the Second Republic. Nevertheless, the prevailing attitude dictated that the revolution was coming and only such a socialist upheaval would resolve all outstanding national antagonisms. It was not until the Third Conference of the KPRP in 1922, that some leaders criticized the party’s tactics between 1919 and 1921, arguing that their inactivity left all the work amongst Polish workers to the Germans.

The most important determinant of tactics and attitudes towards the borders of the Second Republic (and its national security) was the unwavering belief in the upcoming revolution. This was one of Luxemburg’s most powerful legacies. No matter how conciliatory a nation-state could be towards its workers, eventually only a revolution could fulfill the promises of socialism. Such an attitude was reinforced at the KPRP’s Second Council in

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1264 For details about the debates see the accounts from the First Congress published in Czerwony Sztandar, 24 December 1920, 2.
1265 Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939, 24-6; Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski, 67.
1266 It should be emphasized that even though he acknowledged the Polish dominance in the region, he still rejected plebiscites which he perceived as a political tool in the hands of the Entente powers. Marchlewski, "Przyszłość polski pod względem ekonomicznym," 440.
1268 See, for instance, the speech by Jaworski, AAN, KPP, "III Konferencja," 158/II-3 t.4, 103.
September 1919. The political situation in the Republic was depicted as ripe for direct fighting for power. The bourgeois-proletarian conflict was imminent and there was no point in devoting attention to issues outside revolutionary activity. All who attempted to separate political and economic issues, who inserted nationalism into socialism, or who gave credence to national interests, were enemies of the working masses.\textsuperscript{1269} The Comintern only reinforced all these attitudes.

In a letter to the Polish comrades, the Comintern’s Executive Bureau painted an overly optimistic assessment of revolutionary potential on the continent. In these circumstances, Poland was depicted as a bastion of capitalism that needed to perish on the road to utopian socialism:

\begin{quote}
Poland, who was called the martyr of nations, Poland, for whom all European peoples’ parties demanded liberation… that Poland, today resurrected to independent life by the revolutionary masses, is becoming the bastion of reaction, it endeavors to become the executioner of revolution. [...] Indulge the wealthy and at their becking drown in blood the Soviet Republics, oppress the weaker nationalities inside the state, strongarm weaker neighbours, absorb them gradually and expand, keep expanding—that is the slogan of the Polish imperialists.\textsuperscript{1270}
\end{quote}

The KPRP readily accepted such a rejection of the Polish statehood. What they had serious misgivings about was Lenin’s persistent calls for self-determination and acceptance of an independent Poland. They could not understand how Lenin could accept national aspirations while simultaneously promoting revolutionary and class aims.\textsuperscript{1271} For Polish Communists, class first and nationalism second was interpreted as only class. When the Comintern’s Second Congress reaffirmed the Second Republic’s sovereignty, the party elites were perturbed. Moreover, while traveling through Poland in March of 1920, Karl Radek publicly supported the republic in an open letter to the PPS, infuriating Polish Communists.\textsuperscript{1272} Even with utmost pressure coming from Moscow, the Poles refused to give even tactical credence to the nationality question.

**THE RED ARMY IS COMING: SOVIET-POLISH WAR AND THE FADING DREAMS OF REVOLUTION.**

The Soviet-Polish War lasted from 1919 until the Treaty of Riga was concluded in March of 1921. The opening phases of the conflict involved Poland’s skirmishes with Ukrainians in late 1918 and early 1919, and the eventual seizure of Vilnius in April of 1919. Gradual expansion of the Second Republic’s borders eastward and the Bolshevik dream of exporting the revolution westward culminated in more serious fighting in the summer of 1919.\textsuperscript{1273} For Polish Communists, the situation was clear: Polish imperialists were trying to destroy the international proletariat’s homeland in order to acquire new land and to appease their Western masters. The Communist press attacked the government’s war of expansion, calling for workers to refuse the shedding of blood to enrich

\textsuperscript{1269} “W sprawie sytuacji obecnej i taktyki,” September 1919, in *KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1*, 76-9.
\textsuperscript{1270} “List Biura Wykonawczego Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej,” 6 July 1919, in *KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1*, 83-4.
\textsuperscript{1271} This was especially highlighted by the ultraleftists for whom self-determination betrayed some of the most critical principles of Marxism. See, for instance, Leński polemics during the Second Party Congress, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 145-6.
After the Red Army’s victories in the Civil War, all efforts were concentrated on the Polish theatre of war, and by early 1920s, the Bolshevik offensive pushed into the Second Republic.

As the Red Army neared Polish borders, the KPRP was confronted with a new situation. Already by the middle of 1919, especially once the Workers’ Councils failed to acquire power, Polish Communists agreed that the domestic revolutionary forces were meager. The First Congress had claimed that external help would be paramount if a revolution were to succeed in Poland. In January, the party called for the establishment of Red Guards with the assistance of the Red Army. Yet, this was a sensitive issue, as any direct assistance of the Red Army would simply be perceived by the Polish nation as an invasion. Hence, it was accepted that the Bolshevik forces could only provide assistance once a revolution broke out in the republic. In early 1919, a vague suggestion was made that the Russian, Byelorussian, Lithuanian and Polish representatives should collectively decide on the future borders of Poland.

Moscow’s contradictory statements about self-determination and tactical indecisiveness (based on military expediency) further confused the situation. On the one hand, Lenin’s rhetoric supported Poland’s self-determination:

[But] there is not the slightest shadow of doubt that we must recognize the self-determination of the Polish nation now. That is clear. The Polish proletarian movement is taking the same course as ours, towards the dictatorship of the proletariat, but not in the same way as in Russia. And there the workers are being intimidated by statements to the effect that the Muscovites, the Great Russians, who have always oppressed the Poles, want to carry their Great-Russian chauvinism into Poland in the guise of communism.

Communism cannot be imposed by force. When I said to one of the best comrades among the Polish Communists, “You will do it in a different way”, he replied, “No, we shall do the same thing, but better than you.” To such an argument I had absolutely no objections. They must be given the opportunity of fulfilling a modest wish—to create a better Soviet power than ours. We cannot help reckoning with the fact that things there are proceeding in rather a peculiar way, and we cannot say: “Down with the right of nations to self-determination! We grant the right of self-determination only to the working people.” This self-determination proceeds in a very complex and difficult way. It exists nowhere but in Russia, and, while foreseeing every stage of development in other countries, we must decree nothing from Moscow.

In March of 1920, this was further confirmed through an official declaration by the Soviet government, which reaffirmed the independence and sovereignty of the Polish Republic:

We know that France is inciting Poland, flinging millions into that country, because France is bankrupt anyhow and is now putting her last stake on Poland. And we say to the comrades in Poland that we respect her liberty as we respect the liberty of every other nation, and that the Russian workers and peasants, who have experienced the yoke of tsarism, know very well what that yoke meant. We know that it was a heinous crime to divide Poland up among the German, Austrian and Russian capitalists, and that this division doomed the Polish nation to long years of oppression, when the use of the native language was regarded as a crime, and when the whole Polish nation was brought up in one idea, namely, to throw off this terrible yoke. We therefore understand the hatred the Poles feel, and we declare to them that we shall never cross the line on which our troops are now stationed—and they are stationed a long way from any Polish population. We are proposing peace on this basis, because we know that this will be a tremendous acquisition for Poland. We do not want war on account of frontiers, because we want to obliterate that accursed past when every Great Russian was regarded as an oppressor.

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1275 Najdus, “Poglądy grup SDKPiL i KPRP w Rosji w latach 1917-1920 na kwestię narodową,” 124-5.
On the other hand, the resolutions of the First Congress of the Comintern asserted that nation-states were an anachronism of the capitalist era and that the establishment of new states in Europe had done nothing but stimulate national hatred. If socialism were to succeed, nation-states would have to disappear. Polish Communists preferred the latter position, which confirmed their opposition to the Second Republic. Besides, semantic battles seemed not as important as the optimism associated with the approaching Red Army.

As the Bolsheviks’ initial military campaign bore fruit, Polish Communists began to debate over the idea of bringing a revolution to Poland on the bayonets of the Bolshevik soldiers. To reassure their followers and enemies alike of the nonbelligerent Soviet intentions, the KPRP issued a declaration in February 1920, proclaiming that it is not their intention to forcefully introduce Communism with the assistance of the Russian army. “This task cannot be carried out through an external force of a foreign army,” the statement clarified, “[as] the invasion of any army into Poland would give the bourgeoisie, on the contrary, the ability to uphold nationalism amongst the masses with all the ensuing implications.” Yet, these proclamations were somewhat contradictory as they called for peace while simultaneously attacking the government and the Polish war effort. Such mixed messages merely provided fodder for the anti-Communist rhetoric.

Even though Lenin called for self-determination, the KPRP’s elites still refused to consent to the policy. They could not accept it even as a tactical maneuver or propaganda. A statement published by the Executive Committee in April 1920 once again attacked the notion, arguing that in a capitalist system, national interests of one state would always violate the rights of another. National will was an illusion. Moreover, since there existed contradictory conceptions of national aspirations within each individual state, an all-encompassing idea such as self-determination was meaningless because it could never satisfy all the members of a state.

The situation once again changed when the Red Army neared ethnic Polish territories in the spring of 1920. The First Party Conference in April of 1920 concluded that the war had turned into a catastrophe for the Polish bourgeoisie and that it was only a matter of time before the government collapsed. Debates ensued amongst Polish Communists in Russia on how best to approach the Polish masses. Some, like Stanisław Budzyński, Stefan Borski or Edward Pröchniak contended that the Bolshevik offensive should be localized and limited, or else it could trigger an anti-Soviet levee en masse. But by June of 1920, another view prevailed. Julian Leszczyński and Józef Unszlicht were convinced that the war had class rather than national tones, and that the arrival of the Soviet armies would trigger and accelerate the socialist revolution in Poland. Even if a widespread revolution did not break out

1282 Położenie Polski," in *KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1*, 91-4.
immediately, the workers could be armed to launch the overthrow of the government. Moreover, although many remained skeptical about the readiness of the masses for revolution, the Polish Bureau gave approval for the invasion. Indeed, Polish Communists in Russia actually convinced their Russian counterparts of the appropriateness of exporting the revolution to Poland.\footnote{Trembicka, “Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski wobec wojny polsko-radzieckiej w latach 1919-1920,” 179.} Marchlewski, the Bureau’s leader, only urged Lenin that the future Polish borders encompass Chelm and Białystok regions.\footnote{Jakubowski, \textit{Julian Marchlewski}, 155. Marchlewski would eventually assume the role of the Bolshevik representative in the secret peace talks with the Polish government.} In late July 1920, a decision was made to establish the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland (\textit{Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Polski})\footnote{It was also known as Polrevkom or Polish Revolutionary Committee (\textit{Polski Rewolucyjny Komitet}). Marchlewski was selected as its leader. Other leaders included Dzierżyński, Feliks Kon, Edward Próchniak and Unszlicht.} that would maintain political and administrative control of the areas “liberated” by the Red Army.

The Polrevkom (Polish Revolutionary Committee) immediately published a Manifesto calling Communists "revolutionary separatists" who fight for genuine independence of Poland from colonial (i.e., Entente) oppression. It concluded with the slogan for a "truly free worker-peasant Rzeczypospolita Poland."\footnote{“Manifest do polskiego ludu robotniczego miast i wsi,” Manifest Tymczasowego Komitetu Rewolucyjnego Polski, Białystok, 30 July 1920, in \textit{KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1}, 279-83.} Piłsudski was accused of national treason by turning Poland into a gendarme of Eastern Europe under directives from Paris. Most Communists wholeheartedly believed that the Red Army would create a fully sovereign Poland. As Dawid Jakubowski argues, the failure of the TKRP lay not in any sort of anti-nationalist rhetoric, but rather in its utopian idealism and erroneous assumptions.\footnote{Jakubowski, \textit{Julian Marchlewski}, 161ff. Jakubowski points to various activities of the TKRP in the cultural, educational and lingual spheres.} It refused to ascribe any sort of wartime atrocities to the Red Army or the Bolshevik tactics. It failed to give land to peasants, instead promoting nationalization. And it was convinced that a socialist revolution was about to break out and would be popular throughout the entire country.\footnote{Trembicka, “Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski wobec wojny polsko-radzieckiej w latach 1919-1920,” 180-4.} It was intoxicated by the prospect of the seizure of power, and refused to accept a more moderate position.

The approach of the Red Army forced the members of the TKRP to now deal with the possibility of a Communist Poland. They envisioned a smaller country with a border along the Bug River. Although they continuously reinforced the notion of Poland’s independence as a state, its position between the Soviet Russia and the Soviet Germany was somewhat unclear. The Soviet Poland would include the following: Białystok (with Białostocki, Bielski and Sokólski powiaty); former gubernias—Grodzińska (up to Białowieża), Łomżycka and Suwalska; and Chelmshczyzna.\footnote{Trembicka, “Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski wobec wojny polsko-radzieckiej w latach 1919-1920,” 183.} The southern border with Galicia remained unspecified due to opposing attitudes of various Communist groups. Marchlewski, on the one hand, argued that Galicia had always turned towards Poland and should be included in the future Soviet Republic. Leaders of the Temporary Revolutionary Committee of Eastern Galicia (\textit{Tymczasowy Komitet Rewolucyjny Galicji Wschodniej}), on the other hand, called for the immediate
separation of the region from the Second Republic. Although in the end, Dzierżyński and the KPRP decided on a more centralized solution, the debates would continue until the Second Party Congress.\footnote{Radziejowski, \textit{The Communist Party of Western Ukraine 1919-1929}, 13-20; Trembicka, \textit{Między utopią a rzeczywistością}, 257-60.}

When the Polish counteroffensive succeeded in defeating the Red Army, Communists fell into disarray. Repressions against them were swift and severe. Whatever little appeal Communism had before 1919 had nearly disappeared as a result of the Soviet-Polish War. If the party was to survive, it needed to reform some of its principles and tactics, especially those that isolated it from mainstream Polish society. If it was to succeed, it needed allies. And the interwar Poland—a young state with serious socio-economic and ethnic challenges—offered a plethora of individuals who, like the Communists, had a bone to pick with the existing order. The evolution of the KPRP after the Polish-Soviet War is a story of how Polish Communists tried to insert nationalism into their doctrines and practices, how they searched for and acquired questionable allies, and how they succumbed to Luxemburgian internationalism.
CHAPTER 12: THE ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF POLISH COMMUNISM:
THE MINORITY QUESTION IN THE KPRP.

MULTIPLE LOYALTIES: COMMUNISTS SEARCH FOR ALLIES AMONG THE MINORITIES.

Even before the signing of the Treaty of Riga, which concluded the Soviet-Polish War and settled Poland's borders, it became apparent that the Second Republic would be a multiethnic state. A third of its population constituted minorities of Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Jews, Germans, Lithuanians and others. This multiethnic and multilingual diversity combined with regionalism had a tremendous impact on both the ideology and structure of the KPRP. The nationality question amongst the rank and file could not be dismissed as easily as it was by the party elites. The mere issue of reaching workers in their spoken language forced the party to change its tactics. Rejecting the nationalism of the majority was acceptable, but applying the same tactics to the minorities was a thorny dilemma. On the one hand, denying the nationalism of the minorities amounted to following in the footsteps of the authorities; on the other hand, giving it recognition was equally disconcerting for a party that rejected everything national. Initially, the situation was simple, as the Communists and non-Poles could agree on their shared antagonism towards the state. But beyond the common dissatisfaction with the Republic's domestic and foreign policies, creating a common ideology and coordinating activities became much more challenging.

Nationalism in interwar Poland was a complex issue. Many Germans, Byelorussians or Ukrainians looked to escape. The Byelorussians aspired to unite with their counterparts in a Soviet Republic, which offered the best promise of fulfilling their national needs. The Ukrainians likewise looked for an exit strategy from the Polish state, but unlike their northeastern neighbours, they were divided between those who were attracted to the Soviet Ukraine and those who wanted a separate state altogether. The Germans, now subjugated by what they considered to be an inferior race, gravitated towards the reunification with the Weimar Germany (and later the Third Reich). The Jews, whose potential homeland did not border the Second Republic, were torn between multiple loyalties: to Poland, to Zionism, and to an array of political affiliations. The KPRP had to tread carefully through this complex minefield of national interests and aspirations.

Foremost, there was a logistical problem of reaching the masses in their language and of being active in all regions. Spreading Communist ideas across all three (former) partitioned areas was difficult and slow, and never fully accomplished. Based in the former Congress Kingdom, the party's activities extended to other areas unevenly. In addition, the tongue and content of party propaganda had to be adapted to the needs of individual groups. It became immediately apparent that each group's desires, aspirations and motives were distinct due to

1292 For the study of the minority question in interwar Poland, see Jerzy Tomaszewski, Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1985); Leczyk, Druga Rzeczpospolita 1918-1939, 106-26.
1293 The KPRP had actually begun its work in the former Congress Kingdom where its presence was strongest. It spread to other regions of the Second Republic but did so slowly and unevenly.
1297 A reflection of these many challenges can be found in the proliferation of the Communist press in the first five years of the KPRP’s existence. See Maria Meglicka, Prasa Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski 1918-1923 (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1968).
1298 Again, Meglicka’s study reveals the difficulties associated with the Communist publications in foreign languages. Prasa Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski 1918-1923, 64ff, 306ff.
ethnic and regional peculiarities, and that for many, the line between social and national goals was blurry. All of these would have to be recognized and incorporated into the party philosophy without imposing significant changes to its central tenets. There were fears amongst KPRP’s leaders, and not completely unjustified, that they might not be able to assimilate some of the more nationalistic or opportunistic elements into their system of belief. This became a pressing issue when the minorities began to constitute a far greater numerical force within the KPRP’s rank and file than ethnic Poles. Moreover, given the principle of a single Communist party, all the groups would have to be incorporated into and accommodated within the structure of the KPRP. But even this would not be a straightforward process as each group, wanting separate recognition and representation, negotiated directly with the Comintern. The battle over administrative and executive autonomy never ceased.

**TAKING THE BUND OUT OF A JEWISH COMMUNIST: JEWS IN THE KPRP.**

The Jewish proletariat, constituting a significant portion of the Polish working masses, immediately became a prime target of the Communist propaganda. The party press reported on and vehemently criticized the pogroms against the Jews in the immediate postwar period. The struggle against anti-Semitism became a staple of its policy. The First Party Congress issued a protest resolution against pogroms. The establishment of a Jewish section in the KPRP in early 1919 marked the beginning of a battle for the loyalty of the Jewish working masses. But the KPRP came against stiff competition from well-developed parties whose main agenda did not involve revolutionary ends.

Jewish nationalist deviation, spearheaded by the socialist Bund—which was viewed as the Jewish equivalent of the PPS—seemed to represent the Communists’ fiercest rival. Already in 1918, a section of the Bund turned leftward in the radicalized atmosphere of the postwar years. For the next couple of years, the Bund attempted to consolidate the Jewish socialist vote and to determine its relationship towards Communism. The First Unification Congress of the party in April in 1920 revealed the debates raging within its ranks. The leftist majority

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1299 Just consider that in the early 1920, the Bund constituted about 10,000 members while the KPRP could master no more than a bit more than half of those numbers (about 5,500 members).


1301 Jews did comprise a disproportionately large section of leaders and members of the Communist movement in the Soviet Union. Jerry Z. Muller estimates that between 1917 and 1922, “between one-sixth and one-fifth of the delegates to the Bolshevik party congresses were of Jewish origin.” “Communism, Anti-Semitism and the Jews,” *Commentary*, (August, 1988): 30.

1302 „Na Litwie,” *Nowiny Krajowe i Zagraniczne*, 27 May 1919, 4. The party was proud of its history of speaking out against anti-Semitic policies. See, for instance, W. Kalima-Hański, “Znaczenie święta majowego w dziejach ruchu robotniczego w Polsce,” *Kultura Robotnicza*, Nr. 5, 7-8.

1303 „Uchwała protestacyjna przeciw pogromom antyżydowskim,” in *KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1*, 54.


1305 Jass Schatz argues that "Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Poland at the time was the world center of modern Jewish politics. Divided between socialists and antisocialists; the Orthodox and the anticlericals; nationalists and assimilationists; Zionists and anti-Zionists; Hebraists and Yiddishists, the Jewish parties developed an extraordinary variety of ideologies and programs, which were all defended with an unyielding (some would say, blinkered) sense of conviction." "Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland," in *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (New York: Published for the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry by Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

voted in support of membership in the Comintern. Nonetheless, the KPRP was not convinced that the Bund had shed away its nationalism (i.e., Zionist leanings). In a formal declaration at its First Conference (April-May 1920), it contended that “neither in its programmatic principles (national-cultural autonomy), nor in its organizational tactics (separatism of the party and trade unions), has Bund altered its nationalist position.” Polish Communists attacked the Bund on two issues: firstly, they were critical of the Bund’s desire for organization autonomy; and secondly, they pointed to the rightist and centrist elements in its ranks and its overall strategy of accommodation with other parties. At worst, these Jewish socialists were counterrevolutionary, and at best, they were opportunistic. Many of the KPRP elites maintained that even those with best intentions could not be fully trusted.

The tripartite discussions between the Bund, the KPRP and the Comintern intensified in 1921 as the Russians tried to mediate. Eventually, Zinoviev sided with the Poles, triggering a split within the Bund with the Communists establishing separate fraksie (in the fall of 1921). But the resultant Combund (Kombund) was not alone in promoting the Communist line. In a similar fashion, left wings of the Poale Zion (Żydowski Związek Komunistyczny Poale Syjon, Po’alei-Tsiyon), of the Cukunft (Jugend Cukunft in Pojlen, Jewish youth organization), and of the Ferajnigte (or Fareynikte, Żydowska Socjalistyczna Partia Robotnicza—Zjednoczenie) also developed Communist-oriented factions. All of them were expected to abandon their reformist and nationalist attitudes before being admitted into the KPRP. But even when they did so, their loyalties continued to be questioned.

A September 1921 meeting gathered all Jewish Communist elements from across Poland under the tutelage of the KPRP. “The party organization should to the best of its ability adapt to the multinational composition of its members,” one of the meeting’s resolutions concluded, “while the national question, as a question of the forms of coexistence of various nationalities in one single state, should attract more attention.” The main objective was to develop a tactical policy that would appeal to the minorities while liberating them from their national prejudices. In the case of the Jewish workers, who were already moving towards Communism, the objective was twofold: Firstly, to attack all elements that seemed to distract Jewish workers away from proletarian aims. These included the social-nationalist organizations (such as the Bund) and Jewish clericalism. And secondly, to give Communists control over the trade unions where the Jews had a strong presence: “The party should take vigorous steps to unite the trade unions,” a resolution proclaimed, “while simultaneously attempting to resolve the language question, which would respond to all the cultural needs of the masses that are not familiar with the Polish language.” All of the work was to strictly follow the ideological and organizational lead of the KPRP. It was obvious that Polish Communists felt threatened by any signs of Jewish administrative or ideological separatism. Moreover, “Jews were among the leaders of the KPP who challenged the traditional Luxemburgist stances against demands for Polish independence and on the issues of ‘export of revolution’ from the Soviet Union, the agrarian question, and sectionalism in the

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1308 „Stosunk do ‘Bundu’,” in KPP Uchwały i rezolucje. Tom 1, 103.
1309 Iwański, “Żydowski Komunistyczny Związek Robotniczy Kombund w Polsce 1921-1923,” 53-7. Since the October Revolution, the Bund had experienced factionalism between the center, right- and left-wing. The left wing had achieved considerable power within the leadership from 1919 onward. By 1921, signs of divisions had become prominent and finally in 1922, the Combund was official established. It is estimated that about 25% of the Bund entered the ranks of the Combund. Piotr Wróbel, “From Conflict to Cooperation: the Bund and the Polish Socialist party, 1897-1939,” in Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe, 160-1.
1310 „Ruch komunistyczny wśród robotników żydowskich,” Głos Komunistyczny, December 1921, 4-5.
relations with other labor parties.”  

Ironically, the people whose nationalism (read as anti-government sentiments) the KPRP exploited were asked to abandon those same national ties that pushed them towards Communism in the first place. Moreover, the KPRP could only convey its internationalist message in national conventions that were familiar to each minority.

Pinkus Minc recounted a story of how the Polish Communists feared the growing strength of the Combund and insisted on its immediate amalgamation. A March 1922 “Report of the Jewish Section” ascribed certain separatist tendencies that were emerging within the ranks of the Combund due its prolonged existence.

According to the arrangement between the KPRP and the Combund, the main tasks of the temporary Combund was to amalgamate, as quickly as possible, into the existing structures of the KPRP. This was especially evident during the Third Conference of the KPRP in April of 1922. Various delegates agreed that the split within the Bund was the right tactic but that the establishment of the Combund was somehow “abnormal,” and so Jewish Communists should be quickly incorporated into the countrywide movement. Organizational separatism was perceived to constitute a significant danger to the unity of Communism within Poland as it legitimized autonomism and Zionist tendencies. Minc described the situation:

The tactics of the Communists consisted in putting us in such a position that we would liquidate the Combund as quickly as possible. They feared that the longer the Combund existed, the stronger would become the tendency of favoring an independent, separate Jewish Communist organization. Particularly fearful of this development, the leaders of the ‘Jewish Section’ began to agitate within the Combund for its prompt liquidation, which they were prohibited from doing by the agreement between the Combund and the Communist Party.

The Combund would have to shed its Bundist legacy if it was to be admitted into the Communist ranks.

By 1923, as the Combund (along with other factions) joined the Polish party, the Central Bureau of the Jewish Sections (Centralne Biuro Sekcji Żydowskich, or simply the Centralne Biuro Żydowskie, CBŻ) was established to coordinate all the work amongst the Jews. The Bureau's creation marked a compromise between Combund's victory over organizational separatism and the Polish Communists' promotion of a single party. It is interesting that neither the struggle against anti-Semitism and against the non-Communist Jewish organizations, nor the creation of the CBŻ translated into recognition of a distinct Jewish ethnicity.

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1315 At this point, the Combund has existed for half a year.
1316 “Sprawozdanie Wydziału Żydowskiego. I marca 1922,” ANN, KPP, “Wydziały Komitetu Centralnego: Centralne Biuro Żydowskie,” 158/X-2, t.10, 2. The Comitern actually resisited the amalgamation of the Combund into the ranks of the KPRP, arguing that a separate Jewish section should exist. Only pressures of the KPRP and Combund leadership convinced the Comintern to allow for the unification.
1317 Debates by Wiśniewska, Stach, Aleksander, Szczepan or Jaworski, AAN, KPP, “III Konferencja,” 158/II-3 t.4.
1319 Three main tasks of the CBŻ were identified: 1) to control the entire agitation and propaganda in the Jewish language; 2) to fight against Jewish nationalism and Jewish nationalist parties; and 3) to deal with all issues and questions relating to the work amongst the Jewish workers. “Projekt Statutow Wydziału Żydowskiego przy K.C. K.PR.P.,” ANN, KPP, “Wydziały Komitetu Centralnego: Centralne Biuro Żydowskie,” 158/X-2, t.5, 1. Mishkinsky argues that the CBŻ actually denoted a loss for the Jews rather than a compromise as the Jewish bureau did not receive official recognition of its autonomous rights. Mishkinsky, “The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews,” 73.
To some extent, the distrust of the Combund extended to the Jewish community as a whole. A prime example of this tendency was the KPRP’s position on the Cultural League (Liga Kulturalna). Polish Communists concluded that as long as it remained a nationally oriented institution without strong proletarian values, the Jewish proletariat would have to stay away from it. Only when the Jewish trade unions could assume control of it, would the Jewish proletariat be able to join its ranks. Moreover, Polish Communists were certainly not devoid of anti-Semitic attitudes.

Many leaders of the KPRP maintained the prevailing belief that the best option for Jews would be to assimilate. In a broader sense, since the Jewish question would be resolved within the confines of the future socialist revolution, there was no point in trying to solve it separately. Marchlewski's views on the Jewish question are fairly representative of the whole Polish Communist movement. In the preface to the second edition to his Anti-Semitism and Workers, he offered a definitive conclusion: “I am fully convinced that as a separate social group, Jews will cease to exist in Europe, and I believe: in the instant that tsarism collapsed, the last hope of Jewish nationalism disappeared.” Elsewhere, he wrote that “Jews ceased to be a nation long ago. An English Jew, a Polish Jew, a Turkish Jew, though descendants of one tribe, are people of different cultures and languages, who would require a massive effort to become a single nation.”

Even more telling was Marchlewski's recounting of a story about educational reforms that were initiated during the TKRP's tenure. Trying to copy the policies of the Peoples Commissariat of Education in Russia, the Jews of Białystok tried to implement equality between the various representative languages, placing Yiddish on equal footing with Polish. Marchlewski was highly critical of this. The establishment of Jewish schools was nothing more than a product of “Jewish nationalism.” Moreover, the Polish language could not be replaced by Yiddish (or even Russian). The Jewish policies were reversed and Poles were selected to lead the emerging institutions of power (of what was to become the Soviet Polish Republic).

The furthest step that Polish Communists took was in early 1922, when the KPRP committed itself to the vaguely defined fight for rights, cultural freedom, and the Yiddish language of the Jewish population. But debates persisted on the issue of proper forms within the KPRP that would satisfy the needs of the “Jewish street.” It was a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, Jewish Communists were required to pay attention to specifically Jewish problems, especially those associated with anti-Semitism, in order to bring the Jewish workers into the fold of the party. On the other hand, Jewish Communists were expected to abandon their Jewishness, lest they would be accused of nationalism. “In the process of becoming committed Communists,” as Jaff Schatz explains, “particular Jewish problems and concerns, which might have constituted part of their [i.e., Jewish Communists’] initial

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1320 “Sprawozdanie Wydziału Żydowskiego. I marca 1922,” 3. A similar fate was ascribed to the Central Jewish Educational Organization (Centralna Żydowska Organizacja Szkolna, CISZO). Labeled as a tool of Bund, it was considered to promote cultural-national autonomy. Again, only its proletarianization would enable Jewish workers to participate in its activities. “Untitled note,” ANN, KPP, “Wydziały Komitetu Centralnego: Centralne Biuro Żydowskie,” 158/X-2, t.6, 1.
1321 See, for instance, Izaak Gordin’s comments during the Second Party Congress (see below).
attraction to Communism, came to be perceived as insignificant or even harmful to the grand revolutionary
design.  

Further compounding the situation was the prevailing stereotype of the Judeo-Communist conspiracy
(Żydokomuna). There was a widespread belief that the KPRP was dominated by Jews who were Moscow’s agents.
Ironically, although Jews did indeed constitute a significant presence within the party—about 20%—most Jews in
Poland did not support Communism.  

Julia Brun-Zejmis explains this paradox: “On the one hand, in order to recruit large numbers of Jewish workers, the Party emphasized its unquestionable commitment to the defence of Jews against anti-Semitism. On the other hand, the large number of Jews in the Polish Communist Party justified the Żydokomuna (Jew-communist) stereotype and, in a sense, caused embarrassment and presented a political liability to the communists.” In this atmosphere of ambiguity, the work of the CBŻ revealed mixed results.

The reports of the Jewish Bureau from the mid 1920s disparaged that its effectiveness had been limited to
the Jewish trade unions, and only those located in Warsaw. Their main struggle was against autonomism, Jewish
nationalist parties, and clericalism. They hoped to acquire the poor Jewish masses by promoting the Jewish
language, by secularizing Jewish schools and fighting religious districts (religijne gminy), by eradicating the roots of
anti-Semitism, and by preventing the cooperation of the leaders of the Jewish community and the Polish
government. The problem was that almost all of the manifestations of the traditional Jewish culture were also
attacked.

The position of Jews in the KPRP, as Piotr Wróbel aptly explained, remained that of a failed integration. In December of 1924, a debate ensued on the pages of the Nowy Przegląd about the Jewish work. A. Wajsblum (writing under the pseudonym K. Karolski) penned a scathing ultraleftist account of the Jewish question in Poland. His starting point was that the various sections of the party, and this especially pertained to the Jewish Bureau, were much too autonomous. The SDKPiL had been right in rejecting cooperation with nationalist-Bundist elements and directly reaching out to the Jewish workers. Combund was nothing more than a Menshevik, reformist, nationalistic organization whose inclusion in the KPRP had been achieved through an unacceptable ideological
compromise. Supporting the establishment of Jewish schools, defending the right of education in a Jewish language, and assisting in the building of a monument to commemorate a Jewish poet—these were all signs of national-cultural autonomy. Such nationalistic manifestations were unacceptable. As a party policy, they amounted to petty-bourgeois violations of Marxism. And even as a mere tactic (i.e., a way to reach the masses), they bordered on anti-revolutionary opportunism. Since specifically Jewish problems would be resolved in the broader class struggle for political and economic equality, there was no need to make any sort of compromises with Jewish cultural aspirations.

Saul Amsterdam-Henrykowski (A. Duniński) and Izaak Gordin (E. Czarnecki), the leading members of the CBŻ, responded to Wajsblum’s accusations. They maintained that the Jewish bureau had made mistakes (e.g., united front tactics on the issue of the CISZO)—but that it was free of sympathies towards Bundism or autonomism. What really stood out in this defence was that lack of support for the specific problems of the Jewish street. The struggle for language rights, for instance, though an important ingredient in the Jewish propaganda was somewhat reactionary. Similarly to the battle against anti-Semitism, the promotion of Yiddish was never supported by a concrete and systematic plan of action.

FROM OPPRESSOR TO THE OPPRESSED: GERMANS IN THE KPRP.

The German question was also not recognized as a specifically ethnic problem of the Polish state. Upper Silesia and Pomerania were viewed as multiethnic areas with a mixture of Poles and Germans. In the postwar period, German Communists managed to organize themselves relatively quickly with the creation of the Communist Party of Germany (Komunistische Partei Deutschlands, KPD) in December 1918. They immediately began work amongst the workers of Upper Silesia. During the First and the Second Silesian Uprisings (in August 1919 and August 1920), in which Communists participated informally, the intensified nationalist fervor led to significant decline of the Communists who emphasized only the socialist-revolutionary character of the fighting. Many workers joined the ranks of distinctively national organizations. Throughout the early 1920s, the majority of both Polish and German Communists painted the uprisings in derogatory terms (for instance, as fascist putsches). National aspirations of either Poles or Germans residing in the region were dismissed as machinations of two oppressive bourgeois governments in Warsaw and Berlin. The presence of both German and Polish Communists created questions of jurisdiction and strategy.

1336 A. Duniński (Saul Amsterdam-Henrykowski) and Ed. Czarnecki (Izaak Gordin), “Krytyka czy jątrzenie (w sprawie naszej roboty żydowskiej),” 267-8.
1337 For a detailed study of the KPD’s activities in the early years, see Pierre Broué, The German Revolution 1917-1923, trans. John Archer, ed. Ian Birchall and Brian Pearce (Boston: Brill, 2005). Unfortunately, this monumental work provides very little insight into the German Communists perceptions of their eastward neighbours.
1339 Czubiński, Komunistyczna Partia Polski, 66-7; Orzechowski, “Komunistyczna Partia Niemiec wobec problemów narodowościowych na G. Śląsku w latach 1922-1933,” 331-5.
The emergence of the Communist Party of Upper Silesia (Komunistyczna Partia Górnego Śląska, KPGŚ) in November of 1920 was not a result of Communism’s appeal as much as a product of a split within the PPS. By November, all the Polish and German Communist elements were united within the KPGŚ, which adapted, to a large extent, the KPD’s political line of rejecting any premise of the national liberation struggle. The new party was an amalgamation of the Communist Party of the Silesian District (Komunistische Partei Oberschlesiens, a wing of the KPD), and of the leftist secessions of the PPS under the Communist Party of Silesian Lands (Komunistyczna Partia Ziem Śląskich). The latter group, led by Stanisław Barczyński, had initially accepted self-determination as a component of its nationality policy and took a pro-Polish approach. Most of its leaders believed that Upper Silesia should belong to Poland. Nonetheless, the new party was to be devoid of nationalist inclinations, as class solidarity was to prevail over ethnic affiliation. But this was an unacceptable position in an area such as Upper Silesia, which in the postwar years was defined by national passions.

During the KPGŚ’s First Party Congress in December 1920, debates raged on the question of participating in the plebiscite scheduled for March 1921. Although some (e.g., Barczyński) urged the party to allow each member to vote individually, the leadership rejected voting altogether. The leadership came out with the slogan of the “Upper Silesian Republic of Councils.” National interests were dismissed as manipulations of either the German or the Polish governments. This amounted to political suicide given that the approaching vote was to determine the region’s future. Renouncing the referendum strengthened the German vote and only decreased the party’s appeal amongst the Polish proletariat. Communists did not realize the distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed, the socio-economic relations between German employers and Polish employees, and the desires of the masses. It was no surprise that the party stood on the sidelines during the Third Silesian Uprising in May-July 1921, naively hoping that the fighting transforms into a socialist revolution. Ironically, the German Communists initially were somewhat more inclined to accept the Polish demands than were their Polish counterparts. Orzechowski postulates that Communists were afraid that the promotion of self-determination in Upper Silesia would hinder its contact with the German working masses. National liberation was simply too closely associated with the unification of the region with the Polish state.

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1341 The KPGŚ united factions of Spartakus League, Communist Party of Silesian Land (Komunistyczna Partia Ziemi Śląskiej) and the left wing of the Independent Party of Social Democrats (Niezależna Partia Socjaldemokratów, USDP). Interestingly, The faction which separated from the PPS under the name of the Communist Party of Silesian Lands (Komunistyczna Partia Ziem Śląskich) decided not to become a branch of the KPD but rather stood separate from its German counterpart. Świetlikowa, Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918-1923, 108-12; Franciszek Hawranek, Ruch komunistyczny na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1918-1921 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1966), 41-109.


1343 Hawranek, Ruch komunistyczny na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1918-1921, 107-9.

1344 The vote was quite close as those supporting participation lost by only four votes (with 46 to 50 votes).

1345 Orzechowski, “Komunistyczna Partia Niemiec wobec problemów narodowościowych na G. Śląsku w latach 1922-1933,” 337. Hawranek sees this as the party main error in the first few years of existence. Ruch komunistyczny na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1918-1921, 120-1, 157-82.

1346 Hawranek, Ruch komunistyczny na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1918-1921, 210.

1347 Orzechowski, “Komunistyczna Partia Niemiec wobec problemów narodowościowych na G. Śląsku w latach 1922-1933,” 338. This is somewhat strange as Polish members dominated both the German and Polish parts of Upper Silesia. In the territories held by the Second Republic, the Poles constituted 68.5% and in the regions under German control, Poles constituted 83.3% of the party membership. Ruch komunistyczny na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1918-1921, 122-8.
When the KPGŚ was eventually dissolved in early 1922, an unspecified division of responsibility was spread between the KPD and the KPRP. This arrangement once again neglected to take into account the needs of the Germans. Although a German section had existed in the fold of the KPRP since 1919, its work was negligent.\textsuperscript{1348} The Third Party Conference (in April 1922) encouraged the Central Committee to establish an active German branch, but its work remained sporadic.\textsuperscript{1349} The German question became an even more distant issue on the KPRP's ethnicity agenda than the Jewish one. Although Polish Communists accepted self-determination of the region in 1927 (at the Fourth Congress of the KPP)\textsuperscript{1350}, and the KPD in 1930, both policies remained a distorted application of Lenin’s policy. It was not meant to determine the region’s association to either the Rzeczpospolita or the Weimar Republic, but rather its complete independence from both.\textsuperscript{1351} Like its Jewish counterpart, the German question remained tenuous. Most of Polish Communists' attention on the nationality issue concentrated on the eastern borderlands.

COMMUNIST NATIONAL LIBERATION: UKRAINIANS IN THE KPRP.

Similarly to the Jewish case, the relationship between the Polish Communists and their Ukrainian and Byelorussian counterparts also began with an ideological-administrative battle. Firstly, the KPRP had to contend with powerful Ukrainian nationalist forces active in Eastern Galicia (Lvov, Stanisławów and Tarnopol), southern regions of Polesie (Polissia), and parts of Lublin and Chełm, as well as a growing diaspora abroad. Between 1917 and 1920, Ukrainians experienced a series of victories and losses with the establishment of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic (headed by Symon Petliura who eventually reached an agreement with Piłsudski), the Hetmanate (a German puppet state headed by Pavlo Skoropadsky), the Directorate (a Council of Ministers which attempted to hold a united Ukraine amidst fighting in 1919-20) and the Ukrainian SSR (a Soviet republic established by the Bolsheviks). By the early 1920s, several movements and organizations existed which competed with the Ukrainian Communists for the loyalty of the Ukrainian peoples: Union of Hetman Statists (SHD), Ukrainian National Rebirth party (UNO), Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO), or Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).\textsuperscript{1352} Although Ukrainian Communism faced much competition from without, equally challenging was the factionalism within.

The loyalties of Ukrainian Communists were divided between several groups. The Communist Party of Eastern Galicia (Komunistyczna Partia Skhidnoi Halychyny, KPSH or Komunistyczna Partia Galicji Wschodniej,

\textsuperscript{1348} Świętlíkowa, Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918-1923, 82-91. An official German section was created in 1919, but it remained almost completely inactive until 1922-23 when the KPGŚ was abolished and the KPRP was reorganized at the Third Conference and the Second Congress. Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 36. To assess the Polish Communists’ German work, one needs only to mention the extreme underdevelopment of the KPRP’s publications in German. Meglicka, Prasa Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski 1918-1923, 306ff.

\textsuperscript{1349} According to a report at the Third Party Congress, almost all the press in the German language came from across the border.

\textsuperscript{1350} Self-determination for Pomerania was asserted in 1930 (at the Fifth Party Congress) and the self-determination of Gdański (Danzig) in 1932 (at the Sixth Party Congress).

\textsuperscript{1351} Orzechowski, “Komunistyczna Partia Niemiec wobec problemów narodowościowych na G. Śląsku w latach 1922-1933,” 342ff. Communists assumed that all Silesians were bilingual and had developed a distinct identity that was neither Polish nor German. Moreover, unification of the area with either Poland or Germany would never resolve national antagonism.

\textsuperscript{1352} For further reading, see Paul Robert Magocsi, A History of Ukraine (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 468-528; Solchanyk, “The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938,” 11-12.
KPGW) established in February of 1919, the Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbisty) created in March, and the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine (Komunistychna Partii (bilshovykiv) Ukrainy, KP[b]U) all competed for power. The postwar struggles for statehood, which inserted nationalism into the Ukrainian Communist discourse, posed serious problems for Polish Communism. How could the KPRP, a party that fought chauvinism at home, tolerate Borotbists who aspired to a specifically national Ukrainian peasant communism? They had to walk on a tightrope between criticism of Ukrainian nationalism and promotion of Ukrainian aspirations. As in the Jewish case, ethnic peculiarities created tensions over organizational autonomy. The Poles believed that unless they belonged to the KPRP, the Ukrainians would always be swayed by nationalism. But whereas the source of Polish nationalism stemming from a bourgeois republic could be discarded, the Ukrainian nationalism of the Bolshevik SSR could not.

The drive for administrative separatism was stimulated by the Ukrainians’ potential homeland across the border in the neighboring Ukrainian SSR. Polish Communists struggled with the appropriate solution to these circumstances: how to allow Ukrainians to separate from the Second Republic without overtly supporting the notion of self-determination. Although eventually (at the Second Party Congress) the KPRP agreed to the notion of separating Ukrainian territories from the Second Republic, they remained vague on the specifics of this process. After all, separatism was acceptable only as a sign of internationalism and not of national aspirations.

Since Eastern Galicia’s proletariat was weak and underdeveloped, the social-national predicament was closely intertwined with the peasant question. Could the conservative and reactionary peasantry be an ally of the revolutionary cause? On the one hand, the agrarian-national challenge was on the doorsteps of opportunism. Unlike the proletariat, the peasants were not committed participants of the revolutionary process a la Marx. On the other hand, though, the partisan movement in Ukraine in the early 1920s had proven its activist value. The disgruntled Ukrainian masses were certainly more revolutionary than their Polish counterparts. Echoing Marx and Engels’ views, there was a potential of initiating a revolution on the periphery and then bringing it to Warsaw. The tactics of sabotage or terrorism, though dismissed on the national level, were promoted in the eastern borderlands of the Second Republic (especially by the ultraleftists). Given the Polish Communists’ inclination for everything

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1353 Most leaders of the KPSH (and the future elites of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine) emerged from the ranks of the International Revolutionary Social Democracy (Internatsionalna revoliutsiina sotsialdemokratiia, IRSD). These included Osyp Krilyk (Vasylkiv), Roman Kuzma (Turiansky) and Roman Rosdolsky (Prokopovych). Solchanyk, “The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938,” 37-41, 48-61; Radziejowski, The Communist Party of Western Ukraine 1919-1929, 10-12.

1354 The new party was an amalgamation of Communist elements from Soviet Russia and those who fought in Austria and later in Ukraine. There has been much debate about the roots of Ukrainian Communism: that it was imported from Soviet Russia or that it was borne out of indigenous roots. In addition to the main groups listed above, other Communist movements also existed. These included the Socialists-Communists (a branch of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party [Ukrainska sotsialdemokratychna partiia, USDP]), the Worker’s-Peasant’s Union, and the Jewish Social Democratic Party. Solchanyk, “The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938,” 158/II-3 t.4, 84.

1355 Mischaś’s contribution to the debate, AAN, KPP, ”Trzecia Konferencja,” 158/II-3 t.4, 84.


1358 Vasylkiv argued against any sort of “sabotazhyzm” against the Polish authorities. The Ultraleftists who won in the factional struggle against the “3 Ws” pressured the KPZU not only to support the partisan movement in the Ukraine but also to actively expand its scope. For instance, they promoted the boycott of taxes in the countryside. Solchanyk, “The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938,” 202-9.
revolutionary, they lunged at every sign of trouble in Eastern Galicia (and Byelorussia), even if it was opposed by the indigenous Communists who feared the repressions of the Polish government.\textsuperscript{1359} 

Already in August of 1919, the Comintern admitted (even if reluctantly) the KPSH into its ranks as an autonomous movement.\textsuperscript{1360} Through the shifting battlefronts of the next two years, as all the various groups fought for influence and supporters, the KPRP’s main priority was organizational integration and party discipline. Failing to grasp the complexities of the Ukrainian situation, it attempted to sway the Comintern to pressure the Ukrainian Communists to follow the \textit{one state one party} policy. A battle thus erupted between \textit{Vasylkivists} (secessionists) who believed in a separate Galician party and those who supported integration into the Polish party.\textsuperscript{1361} Many Ukrainians could not accept the Poles' rejection of the nationality question and criticized their dogmatism, asserting that their obsession with political purity blinded them to the real needs of the masses.\textsuperscript{1362} When during the Soviet-Polish War, the entire eastern front was engulfed by the armies of the two belligerents, both the Polish and the Ukrainian Communists hoped for a Bolshevik victory. The KPRP's press and resolutions protested against the Second Republic's occupation of Eastern Galicia.\textsuperscript{1363} But for the Vasylkivists, the Poles had not gone far enough in the region’s defence.

The discussions intensified in 1921, when, following the Treaty of Riga, it became clear that Eastern Galicia would end up in the Second Republic. In May, the KC initiated a resolution against Vasylkiv, pointing out his activities to subvert the KPRP’s policies. He was too independent in his decisions, opening relations with other parties (e.g., Bund) against the directives coming from Warsaw.\textsuperscript{1364} Polish Communists had reached a crossroads. Recognizing Ukrainian aspirations or accepting administrative separatism would weaken the Polish party and strengthen Ukrainian nationalistic opportunism, but ignoring the national peculiarities of the Ukrainians would only diminish the image of the Poles as defenders of minority rights, and could push the Galician masses into the nationalist camp. Most importantly, the Central Committee remained skeptical about the Ukrainians' ability to shed their nationalist inclinations. During the Third Party Conference, several Polish delegates voiced their reluctance to admit members of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party (\textit{Ukrainska Sotsiial-Demokratychna Partiia}, USDP)—which had turned towards Communism—into the ranks of the KPSH.\textsuperscript{1365} The Comintern mediated between the Poles and the Ukrainians. It concluded the KPSH would exist under the KPRP, but would retain its autonomy and the right to hold its own conferences on organizational issues.\textsuperscript{1366}

Even when the Second Party Congress of the KPRP in late 1923 created the Communist Party of Western Galicia (\textit{Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Galicji}, KPZG) as an autonomous organization within the KPRP, and

\textsuperscript{1361} Solchanyk, “The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938,” 122ff. Vasylkivs got their name from the main leader of the faction Osyp Krilyk (Vasylkiv).
\textsuperscript{1362} Radziejowski, \textit{The Communist Party of Western Ukraine 1919-1929}, 17-20.
\textsuperscript{1365} AAN, 158/I-3 t.4, 100. USDP was finally admitted into the KPZU in March of 1923. By this point, Communists had achieved control over the upper layers of the USDP.
\textsuperscript{1366} Świętołkowa, \textit{Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski 1918-1923}, 97-105.
self-determination was admitted into the party's discourse, the debates continued to rage between the Poles and the Ukrainians. In an attempt to achieve administrative and executive sovereignty, the KPZG's leaders continued to undermine the ideological cohesiveness and tactics of the KPRP, while the CK KPRP continued to disregard the nationalism of the Ukrainians.

The Second Congress of the KPZG in January 1925 revealed the main antagonisms between the Ukrainians and the Poles, which had been stewing for years. The KPRP’s representatives concentrated their criticism on the Ukrainians’ unwillingness to cooperate, refusal to follow instructions, overemphasis on the peasant masses and lack of work amongst the workers. The KPZG, on the other hand, demanded a representative within the Politbiuro of the Central Committee, its own delegate in the Comintern, and went as far as asking for freedom to disregard Warsaw’s resolutions. The most controversial issue pertained to the separation of Western Galicia and its annexation by the Ukrainian SSR. Zinoviev and most Poles believed that this should only happen in the course of a countrywide revolution. However, some Ukrainians (e.g., Shumsky) believed that secession should be the principal slogan of the KPZU. Taking the middle ground, Vasylkivists argued that although the overall objective would be an all-Polish revolution, secession should remain a key slogan to avoid losing appeal amongst the masses. By the late 1920s, the Vasilkyvists and the “Three Ws”—those who offered at least a semblance of a solution to the nationality question—were eliminated from the KPZU and KPRP leadership.

**PERSUADING PARTISAN PEASANTS: BYELORUSSIANS IN THE KPRP.**

Western Byelorussia was an undefined territory until the aftermath of the Soviet-Polish War, when it came to encompass the regions (województwo) of Polesie, Nowogród, Białystok and Wilno. Unlike Ukraine, it was a much more diversely populated area shared by Lithuanians, Poles, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. Like the Ukrainians, the Byelorussians also constituted a majority population in the territory. But given their underdeveloped national identity, there was no separate Byelorussian center of nationalism with the exception of the Soviet model. Hence, unification with the Byelorussian SSR dominated the agenda of the region’s Communists.

Indigenous Communism of Western Byelorussia had slow beginnings. Communist youth groups emerged immediately after the Great War but several years would pass before a distinctly Communist party emerged. In early 1922, a faction of the Byelorussian Revolutionary Organization (Białoruska Rewolucyjna Organizacja, BRO) emerged from the ranks of the Socialist Revolutionaries but it focused on national rather than social liberation. A variety of Communist factions began to unite only in the spring of 1923. Their efforts were then recognized

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1367 They pointed out the various errors of Polish Communists—siding with Trotsky, leftist and rightist deviations, etc. KPZU leaders argued that they did not want to be forced to act in solidarity with the KPRP if it went against the Comintern. Teofil, AAN, Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Ukrainy (KPZU), “Drugi Zjazd – Protokół obrad 1925,” 165/I-2 t.1, 26-36; t. 2, 72-81.


1369 Even Koszutska questioned the future regional name of the Communist Party, since she had a difficult time to see Western Byelorussia as a unified and defined territory. Aleksandra Bergman, “Kwestia białoruska w Komunistycznej Partii Zachodniej Białorusi,” Przegląd Historyczny 62, no. 1 (1971): 227.

1370 Byelorussian nationalism was much more belated than its Ukrainian counterpart. Its first taste of statehood and national aspirations were revealed in 1918-1919 with the short-lived Belorussian Peoples’ Republic.


during the Second Congress of the KPRP, with the formation of the autonomous Communist Party of Western
Byelorussia (Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi). It united the official Communist Party of Byelorussia
(Komunistyczna Partia Białorusi) and parts of the Communist Party of Lithuania (Komunistyczna Partia Litwy).1373

The volatile atmosphere in Western Byelorussia, combined with the KPZU’s calls for the boycott of the
Polish administration, Polish schools, conscription and taxes, as well as the entering of the BRO into the Communist
Party, resulted in the (predominantly peasant) masses flooding into the party.1374 Once again, the Polish Communists
hoped that revolution would come from the periphery. Initially, the elites of the KPZU maintained good relations
with their Polish bosses. Yet, as the Byelorussian Communists quickly realized their growing strength by the latter
half of the 1920s, a movement towards separatism emerged.1375 They preferred to listen to the Bolsheviks in Minsk
than to Polish Communists in Warsaw. The KPRP had to deal with yet another challenge to its administrative unity.
But this was not the only problem they faced in the region.

Ironically, although both the KPZU and the KPBZ maintained recognition of national rights as a pillar of
their policy, neither created sections that would focus on the minorities within their respective territories. For
example, in the city of Lviv, the Poles numbered 30% of the Communist party’s rank and file.1376 Yet, the KPZU did
not publish a single periodical in the Polish language and the question of Polish minority was never discussed as a
separate issue.1377 Such a deliberate negligence was even more surprising in Western Byelorussia, where the Poles
and the Lithuanians resided in considerable numbers. In late 1925, at the Fourth Conference of the KPP, Vincas
Mickiewicius-Kapsukas and Z. Angaretis made a public declaration criticizing the tactics of the KPZU’s Central
Committee. Not only did the party fail to initiate any work amongst the Poles and Lithuanians, but their slogan of
unifying Western Byelorussia with the Soviet Republic was simply alienating the masses.1378 Self-determination was
important but it should not have been narrowed down to the separation of the region and its unification with the
Soviet Republic.

A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY: MEMBERSHIP IN THE KPRP.

There should be no doubt that the minorities played a critical role within the KPRP throughout the interwar
years. But even though the party was striving to become the Communist melting pot, complete integration continued
to be a distant dream. The party remained a mosaic of ethnicities and ideologies, each with its own problems and
aspirations. By the early 1920s, it was an amalgamation of various Polish elements (SDKPiL, PPS-Left, PPS-
Opposition, PSL-Liberation [Polish Peasant Party, Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe—"Wyzwolenie"], NPCh
[Independent Peasant Party, Niezależna Partia Chłopska], etc.), Ukrainian groups (KPGW, USDP, KPZU, etc.),
KPGŚ, KPZB, CBŻ, elements of KPD, and a variety of youth organizations (Union of Communist Youth in Poland

1376 Gabriele Simoncini, “Ethnic and Social Diversity in the Membership of the Communist Party of Poland: 1918-
1378 They submitted the declaration on December 23rd. The following day of the Congress was devoted to the
AAN, KPP, “IV Konferencja – Protokół z obrad – 18-23 XII 1925,” 158/II-4 t.5, 125-6. Bergman sees this as a
critical issue which defined the activities of the KPZB for years. It eventually initiated a policy of national nihilism
in the late 1920s when the Soviet Union’s tactics of indigenization were reversed. Bergman, “Kwestia białoruska w
Komunistycznej Partii Zachodniej Białorusi,” 234ff.
[Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej w Polsce, which after 1930, became the Communist Union of Polish Youth (Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polski)], Communist Union of Western Byelorussia Youth [Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Zachodniej Białorusi], Communist Union of Western Ukrainian Youth [Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Zachodniej Ukrainy], Cukunft), and others. Accommodating all of these ideological and organizational peculiarities within the confines of a single party that struggled with regionalism and illegal status, a hostile government, and which had to contend with a growing power of the Comintern was simply overwhelming.

Antagonisms that existed within national groups were brought into the corridors of the Polish Communism's discourse.1379 Battles against seemingly nationalist deviations were ever present in party that strove for dogmatic purity. Organizational and ideological squabbles over jurisdiction, policy-making and tactics between the Polish center and the ethnic peripheries never ceased. Paradoxically, the minorities were an important ingredient in the KPRP’s successes while simultaneously contributing to its dysfunction and factionalism. Although the leadership of the party remained in the hands of the Poles, electoral seats as well as rank-and-file membership were boosted through minority participation.1380

When the SDKPiL and PPS-Left united in 1918, the membership in the KPRP amounted to about 5000. By early February 1919, it rose to about 7000-8000.1381 Thereafter, it fluctuated between 2,500 and 25,300.1382 Accuracy of membership ranges widely, depending on sources.1383 For example, for 1925, membership in the KPZU ranged from 2087 (Świetlikowa) to over 4000 (Ławnik). The variation in numbers stems from the questionable records (usually determined from Congresses or police reports) as well as undefined affiliations (i.e., the question of which organizations actually comprised the Communist movement at any given time). Some historians include Communist-oriented organizations that were not officially included under the umbrella of the KPRP. The general membership of the party for the interwar period was as follows: 1918 – 5,000 (Holzer); 1919 – 8,000 (Świetlikowa)-10,000 (Holzer); 1920-1923 – 5,000 (Holzer, Cimek) to 10,000 (Świetlikowa); 1924-1925 – 7,000 (Świetlikowa) to 12,000 (Ławnik who includes the ZMK); 1926 – 6,000 (Holzer) to 11,200 (Ławnik); 1927 – 3,150 (Świetlikowa) to 4,749 (Ławnik who sees an incredible increase and adds all possible affiliates); 1928-30 – 6,000 (Holzer) to 11,000 (Ławnik); 1931 – 21,400 (Ławnik); 1932 – 25,664 (Ławnik); 1933 – 17,800 (Simoncini); 1934 – 26,067 (Ławnik).

The KPRP’s numbers fluctuated significantly due to the illegal status of the party (and its clandestine activities), repressions and imprisonment, and the party's disorganization. Ethnic Poles accounted for between 10 to

1379 This was most evident in the challenges that the Ukrainian Communist brought into the fold of the KPRP. See, for instance, the debates on the Skrypnyk-Shumsky affair in the latter half of the 1920s. Radziejowski, The Communist Party of Western Ukraine 1919-1929, 127-59.

1380 For statistics on party membership, see below. In terms of parliamentary activity, the Ukrainian contingent was much stronger than its Polish counterpart. In 1924, the members of the Ukrainian socialist club joined the Communist faction, essentially tripling the Communist representation in the Polish parliament. For details, see Zbigniew Zaporowski, Między sejmem a wiecem: Działalność Komunistycznej Frakcji Poselskiej w latach 1921-1935 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 1997).

1381 Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 21, 30. See also note 49 in Chapter 12.


70% of the party membership, even though they dominated its leadership.\textsuperscript{1384} Their numbers were highest in the first 5 years of the party's existence and declined thereafter. The remaining members included Jews, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians and Germans. The Jewish participation fluctuated between 22 and 35\% (a peak reached in 1930) and was even higher (reaching upwards of 50\%) in the youth movement.\textsuperscript{1385} Between 1930 and 1937, the KPZU and KPZB accounted for anywhere between 50\% (in 1930) and 93\% (in 1933) of the membership within the Polish Communist movement.\textsuperscript{1386} "In a sense," as Schatz aptly concludes, "it can be argued that the Communists’ nationalities policy proved almost too successful: by the 1930s, ethnic Poles had become a minority in the Polish Communist movement."\textsuperscript{1387}

\textsuperscript{1384} Only Simoncini maintains that ethnic Poles always retained majority with numbers ranging between 50\% in 1930 to 72.5\% in 1923. Simoncini, “Ethnic and Social Diversity in the Membership of the Communist Party of Poland: 1918-1938,” 59.

\textsuperscript{1385} Schatz, "Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland," 18, 20. Mishkinsky estimates the number to be lower at about 20\%. “The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews,” 62.

\textsuperscript{1386} These numbers include the respective youth organizations of the two parties. Schatz, "Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland," 18, 20. Again, Simoncini offers somewhat lower numbers for the KPZU and KPZB, arguing that even at their height, the two parties averaged around 50-60\% of the KPRP membership. Simoncini, “Ethnic and Social Diversity in the Membership of the Communist Party of Poland: 1918-1938,” 58-60.

\textsuperscript{1387} Schatz, "Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland," 19.
THE SEARCH FOR ALLIES: THE TURNING POINT WITHIN POLISH COMMUNISM.

The first three years of KPRP’s existence had been filled with disappointments. The signing of the Treaty of Riga consolidated the borders of the Second Republic, calmed international relations in East Central Europe, and destroyed the promise of spreading Communism outside the Soviet Union. The demise of the German revolutionary dream was especially disheartening for Polish Communists and the representatives of the Comintern. It became obvious that everyone had overestimated the revolutionary vigour of the workers, who, tired of wartime sacrifices, preferred peace and order rather than barricades. By 1923, even Poland’s economic situation was stabilizing.\footnote{Leczyk, \textit{Druga Rzeczpospolita 1918-1939}, 62-105, 127-40.} The horizon of socialist rupture moved farther and farther away.\footnote{The 1918-1919 revolutionary activity in Germany had been defeated. Bela Kun’s Hungary had long ceased to exist. And the seemingly socialist peasant government in Bulgaria (under Aleksandar Stamboliyski) had succumbed to a military coup.} Reliance on a narrow proletarian base and the failure of the Workers’ Councils had revealed the limitations of the KPRP’s strategy. Disregarding the peasant and national questions had not only made them few friends, but even distanced them from the masses. A shift in tactics was required if the party was to effectively act as the leader of the exploited in the Second Republic. However, it would take a few years for Polish Communists to objectively reflect on their performance, with Walecki as one of the first to identify KPRP’s weaknesses.

In February 1921, Walecki published a brochure “On the Tactics and Attitude towards Parliamentarism.”\footnote{Walecki outlined three main reasons why the party boycotted the elections: firstly, to juxtapose the notions of the RDR against the Sejm (parliament); secondly, it hoped that a forthcoming revolution would destroy the parliament; and thirdly, the party was too young, weak and inexperienced to deal with the issue of elections.} Assessing the KPRP’s accomplishments, he criticized the party’s avoidance of difficult issues. Thorny questions had been neglected for the sake of administrative unity and ideological purity. The party’s response to events was too often guarded and slow. During the Soviet-Polish War, the party failed to rouse people in a fight for power. Yet, the greatest miscalculation of the party was developing tactics without properly gauging the mood and immediate aspirations of the masses. This was most evident in its approach to parliamentarism, which was abandoned outright without an assessment of its potential contributions to the daily lives of workers and to the revolutionary cause.\footnote{Walecki, “O taktyce i o stosunku do parlamentaryzmu,” in \textit{Wybór pism, Tom II, 1918-1937}, ed. Jan Kancewicz (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1967), 5-46.} Although Walecki believed that only a socialist revolution could defeat capitalism, he recognized a variety of tactics that could be used to appeal to the masses. “The chief principle on questions of tactics,” he explained, “is to choose such a line of action, which will allow the communist party to carry its agitation to the broadest masses; to move the masses, to educate them, gather them under the banner of communism, set them against the bourgeoisie and its supporters, to revolutionize them.”\footnote{Henryk Walecki, “O taktyce i o stosunku do parlamentaryzmu,” in \textit{Wybór pism, Tom II, 1918-1937}, ed. Jan Kancewicz (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1967), 5-46.} The brochure rattled the sanctity of the KPRP, which believed itself to be beyond reproach. But such pressures for change were coming not only from within the party.
What further stimulated the coming shift was the Comintern itself. Nevertheless, the accusation that the KPRP was an agent of Soviet foreign policy from its inception is somewhat misleading. The Co mintern itself. Beyond the experiment of the TKRP, Polish Communists had infrequent contacts with Moscow before 1921. Although they readily accepted the “Twenty-one Conditions” of membership in the Third International, they developed a political line that often opposed the directives of the Soviets. The KPRP was composed of experienced and hardened intellectuals, young and volatile members and a mosaic of (regional and ethnic) workers, none of whom were willing pawns. The main tenets of the Second, Third and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern (in July-August 1920, June-July 1921, and November 1922) were contested by the Poles. Since contacts between the Comintern and the Polish Communists were sporadic before 1921, only the Third Congress, which took place after the conclusion of the Soviet-Polish War, welcomed a sizable representation of the Poles. But even when they became receptive to Lenin’s directives, Poles still showed independence and defiance.

There were several instances when the KPRP not only refused to follow directions from Moscow, but were even critical of the Bolshevik tactics and policies. The KPRP, for example, sided with German Communists in criticizing the Kremlin’s coercion of Germans to initiate the March Action of 1921, which became a complete fiasco. The Bolsheviks were not impressed with the Poles’ audacity to place blame at Moscow’s doorsteps. Moreover, Henryk Lauer criticized the Bolsheviks’ (and more specifically Lenin’s) fear of ideological dissent within party ranks. Lauer believed that debate and discussion were healthy for the growth of Communism. Likewise, in February of 1922, in a letter to Zinoview, Walecki openly opposed the tactics of a united front, which he believed to be premature in the Polish case. He also reprimanded the Comintern for disciplining member parties that opposed its policy, arguing that they had to account for local conditions when accepting or rejecting directives coming from Moscow. These acts of defiance were never forgotten and did eventually contribute to Stalin’s decision to dissolve the party in 1938. Yet, even though the Poles were reluctant to accept the ideas of the Comintern’s first three congresses, they began to entertain their merit, especially since the Comintern still placed great emphasis on revolutionary activity. To some extent, the period after the Third Congress became a turning point for the Poles, who

1394 The KPRP was one of the first in Europe to accept the conditions imposed by Moscow even before they were officially imposed at the Comintern’s Second Congress. Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939, 18; McDermott and Agnew, The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin, 11.
1395 There should be no doubt that the first three congresses of the Comintern were meant to centralize the entire Communist movement in the hands of the Bolsheviks. The Second Congress was an attempt to universalize Bolshevism by promoting Moscow’s leadership within the Comintern through the “Twenty-one Conditions.” It was meant to subjugate all of the Communist movements in Europe. It also intended on removing the reformers and centrists from the ranks of the left in the name of unity. “But the Bolsheviks did not wish simply to create tiny sects,” as McDermott and Agnew explain, “the dichotomy was therefore how to establish mass parties on the basis of a rigid discipline.” (18) The Third Congress further expanded the Executive Committee’s ability to interfere in the daily operations of the various member parties. One of the key changes was that congresses of member parties were to take place following the Comintern’s congress, to allow for the application of policies coming out of Moscow. McDermott and Agnew, The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin, 10-40.
1398 The Second Congress of the Comintern urged member parties to establishe a united front beyond the working class—to reach the peasantry and even nationalists (especially in colonies).
realized that the daily struggle to improve the lives of the working masses was important, and that new (non-revolutionary) tactics could reap success.\textsuperscript{1400}

After KPRP’s years of struggle revealed only a few accomplishments, some leaders of Polish Communism realized that more effective tactics had to be introduced if the party is to achieve a broader appeal. One common theme began to emerge—it was pointed out by Wera Kostrzewa in her summary of the proceedings of the Comintern’s Third Congress: the proletariat needed to unite all oppressed elements that were striving for liberation in order to create a formidable brigade against the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{1401} But a shift in strategy would be difficult given the oppressive and conspiratory environment, which had turned the KPRP into an inflexible besieged fortress whose perceived strength stemmed from ideological purity, iron discipline and an uncompromising attitude. The two years preceding the KPRP’s Second Congress exposed the various challenges of the much-needed transformation.

The minutes of the Second and Third Conferences (in February 1921 and April 1922) of the KPRP revealed much not only about the Polish Communists’ struggle with change, but also about the relations between the Poles and the Bolsheviks. Several Poles found the suggestions coming from Moscow—especially those pertaining to reaching out to a broader audience—as too opportunistic and deviationist. During the Second Conference, some delegates even argued that the Third International was nothing more than a nationalist group representing Russian interests and compromising its proletarian priorities.\textsuperscript{1402} One of the most contested issues at the two conferences was the policy of a united front. For many Polish Communists, promoting a united front with moderate socialists or participating in elections was simply unacceptable. “If we come to the masses with the notion of a united front,” as one participant argued, “they will not understand us, they will see us as compromisers.”\textsuperscript{1403} Taking the most extreme position, Władysław Grzech-Kowalski maintained that nothing less than a purely Communist and proletarian party would do. Neither the peasantry nor socialists could be admitted into the ranks of Communism without destroying its ideological core. He insinuated that the Bolsheviks had become representatives of a state—perhaps not a bourgeois state but a state nonetheless—and that there was a growing divide between the nationally oriented Russian Bolsheviks and the internationalist Comintern.\textsuperscript{1404} Nonetheless, others had begun to realize that circumstances had limited the socialist revolution to Russia, that Communists had to accept partial objectives that improved workers’ daily lives, and that some cooperation with other left-minded groups would be valuable.\textsuperscript{1405}

More than anything else, these discussions highlighted the factional trenches that were emerging within the party corridors.


\textsuperscript{1402} ANN, KPP, “Druga Konferencja,” 158/II-2 t.2. The Poles were certainly not alone in their criticism. Clara Zetkin, for instance, communicated directly with Lenin to complain about the Executive Committee of the Comintern’s heavy-handed approach to the various member parties. McDermott and Agnew, \textit{The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin}, 25.

\textsuperscript{1403} AAN, KPP, “Trzecia Konferencja,” 158/II-3 t.4.

\textsuperscript{1404} AAN, KPP, “Trzecia Konferencja,” 158/II-3 t.4. This is somewhat ironic given that the ECCI was actually moving against Lenin’s prescription to avoid pushing for a Russian solution to the challenges of the various member parties.

\textsuperscript{1405} AAN, KPP, “Trzecia Konferencja,” 158/II-3 t.4.
Although resistance to change persisted, the Third Conference of the KPRP pushed forward three pressing issues. Firstly, a resolution was passed supporting united front tactics, which were then implemented during the strikes throughout the remainder of the year. Secondly, a discussion of the peasant question was finally initiated. And thirdly, the party decided to participate in the parliamentary elections of November 1922 under the guise of the Union of the Proletariat of the Towns and Countryside (Związek Proletariatu Miast i Wsi, ZPMiW).\footnote{The ZPMiW was created in August 1922 to participate in the 5 November elections. The movement received between 126,000 and 130,000 votes and only two candidates were elected on the ZPMiW’s ticket: Stanisław Łańcucki and Stefan Królikowski. See Zbigniew Zaporowski, Między Sejmem a Wiecem: Działalność Komunistycznej Frakcji Poselskiej w latach 1921-1935 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 1997).} The overarching themes that emerged during 1921 and 1922 associated KPRP’s success with a need for allies; with improving the conditions of the working masses; and with the possibility of a phase of democracy preceding socialism.\footnote{Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 89-97; Cimek and Kieszczynski, Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938, 69-78. Both Simoncini and Cimek see the Third Conference as a critical turning point—probably the most important in the early 1920s—in the history of the KPRP.} Although the gradual ideological shift reflected a genuine conversion of some members, many still perceived these changes as tactical instrumentalism or even opportunism. Hence, as new policies entered the party’s mainstream, their application was inconsistent and haphazard.\footnote{This inconsistency is visible for instance in how the KPRP approached the November elections. Although the party called for a united front during 1 May 1922 celebrations, the PPS refused in most instances to cooperate with the Communists. However, when the Communists were approached by Bund, the Party of Independent Socialists (Partia Niezależnych Socjalistów w Polsce) and Poaley Zion to create a voting bloc, the KPRP refused to collaborate.}

Although change was finally affecting the practices and ideology of the KPRP, there was still a reluctance to deal with nationalism. Adolf Warski, who was highly critical of the “childish disease of leftism”\footnote{This refers to Lenin’s “Left Wing” Communism: An Infantine Disorder, published in June 1920, which criticized the ultraleftist dogmatism. In Collected Works, Volume 31 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1968), 17-118.}—which was by now consolidating into an “opposition” within the KPRP—still defended SDKPiL’s battle against nationalism, not only as the proper approach in the past but also as a viable policy even in the present.\footnote{Adolf Warski, “W sprawach partyjnych,” originally published in a series of articles in Nowy Przegląd, August-December 1922, in n Wybór pism i przemówień, Tom II, ed. T. Daniszewski (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1958), 91-131.} The national question was understood solely as a battle against anti-Semitism and chauvinism, and as support of minority rights, and not as endorsement of self-determination, of Polish statehood, or of Polish national interests. Articles that appeared in the Nowy Przegląd (New Review) and Kultura Robotnicza (Workers’ Culture) in 1922, depicted nationalism as an artificial construct developed by capitalism to satisfy its own ends.\footnote{Henryk Stein-Kamiński (L. Domski), “Gruzja a Rosja Sowiecka,” Nowy Przegląd nr. 1-2, June 1922, reprinted in Nowy Przegląd (Reedyicyja): 1922, ed. Józef Kowalczyk, Felicja Kalicka, and Eugenia Brun (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1957), 45-55. Stein argued that nationalism was a contemporary artificial construct that emerged in the interest of capitalism. Moreover, he painted the Bolshevik takeover of Georgia as justifiable. Jur. (unidentified author), “Narodowość,” Kultura Robotnicza nr. 8, 4 June 1922, 8-14. Similarly to Domski, the article offered a definition of nationality that had no relation to constructs of common traits, ancestry, race, traditions or religion. Only language and state provided for a consolidation of nations in the modern age, and usually based on economic expediency. Once established, these nation-states assimilated all elements within their borders.} Nevertheless, political expediency and practicality were creeping into the party ideology. Moreover, the experiences of the ZPMiW, pressures from the...
Comintern, and the growing need to formulate a strong position on the party’s nationality position, started to break away at the dogmatism of the KPRP.

**COMMUNISTS GO TO THE POLLS: ZPMiW AND THE NOVEMBER 1922 ELECTIONS.**

The ZPMiW’s political platform claimed that Poland’s welfare had been sacrificed on the altar of expansionism. Imperial wars deepened the economic misery of the country and had led to the loss of territory. The Union decided to try a new approach. It appealed to the oppressed minorities, urging them to reject the nationalist rhetoric of their bourgeois compatriots, and arguing that only Communists could ensure their liberation.  

But what would this liberation entail? Socialism would give them a right to land and to self-determination. This was indeed the first time that the concept of national self-determination entered the vocabulary of Polish Communism. Although the promised freedom was vague, and to many party leaders it only denoted cultural development, its insertion into the Communist discourse was important. But as soon as the Union emerged with its political platform, it became clear that the nationality question in Poland was no simple matter. When the Polish Communists went to the polls, their Ukrainian counterparts boycotted the elections, maintaining that their participation would be interpreted as acceptance of Poland’s annexation of Eastern Galicia.  

The anti-governmental rhetoric had certainly grabbed the attention of the minorities, but bringing them into the fold of Communism would require finesse. Nonetheless, although the ZMPiW was divided along factional lines, somewhat disorganized, and experienced widespread repressions, its participation in the elections marked the entrance of the KPRP into Poland’s politics.

The results of the November Sejm and Senate elections revealed the potential power of the disgruntled elements within the Second Republic. The various declarations and reports of the ZPMiW highlighted that their work amongst the minorities had experienced more severe repressions, as if the authorities had feared their agitation amongst the nationalities. Warski interpreted the results as exposing two highly explosive issues—the peasant and national questions. “In the electoral results,” he explained, “it was revealed that the Pilsudskiite great-power aspirations in Eastern Europe, that the pettybourgeois-democratic imperialism under the mask of ‘federation,’ under the slogan of ‘for our freedom and Yours,’ suffered an abysmal bankruptcy.” Commnisists had to take advantage of this situation, and offer all these “political outcasts” a home. Although Communists were certainly not ready to abandon revolutionism, they now entertained other pathways to socialism. Already in the summer of 1922, Warski penned an article suggesting that a democratic phase should persist in the Polish context before the advent of a

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1413 “Do ludu pracującego Polski! (Odezwa Związku Proletariatu Miast i Wsi, 1920).”
1414 For a study of the Ukrainians’ reaction to the 1922 elections, see Tadeusz Biernacek, *Spór o taki kę* (Zielona Góra: WSP Zielona Góra, 1985). Similarly to Radziejowski, Biernacek argues that the Vasyliivists contested the legality of Polish status in Ukrainian territories—Poland had no legal precedent to carry out elections in the region. Ukrainian Communists like Roman Rosdolsky argued that the national and the social questions were closely intertwined. Ukrainians were not only reacting against the Polish government’s national oppression, Ukrainian peasants were also revolting against Polish landowners.
1415 The ZMPiW received 132,000 votes for the Sejm and another 50,000 votes for the Senate. It acquired two representatives in the Sejm: Stanisław Lancucki (from Dąbrowa Basin) and Stefan Królkiowski (from Warsaw). For details, see Rokoszkowski, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, 141-3.
1416 See, for instance, some of the declarations in “Jak się przeprowadza ‘czyste’ wybory,” *Nowy Przegląd* nr. 6-7, November-December 1922, reprinted in *Nowy Przegląd (Reedycja): 1922*, 474-511.
socialist revolution. Communists could thus build a united front with socialists in order to push for democratic rights. This new attitude aligned with what the Comintern instructions had been urging the Poles to do all along.

TO THE MASSES! HOW TO FIND ALLIES IN THE COMMUNIST STRUGGLE.

In the two years following the end of the Soviet-Polish War, when Moscow obtained a clearer picture of the situation within Polish Communism, the Comintern was not impressed. Given the unremitting critique of Soviet policies coming out of the KPRP, the Russians felt obliged to respond in kind. In December of 1922, the Executive Committee of the Comintern sent a letter to the KPRP, attacking its various shortcomings. The letter criticized the Polish ultraleftists’ depictions of the first Communist homeland as promoting national Soviet-Russian interests at the expense of proletarian goals. The Comintern demanded that the Poles fall in line on tactics such as united front, parliamentarism, and the agrarian and national questions. The Comintern had noticed that the last issue garnered most resistance. It could not understand why the Poles refused to exploit the minority issue at home, where more than a third of the population constituted non-Poles. It proclaimed that “in the period of civil unrest and the upcoming revolution [the minorities] are natural allies of the revolutionary proletariat,” and thus the Communist party “should instil in them a belief that only a revolutionary overthrow is capable of breaking their chains.” Moreover, it urged the Poles to accept the slogan of self-determination as the most effective weapon against national oppression.

By the summer of 1923, a turning point was visible within the leadership of the KPRP. Warski, along with Wera Kostrzewa and Walecki (the trio were nicknamed the “Three Ws”) spearheaded the emerging ideological shift. Though still defending the SDKPiL’s opposition to nationalism in the pre-World War I years as a product of the prevailing conditions at the time, Warski now asserted that the current party policy must not be a “straightforward chronological extension of the SDKPiL.” Break away from the Luxemburgist legacy—no matter how subtle or small—was a huge leap. But Warski simply argued that the party had to respond to the new circumstances in this current epoch of revolutionary fighting. He proclaimed that “the slogan of ‘self-determination’ of peoples will hasten the destruction of capitalist states” and will show that only the dictatorship of the proletariat can ensure national liberation.

The June issue of *Nowy Przegląd* included an outline of the “Tactical-Programmatic Tasks (Action Program) in the Era of Capitalist and Reactionary Offensive.” It was a response to both, the Comintern’s slogan of “to the masses!” and the positive experience of the November elections. It contended that Poland’s bourgeoisie, bound in a perpetual struggle for territorial acquisitions through militarism, had placed Poland’s sovereignty at risk. This sovereignty could only be ensured by a victorious revolution and the emergence of a European family of socialist republics. This was another important ideological milestone, as Polish statehood was being accepted as a viable policy within the new strategy. The proposal also identified three potential sources in Polish society that

1419 „List Komitetu Wykonawczego Miedzynarodówki Komunistycznej do KPRP z 19 grudnia 1922 r.,” in KPP Uchwały i rezolucje, Tom 1, 183.
1420 „List Komitetu Wykonawczego Miedzynarodówki Komunistycznej do KPRP z 19 grudnia 1922 r.,” 183.
1422 „Zadania taktyczno-programowe (program akcji) w okresie ofensywy kapitału i reakcji (project),” *Nowy Przegląd* nr. 8, June 1923, reprinted in *Nowy Przegląd (Reedycja):* 1923, 95-110.
could become revolutionary detonators: growing capitalistic coercion of the masses; bankruptcy of the land reform; and the oppression of minorities. In regards to the last issue, the proposal stated that “the party should, with full intensity, agitate in the defence of the right of peoples to freely determine their own fate.” Two slogans would promote this new general approach: “struggle for the worker-peasant government” and the “battle for the proletarian united front.”

The focus on the worker-peasant government denoted the inclusion of the peasantry within the Communist framework. Peasants would now stand arm in arm with workers in their struggle to achieve power. Equally important was the promotion of a united front, which opened the door to potential alliances with minorities and non-Communists. Yet, even though innovative ideas mushroomed in the KPRP, there was an equally powerful movement growing that opposed these changes. The September 1923 issue of *Nowy Przegląd* revealed the emerging divisions within the party leadership. A fierce battle erupted between the center and the ultraleftists, ending only in the latter half of the 1920s with the victory of the latter. This war had existed since the very inception of the Communist party, but was now assuming much fiercer battlefronts.

In the aforementioned September issue of the *Nowy Przegląd*, Walecki reiterated the threats to Polish independence as stemming from the expansionism of the bourgeoisie and the resulting economic downturn. Every new war or expansionist policy magnified Poland’s indenture to Entente imperialism. Only the liberation of the peasants and workers could build a genuine foundation of a free and independent Poland. Yet, the ultraleftists of the KPRP were not willing to adapt the new political line.

Henryk Stein-Kamiński (Leon Domski) launched an attack on the new strategy. No one was spared criticism as even the Comintern was painted as bordering on opportunism, reformism, and Menshevism, becoming a “caricature of Communism.” The united front tactics or political “manoeuvring” (e.g., Soviet Union’s diplomatic relations with other states), suitable for the Russian context, were not viable elsewhere. Communists in the midst of revolutionary fighting could afford nothing short of ideological purity. Domski harshly reprimanded Moscow for pressuring German and Polish Communists to accept more “patriotic” attitudes. He concluded that SDKPiL had been right all along in rejecting everything national. “We are communists,” he asserted, “who, for the purpose of agitation, are playing reformists.” Acquiring the support of the masses could never be achieved at the expense of principles or through the contrivance of false slogans. One genuine Communist was worth more than a thousand questionable reformers. Luxemburgist internationalism and dogmatism could never be sold to nationalist opportunism, even if it held the promise of strengthening the membership of the party.

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1423 “Zadania taktyczno-programowe (program akcji) w okresie ofensywy kapitału i reakcji (project),” 101, 109.
1425 Henryk Walecki, “O rząd robotniczo-chłopski w Polsce,” *Nowy Przegląd* nr. 9, Wrzesień 1923, reprinted in *Nowy Przegląd (Reedycja):* 1923, 139-150. The notion of the defence of Polish statehood as a policy within the political line of the KPRP only fully emerged at the Fourth Party Conference (in November-December 1925) but was quickly shut down by the ultraleftist victory in the factional struggle.
1427 Domski goes as far as to claim that the PPS-Leftist influences were ruining the pure legacy of the Polish Social Democracy.
1428 Domski, “Nektóre zagadnienia taktyczne,” 213.
In turn, Ernest Lauer-Brand responded to the ultraleftist accusations by painting Domski as a professional critic who, obsessed with dogmatism and economic determinism, refused to understand the need to react to contemporary circumstances. Lauer-Brand reasoned that even the dictatorship of the proletariat in Poland would engender a period of democracy, during which Communists would strive for partial objectives and for a united front. Moreover, preparations for a revolutionary overthrow would necessitate the opening of the party to the masses, including the minorities. “Who, in the Ukrainian and Byelorussian peasant, desperately fighting the Polish landowner and gendarme, sees only a nationalist and contemptuously turns away from them,” he concluded, “who today in Poland of 1923 calls opportunistic the slogan of self-determination of nations and wants to combat every national irredentism and separatism, he is not an internationalist, a revolutionary, but rather, under the cover of internationalism, flatters the worst chauvinistic urges of the Polish proletariat and thus directly serves the bourgeoisie.”1429 To succeed, Polish Communists had to reach out to the minorities and to their own leftist-minded compatriots. Self-determination was not opportunism; it was an internationalist necessity.

**REVISITING NATIONAL NIHILISM: THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE KPRP OPENS.**

Throughout 1923, winds of change began to blow into the sails of the KPRP. The assassination of the first President Gabriel Narutowicz in late 1922, who had won on the massive support from minorities and the Left, marked the beginning of another wave of repressions. Although a rightwing fanatic killed Narutowicz, the government’s kneejerk reaction to maintain stability was directed against the minorities and the Communists.1430 Two general currents in Poland’s political life affected the KPRP. Firstly, 1922 and 1923 witnessed considerable labour unrest in the Second Republic. Starting in October of 1922, strikes broke out in Silesia, and quickly spread to Dąbrowski Basin and Kraków.1431 Secondly, Poland seemed to move closer to the anti-democratic political orientation that engulfed East Central Europe. This was reflected in the victory of the right in Polish political life.1432 Given this volatile situation, many of the party leaders realized that significant modifications would have to be made to its policies in order to garner support and prevent what they considered to be a potential coup.

As revealed above, debates raged in the Communist press throughout 1922 and 1923 over the proper tactics. All of the discussions culminated in the Second Congress of the KPRP, which occurred between 19 September and 2 October 1923 in the Soviet Union. The Congress took place amidst what appeared to be an atmosphere of instability across Europe. Unfortunately, signs of trouble on the continent once again made Polish Communists intoxicated with the belief in a revolutionary solution.1433 After all, as Broué explains, “the Bolsheviks had been waiting since 1917 for a revolution in Germany” and “they considered that they had not long to wait,” so

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1430 Roszkowski, Najnowsza historia Polski 1914-1945, 143-8; Leczyk, Druga Rzeczpospolita 1918-1939, 178-85.


1432 Leczyk, Druga Rzeczpospolita 1918-1939, 178-85.

1433 This was associated with Ruhr Crisis of 1923, when the French army occupied the region when Germany halted reparation payments. The KPD became embroiled in the ensuing events. When the government in Saxony fell, the German Communists launched a campaign for a united front with the SPD which assumed power with the help of the KPD. This certainly did not satisfy the Communists who were hoping for a genuine workers’ government. What further confused the situation was Radek’s support for Albert Schlager, a nationalist who fought against the French occupation. Moscow mediated in the growing divisions within the ranks of the KPD over the proper tactics towards the emerging situation: whether or not Germany was ready for a socialist revolution. By the summer of 1923, seeing an opportunity in the volatile and strike-filled Germany, the Comintern encouraged preparation for an uprising, which eventually failed. Broué, The German Revolution 1917-1923, 685-816.
that by the fall of 1923, “Zinoviev saw its victory as more or less guaranteed.” Police repression (along with public trials) of the KPRP and Communist terrorist activities (e.g., bombings) encouraged the prospects of revolutionary victory. The Second Congress was to generate a response to these events. And similarly as their German counterparts, albeit in different ways, the Poles were also confronted with the nationality question.

The nationality question thus permeated all key areas of discussion at the congress: imminent German revolution, united front, peasant-worker government, party organization, as well as agrarian and trade union questions. Two days were devoted exclusively to the issue of nationalism. Hence, if revolution was imminent and if Communists were to be victorious, they needed to be prepared. Since they would need allies in the revolutionary struggle, it was essential to revisit the nationality policy. This was especially prudent as a proper approach to nationalism had assisted the Bolshevik cause after the October Revolution.

The nationality question appeared in a variety of forms. One of the most fundamental and difficult steps was a reassessment of the SDKPiL’s anti-national legacy. Was the Social Democratic position proper in the pre- and post-war years? Was national nihilism still a viable tactic? Should Lenin’s self-determination be admitted into the discourse of Polish Communism? This re-examination of this important tenet of the KPRP’s Weltanschauung was critical if the party had any hope of reaching the broader masses of the Second Republic. Not only the peasants and the working intelligentsia, not only other socialists (through a united front), but especially the minorities would have to be persuaded to join the cause. But could they be trusted to stay the course and not abandon ship to national-bourgeois opportunism? Moreover, there was also a question of how to accommodate these ethnicities within the framework of the KPRP. The problem of administrative-executive sovereignty surfaced as the delegates deliberated on a new party structure.

The proposed nationality policy, though accepted by most, did not prevent disagreements over its theoretical viability and practical application. Was separation of Western Ukraine and Byelorussia, and the unification with their respective socialist republics a feasible solution? Would this not lead to irredentism? If

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1436 The KPD had trouble accepting Radek’s defence of the Schlageter line. Many German Communists believed that a defence of a well-known nationalist—no matter how well intentioned—was simply unacceptable. Factionalism quickly erupted within the KPD over this issue. Nonetheless, the Comintern encouraged cooperation with questionable elements if it meant that a revolution could break out in Germany.

1437 It is surprising how little attention Polish Communists paid to Lenin’s self-determination in their meetings and publications. Luxemburg’s rhetoric against self-determination certainly had taken root within the party ideology. Polish Communists in the Soviet Union were the only ones to use examples of Soviet nationality policy in their work.

1438 Several leaders of the KPRP saw the question of party organization as a critical issue. See, for instance, speeches by Władysław Stein-Krajewski or Brand-Lauer: AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 1.

1439 “Za naszą i waszą wolność!”, in AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 8, 77-82.

1440 Domski and Julian Leński (Leszczyński) led the ultraleftist charge against most of the resolutions passed at the Second Congress. Cimek and Kieszczynski, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938*, 98ff.
nationalism of the minorities was acceptable, would the nationalism of the majority be unobjectionable? Could Polish statehood be recognized and tolerated without infringing on internationalism? What territories could be considered Polish, German, Ukrainian, Byelorussian or Lithuanian? A genuine attempt was made at the congress to respond to these questions, at least by a section of the party, even if the answers stirred much passion and division.\footnote{Cimek and Kieszczyński, \textit{Komunisztyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938}, 98ff; Trembicka, \textit{Między apologią a negacją}, 31ff.}

As one of the two representatives of the Comintern (Radek being the other), Zinoviev fired the opening salvo of the congress. Amongst other issues—including the peasant question, German revolution and the united front—the speech outlined all the key issues that affected the nationality question. Zinoviev tackled the legacy of SDKPiL’s national nihilism. He pointed out that the struggle against the socialpatriotism of the PPS in the prewar years was the right tactic given the prevailing historical conditions. Nonetheless, he urged the Communists to develop a new strategy since absolute (or simplified) internationalism had led towards national nihilism. “In a country such as Poland,” Zinoviev explained, “with such a conglomeration of national antagonisms, it could be assumed that the nationality matter should be the source of greatest strength for Your party.”\footnote{Zinoviev, “Przemówienie tow. Zionowjewa,” 25.}

Going over the dirty laundry of Polish Communism, he lamented that the Poles could not resolve organizational squabbles with Ukrainians, that they neglected the national-agrarian challenge, that they could not even obtain the Jewish vote, and that they should not expect to accomplish the revolution on the backs of the Red Army.\footnote{Zinoviev, “Przemówienie tow. Zionowjewa,” 25-31.} This was a scathing criticism of all the issues that had demeaned the appeal of the KPRP.

Zinoviev argued that the struggle against bourgeois chauvinism was important, but that equally pressing was a constructive approach to the national question of the minorities and the Polish nation. Two objectives guided his attitude. Firstly, an appropriate policy was critical to the success of the German revolution—which was about to break out. It was vital that the Polish masses be inspired to support the events in Germany, and in the process perhaps, even abolish their own bourgeois regime, or at the very least, that the Poles neutralize any potential intervention by their government.\footnote{Zinoviev, “Przemówienie tow. Zionowjewa,” 27.} The second objective was much less overt and had to do with Soviet foreign policy. The Soviets wanted to exploit the cross-border ethnic ties of the minorities. It was hoped that the two Soviet Republics would eventually annex Poland’s Ukrainians and Byelorussians.\footnote{Martin, \textit{The Affirmative Action Empire}, 225-8. Martin argues that such a foreign policy objective was instrumental in shaping the emergence of administrative autonomy within the KPRP.} To achieve these goals, Zinoviev’s prescription was clear: exploit the nationality question in the Second Republic by appealing to both the minorities and the Polish nation, and this will surely neutralize the Polish government’s hostility towards the Soviet Union and eventually will initiate a countrywide revolution.\footnote{Zinoviev, “Przemówienie tow. Zionowjewa,” 33-47. This is also Trembicka’s position on Zinoviev’s motives in participating in the congress. \textit{Między apologią a negacją}, 34.}

Debates ensued immediately about the party’s work amongst minorities and the proposed new line of promoting self-determination. Contrary to the optimistic perception of the Central Committee, the consensus from the various district reports was a list of complaints about the ineffective or harmful work of the Polish Communists.
amongst non-Poles. This was one of many telltale signs of the inconsistency in ideology and practices within the party. Throughout the congress, the minorities’ deputies and the representatives of the KC disagreed on how the various non-Polish ethnicities fared in the fold of the KPRP. The Polish Communists’ dogmatism and internationalism had created a rift between the Polish leadership and the non-Polish members of the party. The Jewish and Ukrainian cases clearly illustrate these contradictory perceptions.

Izaak Gordin depicted the party’s approach to the Jews as either neglectful or unsuitable. Pinkus Bukshorn pointed out that work against anti-Semitism was inadequate, with some party members even inclining to its appeal. Only Saul Amsterdam, while trying to defend the party line, maintained that the party’s work had been effective, especially their battle against clericalism and Zionism. In any case, those working amongst the Jews did not complain about the KPRP’s ineffectiveness as much as their Ukrainian colleagues did.

Recounting the work in Eastern Galicia, Adolf Langer (Ostap Dłuski) claimed that the political line of the KC had been harmful to the work amongst the Ukrainians. Although a supporter of the one countrywide party policy, he rejected “Polska Republika Rad” as a slogan that sounded foreign and suspicious to the Ukrainian masses. Promoting anything Polish in the Kresy was simply suspicious. “We have to clearly state,” he asserted, “that Ukrainian territories under Polish control will be, as a result of a socialist revolution, united with Soviet Ukraine.” Moreover, he deplored the organizational confusion in Eastern Galicia of having four distinct organizations—ZPMiW, USDP, KPGW and KPRP—each competing for members. Asking people to join one or all four created ideological and organizational chaos.

Osip Krilyk (Vasylkiv) took an even harsher line than his compatriot. Although he welcomed the official promotion of self-determination, he questioned the genuineness of the KC’s promises given their track record of opposing everything national. Moreover, he was averse to the accepted practices of the party’s work amongst the minorities. This was visible, for instance, in the party’s emphasis on publications in Russian or Polish, rather than Ukrainian. Not recognizing Ukrainian as a literary language was offensive. Even worse was interference by KC emissaries who did not understand the local conditions. They often arrived in a region, demanding the implementation of certain policies, which had little appeal within the local population. According to Krilyk, the only viable slogan for the Ukrainian-speaking territories was “power to the Councils of East Galicia, Chełm, Wołyń, Podlesie and Polesie” with emphasis on the unification of these territories with the Soviet republic. But the representatives of the minorities were not the only ones to censure the party’s track record on the nationality

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1447 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 11ff.
1448 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 98.
1449 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 158.
1450 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 142. Only Jerzy Czeszejko claimed that the party had begun publishing a weekly in Yiddish, which had widespread appeal amongst the Jewish masses.
1452 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 170. In the Ukrainian ranks, Langer was a Kapeerowiec—a supporter of cooperation with the KPRP. Hence, his line was in agreement with the KC to a much greater degree than his Vasikvist counterparts. Solchanyk, The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1938, 148.
1453 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 171.
1454 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 173. His was the harshest criticism of the KPRP’s work at the Second Congress. Radziejowski, The Communist Party of Western Ukraine 1919-1929, 19-20.
question. The Congress in essence became a platform to criticize the past policies within Polish Communism. The speeches by Władysław Stein-Krajewski, Warški and Henryk Lauer revealed this political NEP.\textsuperscript{1456}

In a report of the Komitet Centralny (Central Committee, KC) on the party’s recent performance, Stein-Krajewski optimistically claimed that the party was on the verge of breaking its isolation from the masses, especially the minorities. The November 1922 elections had shown the potential of collaboration between the non-Polish ethnicities and the Polish Communists. These efforts needed to be consolidated in a new party program.\textsuperscript{1457} Although he warned against the growing bourgeois nationalism in Eastern Galicia and the Lithuanian-Byelorussian district, he recognized each nation’s right to separate from the Second Republic. He concluded that only the unification of class and national aims could bring about the demise of the Polish bourgeois government. To that end, the Ukrainian and Byelorussian comrades were to receive “much [organizational] freedom” at the local level. And even though he recognized the local difficulties that the party’s eastern comrades faced, Stein-Krajewski insisted that all minorities were to promote the slogan of the Polish Republic of Councils (Polska Republika Rad) and the KC’s lead in political matters.\textsuperscript{1458} Stein-Krajewski’s voice was not the only one that resonated through the party.

Giving an assessment of the first five years of the KPRP, Warški highlighted the pessimism of the leadership which had believed that “the revolution will be carried out by our neighbours.”\textsuperscript{1459} It was through this prevailing attitude of awaiting assistance from outside that everything national had been rejected even to the point that the slogan of “Polska Republika Rad” or Radek’s support of Polish independence had been labelled as heresy. In the present circumstances, the most critical aims of the party had to involve the fight against petty bourgeois nationalism; finding allies amongst the peasants, working intelligentsia, and minorities; building a united front with other socialists; and paying more attention to everyday struggles and partial demands.\textsuperscript{1460} Support for minorities would constitute a pillar of this new course.

Arguing along the same lines, Lauer offered a critical evaluation of the Second Republic’s geo-political situation. He claimed that Poland had been steadily losing political and economic independence because its own bourgeoisie was selling the country to foreign capital.\textsuperscript{1461} At the very least, this was an official acknowledgement of

\textsuperscript{1456} New Economic Policy (NEP) was Lenin’s approach to the post-Civil War Soviet Russia, which denoted an acceptance of certain old bourgeois elements in the framework of the new socialist economy. It was meant to gradually transform the older models with new ones while avoiding a complete rapture between the two systems. Lenin feared that too much change might simply bring more economic devastation to a state already devastated by years of warfare.

\textsuperscript{1457} This was a comment Stein-Krajewski made amidst the debate. AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 1, 79-80.

\textsuperscript{1458} AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 1, 6. Simoncini rightly points out that the running theme of Stein-Krajewski’s speech was a push for the policy of a united front. Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 112.

\textsuperscript{1459} Adolf Warški, “5 lat KPRP,” in AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 1, 210. Simoncini rightly points out that Warški still believed in the right ideological or theoretical approach of the KPRP. What he was arguing against was the party’s practices. “He contended,” he explains, “that on theoretical principles there was nothing to be added to those of the First Congress, but that a practical program of action based on more than vague abstractions had still to be formulated. The existing so-called program was mere revolutionary rhetoric, lacking political solidity.” Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 113.

\textsuperscript{1460} Like Stein-Krajewski and Warški, he believed that the united front tactics could steal all of the various adherents of the Pilsudski’s line for the Communist cause.
Poland’s sovereignty as something that had to be defended. Zinoviev and the leaders of the KPRP associated with the “Three W”—Wera (Kostrzewa), Warski and Walecki—as well as elites of the minorities approved the notion of self-determination. In the ensuing debates that raged at the congress, clear lines were drawn between those who supported the policy of self-determination and those who opposed it. Moscow’s pressure was instrumental in pushing forward the inclusion of a Bolshevik-minded nationality policy in the KPRP.

The voices that criticized the proposed nationality policy came from the ultraleftist circles that saw self-determination as an illusion at best, and opportunism at worst. They opposed what they saw as a “mechanical” copying of Russian models and their application to the Polish socio-economic conditions. The Soviet approaches, least of all self-determination, could not be adapted to the Polish circumstances. Hence, any notions of defending the Second Republic’s independence, even if it promised to strengthen the party’s influence, would merely reinforce the interests of the bourgeoisie. Defence of the Second Republic was a dangerous game that could make opportunism attractive. Besides, in the upcoming revolutionary war, there was simply no room for abstract notions of national sovereignty, national interests or self-determination. They pointed out some of the potential pitfalls of self-determination. For instance, calls for national liberation could stimulate separatist tendencies of minorities, and turn them towards bourgeois nationalism. The only viable policies were those grounded on the class-based point of reference. Otherwise, Communists would be only feeding the bourgeois nationalist interests. Like Bolsheviks, they distrusted nationalism as a marking ideology of the bourgeoisie, but unlike Bolsheviks, the Polish ultraleftists were not even willing to recognize legitimate social grievances of national movements. They did not believe that granting forms of nationhood would facilitate the rise of class divisions.

The ultraleftists also objected to the slogan of “we are the nation,” maintaining that it is either too late or too soon for such maxims. It was too late, as the Communists had not participated in the establishment of the Second Republic, and too early, since a proletarian Poland did not exist yet. Moreover, ultraleftists were equally hostile to a united front as rightist opportunism. Cooperating with questionable elements would only dilute the message and power of Communism. Since nationalism was merely a component of the transitory stage of capitalism, it had no permanence within or impact on the human condition, and hence should not have any special status.

The great majority of the party leadership did support the introduction of self-determination into the political program. But this enthusiastic approval was not uniform. There was absolutely no consistency amongst the participants as to what self-determination meant or how it should be practiced. Each delegate had his or her own
distinct understanding of the concept. The delegates could agree on only one thing: that the first step on the KPRP’s road of developing a constructive nationality policy would require reconsideration of Luxemburgian national nihilism.

“One on the question of nationality issues,” as one delegate recounted the Polish socialism’s approach to nationalism, “we simply transferred our old attitudes from the prewar period. Until today, we have been enemies of the slogan of self-determination of nations. We opposed it, because before the war, in the Polish realities, this slogan was a counterrevolutionary slogan. […] Consequently, our previous position was that we only saw negative aspects of national self-determination, shutting our eyes with some sort of manic stubbornness to its great revolutionary importance.” In this manner, he launched an attack on what had been a staple of Communism’s Social Democratic legacy. But even though there was a general consensus that the Luxemburgist national nihilism would have to be reassessed, even its ardent critics knew this had to be gradual and slow. Seweryn Świetochowski, for example, who supported self-determination, asserted that the SDKPiL had rightly fought against the bad bourgeois nationalism and in support of good proletarian nationalism, and that rejection of Second Republic and promotion of independence of the Polish nation were not contradictory. Such an incongruous position was exactly what had prevented the party from creating a clear message to the masses in the first place. Splitting ideological hairs in the party’s ideological debates was acceptable, but trying to convey such an ambiguous message to a wider audience created confusion. Regardless of SDKPiL’s culpability for KPRP’s ineffective nationality policy, it was clear that change was needed.

Such change did arrive in the form of Lenin’s self-determination. However, this vaguely defined and inconsistently applied Bolshevik policy was troublesome. Nonetheless, as Marchlewski pointed out, it was clear that Poles, as the dominant nation, had no choice but to support the aspirations of the minorities. And although the party resolutions proudly proclaimed that the nationality question in the KPRP had finally been resolved with the introduction of self-determination, the gap between the acknowledgment of previous obstinacy and the acceptance of a tactical shift was considerable. Party elites differed in their understanding of what this new policy meant and how it should be applied and realized amongst the Poles and other nationalities. The debates revealed an extraordinary range of opinions.

The extent to which self-determination could be applied constituted one of the key issues of contestation. Should Ukrainian and Byelorussian territories be separated from the Second Republic? There were some who urged the party to move beyond a mere declaration in support of self-determination. Polish Communists had to actively support the minorities’ struggle for genuine national liberation. KPRP needed to move beyond slogans and promote the unification of the Ukrainian and Byelorussian territories with their respective Soviet republics. The suggestion of separating these areas would strengthen the revolutionary energy throughout Poland. But the

1471 Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 113. The range and diversity of opinion was extraordinary.
1472 Stefan Królikowski, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 35.
1473 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 44.
1474 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 1, 75.
1476 Królikowski, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 35.
1477 In his speech, Gordin attacked Stein-Kamienieński (Domski) and Wójcik’s fear of separatism. AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 45.
complexities of reconciling Poles with other nationalities in ethnically mixed territories was no easy task. Nonetheless, there were optimists like Ostap Dłuski who felt reassured that once minorities left the confines of the Second Republic amidst revolutionary upheaval and a reshifting of “Polish” territories was achieved, Poles would find contentment with the remaining ethnically homogenous Polish areas.\footnote{AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 36.} Whereas the national interests of the Ukrainians and the Byelorussians was acknowledged, would the same right not apply to the Second Republic? And if the KPRP supported Polish national interests, would these not clash with those of the minorities?

During one of the discussions, Warski explained that “Words such as Poland or Polish issues used to be impossible for us to swallow, they acted like a red muleta to a bull.” He continued: “If we had taken a different attitude on these issues, perhaps the position of the social masses would be different today. […] In order to carry on a clear policy regarding the liberation of oppressed nations, it is necessary domestically, in Polish politics, to apply a genuine and transparent tactic, for a party that does not defend its own nation, will not be trusted by others.”\footnote{AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 34.}

By 1923, several leaders of the KPRP had realized that negligence of Polish statehood and national aspirations had been detrimental to the party’s work amongst the Polish workers.\footnote{Trembicka, Między apologią a negacją, 30-6. She argues that out of all the Communists at the Second Congress, Warski was the most ardent supporter of a Polish workers’ state.} But a change in policy would require a tremendous shift in attitude. Moreover, it would involve a new understanding of Polish independence and of Polish national interests. This was an impossible journey for many. Nationalism of the oppressed minority was justifiable, but supporting national aims of the oppressor majority was much more difficult.\footnote{AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/1-2 t. 2, 34.}

Julian Brun acknowledged the need to encourage the dual policy of supporting separatist movements of minorities, while simultaneously acting as defenders of the motherland; though he warned about the complications associated with going to the masses with such a message. He argued that Communists would not easily sway the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie, which were still infatuated with grandeur notions of an expansionist Poland.\footnote{Trembicka, Między apologią a negacją, 30-6. She argues that out of all the Communists at the Second Congress, Warski was the most ardent supporter of a Polish workers’ state.} However slowly, there emerged an idea that only Communists could guarantee Poland’s independence.\footnote{Trembicka, Między apologią a negacją, 30-6. She argues that out of all the Communists at the Second Congress, Warski was the most ardent supporter of a Polish workers’ state.} Was this merely strategic manoeuvring aimed at obtaining the support of the masses? “No!”, one delegate asserted, “defence of independence” against fascist Germany and the Polish bourgeoisie was in the interest of the international revolution.\footnote{Trembicka, Między apologią a negacją, 30-6. She argues that out of all the Communists at the Second Congress, Warski was the most ardent supporter of a Polish workers’ state.} Unfortunately, the fate of Polish statehood remained closely tied to the Communist revolutionary utopianism.

Support for Polish independence was connected to the republic’s role within the forthcoming socialist revolution. After all, it was a bridge between the Bolsheviks and the rest of Europe. Moreover, this revolution would
not only have international implications; it would prevent the rise of Poland’s revisionist neighbours and would ensure the state’s sovereignty. Warski emphasized the geo-strategic position of Poland as central to its future: “Between red Germany and red Russia, Poland will be an independent Poland; a Junkerite Germany and a bourgeois Russia would once again force chains upon Poland.” Hence, only as a Soviet state, in a Soviet neighbourhood, would Poland retain her sovereignty. But how could the Polish masses be made aware of this reality? Would they listen to the Communist warnings? Could Communists really become the defenders of Polish statehood? What form of Polish statehood would be acceptable to them?

Roman Jablonowski suggested that the Piłsudskiite slogan of a liberated Ukraine or Byelorussia, devoid of its imperialist inclinations, could be useful. He believed that a vision of Poland, devoid of its chauvinistic inclinations and existing within a future family of socialist European republics, would convince people to join Communism. But going to the masses would require Communists to include themselves in the national discourse. Stefan Królikowski realized the scale of remarketing that the KPRP faced: “that we [Communists], representatives of the workers, represent the Polish nation in its further progress, that we represent the nation against the capitalist class, and not the working class against the nation.” There was no doubt in his mind that “the historical mission of leading the nation is today being directly placed in the hands of the working class.” The main objective of the party was to show that the proletariat was the most genuine representative of national interests and that turning to the Soviet model was the surest way to ensure independence.

“FOR YOUR FREEDOM AND OURS:” THE NEW NATIONALITY POLICY OF THE KPRP.

The ninth and tenth days (27-28 September) of the Second Congress were devoted to the discussion of the new nationality policy. The resolution on nationalism, entitled “For Your Freedom and Ours,” painted the bourgeoisie as the source of all of Poland’s troubles because it had built the state on the national oppression of minorities, on antagonistic relations with all neighbours, on servicing itself to French militarism, and on selling its natural resources to foreign speculators. Such politicking would lead to a loss of independence and to new partitions. “Only in the framework of the Worker-Peasant United States of Europe,” the resolution contended, “will Poland find an unshakable foundation of its independence.” Moreover, no genuine freedom of the Polish nation was possible without the liberation of oppressed nationalities.

All non-ethnic Poles were categorized into two groups: the so-called territorial minorities—which pertained to the eastern borderlands, and the non-territorial minorities such as the Jews and the Germans. The solution for the peoples living in certain territories was simple. Ukrainian Eastern Galicia and the Byelorussian territories of Wilno, Grodno and Minsk, which were forcefully incorporated into the Second Republic, were to be reunified with their respective socialist republics. Self-determination until reunification was accepted as the best prescription for the

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1488 This was not unlike the ideas promoted by Kelles-Krauz two decades earlier.
1489 The Subcommittee on Nationality included the following: Warski-Warszawski, Walecki-Horwitz, Julian Brun, Fransiszek Fielder, Edward Próchniak, Osip Krilyk, Ostap Dłuski, Jasiński (unidentified), Izaak Gordin, Jerzy Herying-Ryng, Saul Amsterdam, Anna Ketti, and Stefan Królakowskii.
1490 “Za naszą i waszą wolność!”, in AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 8, 77-82. The full slogan was slightly different: “for your freedom and ours – free with free, equal with equal” (“za waszą wolność i naszą – wolni z wolnemi, równi z równemi.”) Ibid., 79.
1491 “Za naszą i waszą wolność!”, 78.
nationalities dilemma. But other methods of alleviating national oppression, especially for non-territorial minorities were also recognized, such as granting lingual, administrative, cultural-educational and religious rights. The Jews and the Germans were to receive economic, citizenship and religious rights. The battle against anti-Semitism was to involve the eradication of all limitations placed on the Jews—administrative, judicial and educational. And within the Jewish community, cultural and political life was to be secularized (especially in education). Like the Jews, the Germans would also obtain similar rights. Yet, even though the resolution finally offered a constructive policy on the nationality question, many delegates remained sceptical. A lengthy and passionate debate erupted amongst the Congress participants on the particulars of the nationality resolution.

Edward Próchniak and Karl Radek opened up the session pertaining to the proposed resolution on the nationality question. Radek’s “On the Nationalities Question” was a quintessential summary of socialist thought on nationalism going back to Marx and Engels. Especially criticized was the Polish Communists’ inability to deal with the reestablishment of Polish statehood. Highlighting Lenin’s self-determination, Radek argued that the unification of a multinational working class in a bourgeois state was only possible through the recognition of national rights. Moreover, he maintained that national borders would only disappear when socialism was fully realized. Meanwhile, in the era of preparation before the revolution, the proletariat should seek allies in the minorities who struggled for liberation. The Russians had proven that such approach was valuable. To demonstrate its success, Radek described how the Bolsheviks awakened class-consciousness in Georgia to ensure its genuine cultural-national development. In the Polish situation, since the bourgeoisie would never be able to resolve the minorities question, the Communists had to appropriate it for their own cause. This denoted several objectives: a need to struggle against every act of national oppression by the government; incorporating minorities into the fold of the party while also giving them organizational autonomy; and leaving the thorny questions of borders until after the revolution.

The debates that followed the two speeches revealed that the nationality question remained a hot potato in the hands of the Poles. Five central themes emerged from the discussions: how to deal with the Luxemburgist legacy on the nationality question; how to define and understand the nature of nationalism and national movements; how to categorize national movements within Poland’s borders in order to determine who would be afforded the right of self-determination; how to respond to Polish nationalism and statehood; and how to organize minorities within the framework of the KPRP.

1492 “Za naszą i waszą wolność!”, 79.
1493 “Za naszą i waszą wolność!”, 80-1.
1494 The resolution even explained how the Second Republic was violating the Minority Treaties, which purported to offer protection to the minorities.
1495 “Za naszą i waszą wolność!”, 79-81.
1496 Unfortunately, no copies of Próchniak’s speech have survived and so its content can only be ascertained from the various criticisms launched against him during the ensuing debates.
1497 It included a vehement criticism of the Austro-Marxist solution to the nationality question, even though it seemed not to have been an issue at the Second Congress.
1499 Radek, “O kwestii narodowościowej,” 95. Radek was the only one to actually refer to the effectiveness of the Soviet nationality policy.
Firstly, the Congress delegates once again deliberated on the legacy of SDKPiL’s nationality policy. Radek had cynically stated that the Polish Communists negated the reestablishment of the Polish state because it threatened one of the most sacred pillars of their Luxemburgian ideological constellation.\textsuperscript{1501} Since the KPRP was built on Luxemburgist foundations, Communists could not accept the emergence of the Second Republic, which had opposed for decades. Nonetheless, several delegates became critical of the Esdeks’ national nihilism,\textsuperscript{1502} with some even contending that the self-determination of nations had been a viable tactic already before 1914.\textsuperscript{1503} Others took a much more moderate line, arguing that the SDKPiL had the right line before 1914 but should have changed its policy after 1918.\textsuperscript{1504} After all, both the national nihilism of the past and the support of self-determination in the present shared a common aim of revolutionizing the workers.\textsuperscript{1505} The ultraleftist faction at the Congress refused to abandon or even revise national nihilism, contending that toying with national liberation movements amounted to playing with fire. Paszyn stipulated that the KPRP “could take up Lenin’s position” only when the “Galicians take up the past position of the SDKPiL.”\textsuperscript{1506} The party could become nationalist in forms if all its members aspired to genuine internationalism. Albeit supported by a small contingent, this view remained a powerful current in Polish Communism.

Even though most participants were critical of one or another aspect of the Social Democratic past, they were reluctant to throw out the Luxemburgist line altogether. Could self-determination be reconciled with the Luxemburgist legacy? Edward Sokolowski-Orłowski was convinced that self-determination, if properly qualified, had a place in the Esdek Weltanschauung. He defended Luxemburg’s policy, arguing that the acceptance or rejection of self-determination had to be based on any given national movement’s contribution to the revolutionary process.\textsuperscript{1507}

Another dilemma of the Esdek tradition was Luxemburg’s polemics with Lenin. The latter’s position seemed to be vindicated by its effectiveness in the aftermath of the October Revolution and especially during the Civil War. Nonetheless, some members of the Congress tried to justify the KPRP’s dismissal of the Bolshevik nationality policy by contending that the situation in Russia was conducive to a policy that might not necessarily work elsewhere.\textsuperscript{1508} Most still believed that for Polish Communism, the struggle against indigenous national chauvinism had to take precedence. Even in the intense scrutiny of the SDKPiL’s tradition, the Luxemburgism still resonated loudly within the KPRP.

The second critical issue of contention pertained to the nature of nationalism and national movements. As Marx and Engels had done in the previous century, the Congress participants differentiated between the nationalisms of the oppressor and that of the oppressed. The pervading belief was that the nationalism of the dominant nation—in

\textsuperscript{1501} Radek, “O kwestii narodowościowej,” 98.
\textsuperscript{1503} See Amsterdam, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 142.
\textsuperscript{1504} Tadeusz Żarski, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 146-8.
\textsuperscript{1506} Franciszek Grzegorzewski, Jan Paszyn or Łęski, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 117.
\textsuperscript{1507} AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 51-2. These were the categories that Marx and Engels had utilized in evaluating each national movement. It seemed to be the most simplistic formula that Communists were comfortable using.
\textsuperscript{1508} Brun, Stein-Krajewski and Franciszek Fiedler, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 47-50, 89-92, 108.
this case the Poles—was worse than the nationalism of the oppressed nationalities.\textsuperscript{1509} It was clear that the Poles had to remain anti-national even if minorities aspired towards nationalism. Yet, although all recognized that nationalism was chauvinistic, they could not agree on how it could contribute to the revolutionary cause? Did nationalism have revolutionary or counterrevolutionary qualities? Once again, the ultraleftists saw no value whatsoever in nationalism. They asserted that there was no such thing as “pure independence” under capitalism.\textsuperscript{1510} Nonetheless, most delegates admitted that nationalism had some constructive value and should be brought into the fold of Communism.

There seemed to be a general consensus—both Zinoviev and Radek alluded to this—that the nationality question should not be abandoned, lest it would become a tool of the bourgeoisie. Communists had to appropriate its appeal and mobilizing power, especially amongst the minorities.\textsuperscript{1511} In this sense, national liberation movements could offer progressive value. Some went as far as supporting the establishment of independent Ukrainian or Byelorussian bourgeois states, arguing that their emergence would at the very least weaken the Polish bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{1512} But there were also more moderate voices that were less optimistic about the merits of self-determination. These voices maintained that not all national liberation movements were progressive, that the bourgeois nationalism of the minorities was dangerous, and that small national states would channel proletarian ideals into chauvinistic objectives.\textsuperscript{1513} National nihilists pointed out that some Ukrainians had become so preoccupied with national liberation that they neglected other important proletarian work, especially in the trade unions.\textsuperscript{1514} This small camp of ultraleftists pointed to such incidents as proof that nationalism had no place in Communism. They dismissed the slogan of self-determination altogether, claiming that the daily work amongst the minorities would suffice without the necessity of supporting national interests.\textsuperscript{1515} Even so, most delegates defended the inclusion of self-determination into the catechism of the party. What produced trouble was each participant’s assumption that their colleagues would come around to their preferred point of view.

The third issue emerged from the debates on which nations or territories would be afforded the right to choose their fate. It was concluded that self-determination pertained to the eastern borderlands, while the Germans and the Jews could only be granted cultural, economic and national freedoms.\textsuperscript{1516} In the early 1920s, Communists

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1510] AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 145-6. Cimek believes that the debates on nationalism at the Second Congress were not really genuine as most Communists adhered strongly to the notion of national nihilism. The ultraleftists simply vocalized this attitude, which everyone else ascribed to but could not do so overtly given the Comintern’s pressures on promoting self-determination. Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939, 35-8. Simoncini and Trembicka, on the other hand, see a somewhat more genuine attempt to insert a nationality program into the Polish Communist discourse. Simoncini, The Communist Party of Poland 1918-1929, 120-1; Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością, 257ff.
\item[1513] These reluctant voices included Stein-Krajewski, Stein-Kamieński (Domski), Gordin, Grzelszczak-Grzegorzewski and Sokołowski-Orłowski. AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 58-9, 87.
\item[1515] See, for instance, speeches by Stein-Kamieński (Domski) or Wiktor Bialy. AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 52-4.
\end{footnotes}
still believed that Upper Silesia or Pomerania could never be granted self-determination. Próchniak even asserted that there was no Lithuanian question. The Communists simply assumed that they knew exactly what the minorities wanted and needed, ignoring ethnographic assessments or the realities found at the ground level. They never consulted ethnic groups and never gathered opinions across the rank and file. The Ukrainian and Byelorussian delegates (and the Jewish representatives to some extent) complained that the KC made decisions without accounting for local conditions.

In the context of the Kresy, where self-determination was to be applied, a debate arose as to the appropriateness of separating Ukrainian and Byelorussian territories from the Second Republic. This question was part of the wider discourse on revolution. Would a countrywide revolution need to precede the liberation of minorities? Could national liberation and the insertion of these territories into their respective Soviet republics hasten or hinder the socialist revolution in Poland? On the one hand, there were those who contended that it was essential to separate these territories and unite them with their respective socialist republics. They simply assumed that all peoples residing in Galicia, Chelm and Podlesie wanted to be united with Soviet Ukraine. Besides, promoting the right to separate would assert the KPRP’s credibility in the eyes of the minorities. On the other hand, there were also those who rejected separation. Workers of all ethnic backgrounds were to cooperate in a countrywide revolutionary struggle, and not work for distinct regional or national goals. The Ukrainians and Byelorussians were to cooperate with the KPRP for a revolution in all of Poland, as only a nationwide uprising would ensure genuine liberation for all.

Although self-determination was finally admitted into the KPRP’s ideological pantheon, Communists remained fairly vague about the future shape of Poland and her socialist neighbours. Some contended that since self-determination was evaluated according to its contribution to the revolutionary cause, there was no need for a debate on the future borders that would be drawn between the various states. Much more important was the fact that an equitable division of territories was impossible and would only stimulate disunity.

A re-evaluation of the revolutionary process gave rise to the fourth issue that preoccupied the participants at the Congress. It involved the idea that the road to socialism might involve phases. Since 1922, Polish Communists had toyed with the acceptance of democracy as a potential temporary stage during which cooperation could be established with other Socialists in the name of extending workers’ rights. Acceptance of democracy—marked by the ZPMiW’s participation in the November elections—forced the KPRP to re-evaluate its attitude towards

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1517 AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 114. Ironically, almost all non-ethnographic Polish areas were afforded the right to self-determination by the early 1930s. The Fourth Congress (in May-August 1927) accepted self-determination for Upper Silesia, the Fifth Congress (in August 1930) did so for Pomerania, and the final Congress (in October 1932) did so for Gdańsk and the entire Polish Corridor. Trembicka, “The Communist Party of Poland (1918-1938),” 325-7;
1518 Ironically, this remained the practice right up to the late 1930s. The party elites continued to develop and implement policies in a dictatorial and dogmatic manner, forcing regional branches to simply carry out their directives.
revolutionism and the role of the state. As a component of a transitory phase, the bourgeois-national state had a viable role on the road to Communist utopia. But was there anything progressive about the Second Republic? Could Communism accept the existence of Poland, acknowledge Polish national interests, and participate in the Rzeczpospolita’s politics without succumbing to opportunism? Could this most fundamental dogma of Luxemburgism be abandoned?

Amidst all the discussions over self-determination, the Second Republic remained a large elephant in the Communist room. Since November 1918, Communists had had trouble with the reestablishment of Poland. Stein-Krajewski aptly described the dilemma: “The ‘problem’ [of the reestablishment of Poland] emerged because the bourgeois and independent Poland emerged as a dam against the revolutionary waves coming from the East and the West; it emerged to battle the revolution. In such circumstances, supporting the bourgeois Polish independence would amount to accepting the prevailing counterrevolutionary situation.”\textsuperscript{1524} All the political reports issued by the KPRP on the domestic and international position of Poland painted the country as a chauvinistic imperialist warmonger, in a state of conflict with all her neighbours, and engulfed by domestic political unrest leading towards a fascist coup.\textsuperscript{1525} Moreover, the authorities continued to suppress Communism with arrests and imprisonment. Hence, although Polish Communists had much to say about self-determination for the minorities, they had little to say about Polish independence and national interests.

Ironically, Osip Krilyk (Vasylkiv), a Ukrainian, attacked the economic dogmatism of the party’s line (which especially reigned amongst the ultraleftists), arguing that the party ignored its work not only amongst the minorities but also the Polish nation.\textsuperscript{1526} Brun actually berated Próchniak for failing to devote enough attention to the Polish question in his speech on nationalism. The KPRP’s resolution on the nationality question painted the working masses as the most genuine representatives of national interests and the only protectors against loss of independence. But if accepting self-determination for the minorities was simple, reversing the party’s position and becoming the vanguard of the Polish nation-state was much more difficult. Once again, visible divisions arose regarding the attitude Communists should assume towards the Second Republic.

Leszczyński-Leński and Domski, who spearheaded the ultraleftist current in Polish Communism, argued against support for the Second Republic. The latter saw such support as harmful to the revolutionary cause. It distracted workers from more important proletarian aims.\textsuperscript{1527} The former took a much tougher stance, contending that the notion of genuine independence was an abstract farce, that the recreated Poland offered workers nothing of significant value, and that Communists could not defend Poland’s independence while it was still governed by the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{1528} Neither could even acknowledge any tactical value in defending independence.

Equally few were delegates who took the opposite view and made the volte-face of bringing the defence of Polish statehood into the fold of Communism. These included Warski, Walecki, Franciszek Grzelszczak-Grzegorzewski, Tadeusz Żarski and a few others (ironically representatives of the minorities). Warski envisioned a symbiosis of Communism and nationalism in the future Polish Soviet Republic. If Lenin and leading members of the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1524]{AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 144.}
\footnotetext[1526]{AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 1, 147.}
\end{footnotes}
Comintern accepted Poland’s independence, how could Polish Communists oppose it? Grzelszczak-Grzegorzewski and Żarski lamented that not enough national interest had been shown amongst Polish workers and peasants—a mistake that had decreased the effectiveness of the party’s work. They believed that if Communism was to be a successful movement, it needed to assume more national forms and content.

Oscillating between the extreme positions of Domski and Warski, most delegates occupied the vast middle ground between accepting and rejecting Poland’s re-emergence. Ironically, although they theoretically recognized Polish national interests and the defence of independence, they still promoted the destruction of the Second Republic as an important revolutionary goal. They tended to emphasize the instrumentalist tactical value of such a policy. Izaak Gordin, for example, declared the party’s rejection of independence in 1918 as an error. Yet, he explained that it had not been an ideological error but rather a tactical mistake. Gordin was not interested in preserving Polish independence per se, as much as creating a Communist slogan, engendered now in the worker-peasant Poland, to counter bourgeois nationalism. Although it is important not to underemphasize the shift in the KPRP’s attitude towards Poland, it is equally prudent not to overemphasize the scope of this transformation. Even when the Communists talked about saving Poland’s independence from Western capitalism, sovereignty and statehood were understood as bourgeois abstractions and not as a national right.

Although the nationality resolution spoke forcefully of the proletariat as the vanguard of the nation, along with the need to protect Poland’s sovereignty, and even though the party program was filled with reforms that emphasized national interests, many were struggling with the acceptance of a Polish bourgeois state. Support for national interests was something that many had realized was needed in the party platform, but nobody wanted to have their name attached to what had until recently been considered an opportunistic bourgeois policy. In his speech on the “Political Situation and the Tactics of the Party,” Walecki maintained that “The bourgeois rule in Poland poses a grave danger to her independence. Only the victory of the revolution can ensure permanent independent statehood.” The revolutionary Polish proletariat had to emerge not only as a force representing its own class interests, but also as a leader and spokesman of the interests of the entire nation. But others were much more pessimistic about the success of this approach, arguing that it would be very difficult for the Communists to go to the Polish masses with nationalist slogans. Given its past statements, the KPRP could expect a difficult struggle in convincing the Polish workers of Communists’ concern for the Polish state. Ironically, most of the party elites would also need much convincing.

1531 These included, for example, Stein-Krajewski, Gordin, Biały and Amsterdam. This is the evidence that Cimek uses to discredit any sort of genuine shift in Polish Communism on the nationality question. He argues that for most delegates, the destruction of the Second Republic was rated as one of the most important objectives of the movement. They simply never abandoned hope of dismantling what they saw as a bourgeois-imperialist state. Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939, 37-8.
1533 Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością, 249ff.
The fifth and last issue that the Second Congress hoped to resolve, and which had remained a serious challenge to KPRP’s cohesiveness, was the institutionalization of minorities within the party framework. Self-determination would surely bring minorities into the fold of the KPRP, which meant that the party would have to organize, administer and direct these masses. This had proven a considerable headache in the past, as both the Jewish and Ukrainian Communists had tried to subvert the party’s jurisdiction over all the territories of the Second Republic. Simultaneously, the minorities felt underrepresented and neglected, and feared being ignored by the Central apparatus. At the beginning of the Congress, a representative from Eastern Galicia criticized the KC for not including representatives of the minorities in the Congress Presidium. He could not understand why a party that appealed to various nationalities and now promoted self-determination was unwilling to give these people a voice in the leadership of the party.1536

From the onset of the discussions between the KPRP’s Polish elites and the representatives of the non-Polish rank and files, it was clear that the minorities wanted freedom of action on the ground, where local realities demanded a certain degree of flexibility that oftentimes diverged from (or even contradicted) the general party line. For example, while attempting to point out the distinguishing features of the Ukrainian countryside, Kriłyk (Vasylkiv) argued against slogans that fomented (what he believed to be nonexistent) divisions within the peasantry. Concepts of class divisions were simply foreign and strange to the tightly knit Ukrainian countryside.1537 Another delegate pointed out the difficulties that national antagonisms created in trade unions, where a more sensible approach had to be taken towards Jewish workers.1538 Already in the opening speech of the congress, Stein-Krajewski had concluded that the minorities needed to have much freedom of action.1539 Similarly, Radek urged the party to give the Ukrainian and Byelorussian branches greater leeway in responding to local conditions.1540 These impulses were expressed in the reorganization of the KPRP.

The KPRP’s work encompassed three territories: of Poland (including Upper Silesia), of Ukraine, and of Byelorussia-Lithuania. The latter two would be restructured as district territorial parties: the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Ukrainy, KPZU) and the Communist Party of Western Byelorussia (Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi, KPZB).1541 The KPZU was directed to do the following: extend its work beyond Eastern Galicia into any territories that contained a majority of Ukrainians; absorb the USDP and the ZPMiW of Eastern Galicia into its ranks; and to deal with all of its political and organizational issues. The only caveat was that it had to strictly follow the resolutions of the KC KPRP. The needs of the Jews and the Germans would be met through a variety of party organs based on the prescription offered by the CBŻ.1542 Rather than having separate national parties of their own, they were asked to amalgamate into the various existing organs of the KPRP. In this arrangement, the non-Polish nationalities were granted considerable administrative freedoms. Yet,

1538 A. Łożowski, AAN, KPP, “Protokół Drugiego Zjazdu KPRP – seria główna,” 158/I-2 t. 2, 168. The Jewish working masses had been able to organize themselves into trade unions, which wielding a considerable amount of power. Yet, the KPRP’s leadership remained sceptical about reaching out to the Jewish trade unions.
1541 The KPZU was officially established at the congress, while the KPZB was created shortly after.
1542 „Wniosek w sprawie USDP” and “Zasady organizacji partyjnej,” in II Zjazd Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski, 549-50.
many ultraleftist Communists continued to question the loyalty of the minorities to the Marxist cause. They argued that the party should be more centralized in order to maintain ideological discipline.  

Although huge steps had been taken at the Second Congress in regards to the nationality question, divisions persisted. In many ways, this was a victory of self-determination over the national nihilism, and of administrative autonomy over centralization. The minorities and the Comintern had finally convinced the leaders of Polish Communism that nationalism had progressive value. Communists would defend the minorities against national oppression and the Polish nation against its bourgeoisie. Confident and in control, the “Three Ws” stirred the party towards a genuine united front from the top. The peasantry and the minorities were now anchored within the Communist discourse. The congress marked the height of the debate surrounding the nationality question.

The latter half of the 1920s would reveal a battle between the centrist and the ultraleftist factions within the KPRP, as well as the power struggle within the Soviet Union following Lenin’s death, which was accompanied by the drive to Bolshevise Communism. The compromising “three Ws” sided with the losers of the power struggle and criticized Moscow’s attacks on the leaders of the failed German revolution. Stalin’s punitive condemnation of rightist opportunism within the Central Committee of the KPRP opened the door to ultraleftist ideas of the minority. Under the sweeping catchphrase of right-wing opportunism, many of the accomplishments of Warski, Walecki and Kostrzewa were revisited.

Nationality policy quickly became a victim of the growing factional struggle. Although self-determination remained a staple of the party’s ideology, its understanding and application were continuously distorted and manipulated. All the conflict-ridden interpretations that were voiced in the debates of the Second Congress resurfaced as the power struggle following Lenin’s death intensified in the Soviet Union. Although another attempt was made at the Fourth Party Conference (in 1925) to restore the prerogatives of the Second Congress, it was to be the last. By the late 1920s, the architects and supporters of a more moderate line towards nationalism had been ousted from the party leadership. With them departed the last hope of a rational and constructive nationality policy that would balance the needs of the Polish masses with the needs of the minorities. Yet, while self-determination could not be abandoned by the ultraleftists, the more positive approach towards the Second Republic and the Polish national interests were reversed. Polish Communism returned to what it considered to be its unquestionable principles. The minority slowly rebuilt the nihilistic elements of Luxemburgist nationality policy.

The Polish state would be destroyed either by the separation of minorities (and their respective territories) from the

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1544 Trembicka, , Między utopią a rzeczywistością, 106-22, 141-7.
1545 The “Three Ws” did not fully agree on the peasant-worker government which Zinoviev and the Comintern tried to push onto the platform of the KPRP. Nonetheless, there was a belief that only a united front with other socialists could ensure a mass victory for the Communists. Yet, given that a power struggle was erupting in the Soviet apparatus following Lenin’s death, the KPRP would become a victim of continuous manoeuvring. Stalin quickly and frequently shifted between policies and ideas, leading most Communists to commit supposed “errors” and “deviations.” It was simply impossible to foresee Stalin’s policy at any given time. Yet, his final shift to the left in the latter half of the 1920s, allowed for the victory of the ultraleftists (the so called Berliners) in the factional feud within the KPRP.
1546 Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939, 41ff.
republic, or by the upheaval of a socialist revolution. Communists remained convinced that a revolution was imminent, and that even if it was not imported from the Soviet Union or Germany, it would break out in the Kresy.
CONCLUDING REMARKS TO PART IV: HOW LUXEMBURGISM WAS TURNED ON ITS HEAD.

The KPRP’s experiences of the 1920s were not distinct in the European Communist movement. The Austrian, Bulgarian and Hungarian Communists also felt the repressive hands of their governments. But to what extent was the Polish case study different? A comparison with the Communist Party of Italy (Partito Comunista d’Italia, PCI) is revealing. Unlike the KPRP, the PCI was created from a split within Italian Socialism. Yet, like the Poles, the Italian Communists hated the Italian Socialist Party (the equivalent of the PPS). Unlike the dominance of Luxemburgism in the KPRP, the PCI was an amalgamation of various ideological perspectives. Both parties faced similar problems with regionalism. And both believed that they could only survive if they remained completely loyal to the Comintern. Yet, from the onset, the Italians were not afraid of participating in elections, building the party at the grassroots level, and focusing on national interests. Their parliamentary successes and a viable domestic strategy paid huge dividends. But as the KPRP’s moderates were losing ground by the mid 1920s, Antonio Gramsci—the party’s de facto leader—defeated the ultraleftists in the PCI’s factional battles. More importantly, he sided with the right group in Moscow’s power struggle. Yet, like their Polish counterparts, the Italians eventually succumbed to clandestinity (once Benito Mussolini curtailed the legal status of the PCI), to intellectual impoverishment (especially after Gramsci died, while Angelo Tasca and others were expelled), and to complete Stalinization (by the late 1920s under Palmiro Togliatti’s leadership).1548

When the Italian Communists faced Mussolini’s repressions for the first time, their Polish colleagues had already been hardened by years of hardships. By the early 1930s, when the PCI was losing rank-and-file to imprisonment and ideological rigidity, the KPP was thriving numerically. The inclusion of minorities had seemingly strengthened the party at the grassroots level. But this was an illusory sense of power. The non-Poles remained strangers in a party in which they constituted a majority, with relations between the minorities and leadership becoming evermore uncomfortable. Ironically, the Polish party elites remained estranged not only from their rank and file, but also from their own nation-state.

Following the Second Congress, the KPRP’s leaders made several mistakes, which sealed their fate and that of their party. They criticized the Comintern for promoting erroneous tactics in Germany (in 1923) and commented about the internal battles in Moscow.1549 Stalin himself intervened to chastise the Poles for their insolence. This was facilitated by an attack on the “Three Ws”1550 by the ultraleftist “Berliners”1551 who condemned Warsaw’s apparent rightist opportunism. The Fifth Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1924 thus marked the ideological end of Polish Communism, even if it ceased to exist only in the late 1930s. The Poles served as an example of what happens to a national Communist party that defies Moscow. The Comintern exploited the

1550 Following the Second Congress, Próchniak had joined Warski, Kostrzewa and Walecki.
1551 This camp was led by Domski and Leński.
polarization within the KPRP to obtain complete and unquestionable obedience.\textsuperscript{1552} Although the “Three Ws” put up a fight—especially Kostrzewa who believed in the need for open discussion in the International—they could not withstand the pressures of ideological Bolshevization and Stalinization. The “Three Ws” were branded as opportunists, and the party’s leadership was handed over to the ultraleftists.

Factionalism within the KPRP had for all intended purposes ended. But the victory of ultraleftism was Pyrrhic as the party became nothing more than Moscow’s puppet. Within a year of the International’s Congress, it was clearly revealed that Stalin did not care for ideological persuasion as much as he did for loyalty. Throughout the latter half of 1924 and first half of 1925 (especially at the Third Party Congress in early 1925\textsuperscript{1553}), the new leaders of the KPP were trying to reverse all the components of the Second Congress’ nationality policy (save for self-determination). But when the Executive of the Comintern noticed the decrease in the Polish party’s membership and power, they urged for a more conciliatory nationality policy. At the Fourth Party Conference, the ultraleftist KPP elites had to accept the principle of the defense of national independence.\textsuperscript{1554} The party leadership was only too happy when Moscow eased up pressure on the pro-Second Republic attitude. It was not until the latter half of the 1930s that the Comintern actively returned to the promotion of Poland’s independence in the context of the popular front against fascism.\textsuperscript{1555}

From its inception in December 1918, KPRP’s fixation on Luxemburgism prevented the development of an effective nationality policy that would build grassroots loyalty of the Second Republic’s Poles and non-Poles to the Communist cause. The party saw itself as nothing more than an instrument for revolution. It viewed conspiratory activities and ideological rigidity rather than democratic practices and parliamentary participation as the best means of political discipline and schooling for its cadres. Hence, it could never open a dialogue with other left-leaning organizations, establish a significant parliamentary presence, or build a solid foundation of followers. In the first five years of its existence, it was the party’s inability and unwillingness to construct a viable nationality policy rather than Moscow’s interference that turned the KPRP into little more than an anti-system party.

\textsuperscript{1552} Stalin actually chaired the special Polish Commission at the Fifth Congress. In the end, the Poles retracted their previous statements on Germany and Trotsky. They now sided with the majority in the Russian Bolshevik Party. H. Gruda, “Sprawa polska na V Kongresie Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej,” \textit{Z pola walki} 4, no. 21 (1963): 35-62.

\textsuperscript{1553} AAN, KPP, “Protokół z obrad Trzeciego Zjazdu KPP,” 158/I-3 t. 1-18.

\textsuperscript{1554} AAN, KPP, “KPP – IV Konferencja – Protokół z obrad,” 158/II-4 t. 1-21, especially important are t. 1-4. The discussions on December 11 to 13 focused on the conceptualization of the party’s approach to the defence of Poland’s independence.

\textsuperscript{1555} Cimek, \textit{Komuniści, Polska, Stalin, 1918-1939}, 98-111.
CONCLUDING REMARKS:
NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM: A PARADOX UNRESOLVED.

“Anyone who compares German Marxism, English Laborism, and Russian Bolshevism cannot avoid the conclusion that in each nation inherited national characteristics are giving internationalist socialist ideology a particular national form.” Thus Otto Bauer concluded the preface to the second edition of his *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* published in April of 1924. Bauer was certainly speaking against the growing autocracy of the Comintern, but even beyond his criticism of the Bolshevik policy, his words offered a poignant assessment of Marxism’s relationship with nationalism:

Just as in its historical praxis the working class in every country must increasingly adapt its methods of struggle to the particularities of the national terrain of struggle the closer it comes to power, so too does the socialist ideology of the working class establish an increasingly closer relationship with the particular cultural heritage of the nation the more it absorbs that culture. We cannot overcome this national differentiation within socialism by subjecting the workers’ parties of all nations to the dictatorship of one national workers’ party that dictates the method of struggle to all other parties without regard for the national diversity of the terrain of struggle and imposes its ideology as a canonized doctrinal system on all other parties without regard for the particularity of their cultural traditions. For this is merely the utopian attempt to impose one species of socialism, which is itself a product of a particular national history, of particular national characteristics, on workers’ movements with entirely different histories, entirely different characteristics.

By the mid 1920s, Bauer had become convinced that even though his federalist prescription for the Habsburg Empire had faded with the collapse of the Dual Monarchy, his assertions about the power of nationalism had been vindicated. No matter how international it aspired to be, Marxism could not disregard national peculiarities. Class solidarity could only be successful through the “promotion of international unity within national diversity.” But had Bauer merely succumbed to opportunism, as most interwar Communists would have us believe?

The Great War had forced a reckoning between doctrinal theories and practical realities. On the one hand, each socialist had to pick between his or her national or international affiliation. Mass politics of the turn of the 20th century had shielded Marxism from a confrontation between class-oriented theory and nationally centered practices. But the war stripped away the Second International’s illusion that proletarian solidarity superseded national colours. On the eve of tensions in the summer of 1914, workers and their socialist leaders alike rushed to the defence of their homelands. On the other hand, the war also breathed new life into Marxism through the Bolshevik victory in Russia and the creation of the first proletarian homeland. The decade after 1914 had taken Marxism on a tumultuous and violent journey from internationalism of a stable and parliamentary Western Europe, to the Soviet Union’s “socialism in one country.” Yet, Lenin’s self-determination and the application of Soviet nationality policy within

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1559 Ironically, although Bauer was branded as an opportunist by the Bolsheviks and Communists, he remained loyal to the Soviet Union, always defending its policies and tactics. He only became critical in the aftermath of the terror and purges of the 1930s. Paolo Spriano, *Stalin and The European Communists*, trans. Jon Rothschild (London: Verso, 1985), 39, 54-6.
and outside the Soviet state, stimulated more questions than answers: Could a socialist revolution be successful without recourse to nationalism? Could socialism exist outside the nationalist framework? Could socialism remain universalized or would it always have to compromise to national specificity? Marxists would disingenuously answer “yes” to all of the above questions. But the struggle between nationalism and internationalism could be resolved neither by national nihilism nor by the distorted amalgamation of the two in the confines of the Soviet Union.

In the late 1920s, Adolf Warski revisited the longstanding debate between Lenin’s self-determination and Luxemburg’s rejection of the concept. He tried to explain why the Polish Communists refused to accept the Bolshevik nationality policy for so long and why, even when they finally did so in 1923, they did it halfheartedly. Warski identified several issues, which distinguished the Poles from their Russian counterparts.

At the center of the disagreement lay a diverging view of the socialist revolution. Lenin, on the one hand, focused on the requirements of the revolutionary moment. Amidst war and upheaval, socialists should not be afraid in reaching for any mechanisms that advanced the revolutionary cause. As one of these mechanisms, nationalism offered tremendous energy and activism to mobilize masses. Time and again, it had been shown that nationally oppressed peoples were the most reliable allies of the revolution. Luxemburg, on the other hand, saw the uses of nationalism as opportunistic. She found no room for nationalism within Marxist internationalism. Nationalism—reflected in pre-1914 Polish socialism in the debate over the reestablishment of statehood—only divided working class solidarity. Lenin, on the one hand, believed that national struggles had to be perceived from the point of view of the needs of a given historical epoch. The war against national oppression, as an immediate task of the proletariat, was a vital component in the struggle for democracy and eventually for socialism. Lenin understood that a purely socialist revolution was impossible, that the transition phase from capitalism to socialism would require the existence of states, and that states could even be utilized in the engineering of socialism. Luxemburg, on the other hand, maintained that nothing short of a socialist revolution could resolve society’s problems (including national conflicts), and that states were nothing more than a tool of the bourgeoisie to control the masses.

Although both recognized the powerful hold of nationalism over workers’ consciousness, they made different assumptions about how to control it. Lenin hoped that the mere granting of the right to determine their national futures would liberate ethnic groups from pursuing statehood and national recognition. Removing the causes of national oppression would lead workers to voluntarily gravitate towards class solidarity. Luxemburg, on the other hand, “stubbornly supported the most unrealistic idea in the Marxist conception of human liberation: the idea of liberating people as species beings only—that is, as representatives of universal human nature, not as concrete individuals, shaped by different group affiliations and historical traditions.” She assumed not only that class identity was more powerful than its national counterpart, but that nationally oppressed workers were more

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1561 By the late 1920s, Warski was in the camp of the defeated “Three Ws” who had been demoted from leading the Polish Communist movement. The two-part article was published in the two issues of Nowy Przegląd: Adolf Warski, “20-letni spór z Leninem,” Nowy Przegląd nr. 3 (28), May-July 1929, and nr. 4 (29), August-October 1929, reprinted in Nowy Przegląd (Reedycja): 1929, ed. Felicja Kalicka (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1966), 430-53, 601-21.
1562 Warski, “20-letni spór z Leninem,” 435-6, 440, 442, 448, 603-5, 613.
1563 Warski, “20-letni spór z Leninem,” 445, 451-2, 603-5, 610-11. This is certainly not unlike the Roy-Lenin debate at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920. Roy argued that any cooperation with nationalist elements, regardless of how radical and leftist they might seem, was unconscionable.
1565 Walicki, Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom, 268.
interested in eliminating their social rather than national exploitation. Ironically—even though Warski failed to observe this—both Lenin and Luxemburg shared an important common trait: an “all-consuming and unhesitating devotion to the goal.” They were obsessed about subjugating everything to the cause. The difference lay in that Lenin was much more utilitarian, not afraid to exploit mechanisms which furthered his objective, while Luxemburg drew a line at several deviationisms, especially nationalism. Similarly, Lenin shifted emphasis from economics to politics, while Luxemburg remained true to economism.

When it came to nationalism, both Lenin and Luxemburg deceived themselves, albeit in different ways. Lenin believed that he could exploit self-determination and then control nationalism. Luxemburg maintained that since associations other than class-based were not critical in the workers’ worldview, nationalism was nothing more than a bourgeois sentiment that would dissipate and eventually disappear. In the end, neither realized that nationalism would remain a disease that Marxism could never fully cure. The Marxist world remained divided between those who aspired to insert nationalism into its ideological discourse and those who opposed it. Ironically, and what has remained true to the present day, nationalism has been Marxism’s best ally and its worst enemy.

The end of Warski’s article is full of self-criticism and dejection on the Polish Communists’ failure to properly Bolshevize their movement. Even though the KPRP had adopted self-determination, Warski still attempted to rescue Social Democracy’s legacy within Polish Communism, arguing that the SDKPiL’s battle with nationalism (i.e., with the PPS) revealed its class-orientation, revolutionary discipline, and devotion to ultraleftism (which he equated with Bolshevism). The Polish Communist movement never inserted nationalism into its discourse the way Lenin intended. In this sense, it remained true to the Luxemburgist traditions. Even though Polish Communists abandoned overt national nihilism, they felt more comfortable in an anational framework. Their use of nationalism was purely instrumentalist (to a much greater degree than Lenin’s) without the corresponding ideological convictions. Most importantly, they never rejected revolutionary utopianism. An imminent upheaval

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1566 Walicki, Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom, 271.
1567 Walicki explains Lenin’s position: “By finding the essence of Marxism in class analysis rather than in the theory of a necessary sequence of phases in socioeconomic evolution, he [Lenin] avoided the idea that socialist revolution in an underdeveloped country was doomed to failure through defeat or by bringing about unintended results.” Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom, 276.
1568 As mentioned in the introduction, scholars have offered a variety of schemas to categorize the various Marxist currents on the nationality question. Yet, however complex these positions have been, there is a clear division between those who have found a place for nationalism within Marxism and those who have not.
1569 Just think of the role of nationalism in Cuba, China or Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania. See, for instance, Trond Gilberg, Nationalism and Communism in Romania: The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu’s Personal Dictatorship (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990). Gregor believes that Marxism’s encounter with nationalism contributed, in no small way, to the ideology’s turn towards a totalitarian pathway. Marxism, Fascism & Totalitarianism, 161-88.
1570 Initially, this notion pertained to the Leninist doctrine but by the late 1920s, it denoted unquestionable loyalty to the Stalinism model. Jean-Francois Fayet identifies 1924 as the key turning point when Bolshevization became a frequently utilized weapon of Moscow. See, for instance, Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley, “Introduction: Stalinization and Communist Historiography,” in Bolshevikism, Stalinism and the Comintern, 1-21; and Jean-Francois Fayet, “Paul Levi and the Turning Point of 1921: Bolshevik Emissaries and International Discipline in the Time of Lenin,” in Bolshevikism, Stalinism and the Comintern, 105-23.
1572 This view has been most prominently argued by Cimek and Trembicka. Cimek, Komuniści—Polska—Stalin, 1918-1939, 40; Trembicka, Między utopią a rzeczywistością, 241-65.
eliminated the need for statehood, for nationality policy, and for national identity. All these would soon become fading memories of a past epoch.

According to most Polish Communists, national liberation was only viable for two reasons: it brought some allies into the Communist camp, and it served as a potential trigger in initiating a revolution. Although ethnographic conceptions of a socialist Poland were entertained in the early 1920s, they had dissipated by the latter half of the decade. Self-determination would be applied not to determine the ethnic affiliation of the Eastern Borderlands, Polish Corridor, Upper Silesia and Gdańsk, or the true aspirations of these areas’ inhabitants, but rather to destroy the Second Republic; not as a prerequisite for the socialist revolution but rather as the revolution’s trigger; and not as a way to recognize workers’ national aspirations, but rather as a way to convince them to join the Communist cause. Such a distorted vision of national liberation is worthy of Machiavellian praise. But as powerful as national nihilism has been in Marxism, equally strong is the current that has attempted to formulate a viable socialist or Communist approach to the nationality conundrum.

In 1908, Władysław Gumplowicz, the son of Ludwik Gumplowicz (one of sociology’s early pioneers), and an ardent supporter of the Polish Socialist Party, wrote a lengthy treatise on the Polish question and socialism, *Kwestya Polska a Socyalizm*. Although the central motivation behind this study was to respond to the SDKPiL’s dismissal of the struggle for Polish independence, the work also attempted to discern the role for nationalism within the Marxist tradition. Gumplowicz’s starting point was an examination of Marx and Engels’ views on the nationality question around the 1848 Revolutions and on Poland’s restoration. He understood Marx and Engels as his contemporaries: any troubles in Poland weakened Russian Tsarism and brought Europe closer to revolution. The forefathers of Communism wanted to recreate Poland of the pre-partition era. But why did Marx and Engels want a historical Poland? According to the author, it was their drive towards large centralized states and a belief that some nations had a historical role to play out on the revolutionary stage. Fortunately for the Poles, their revolutionary fervor had given them a pass to enter the pantheon of the worthy states. But why did Marx and Engels not afford the same right to self-determination to other states? Gumplowicz had a simple answer: Marx and Engels did not recognize such a right. In their worldview, everything was measured according to their contribution to the revolutionary cause. Most importantly, they undervalued the role of the nation-state in the struggle for socialism.

For Gumplowicz, national independence was a prerequisite for socialism: “Everywhere and always socialists have to struggle for democracy as a prerequisite for socialism, and since a necessary prerequisite for democracy is national independence, then the struggle for national independence must be enforced by socialists always and everywhere.” But why were democracy and statehood so closely intertwined? Firstly, a nation could experience genuine democracy only within its own state. Such democracy was possible only when its own people, in their own language, ruled a nation; when conationals occupied administrative and judicial positions; when children

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1576 Gumplowicz, *Kwestya Polska a Socyalizm*, 16.
attended school in their own language; and when soldiers and officers came from within the nation. Secondly, the nationality question had always been important to the masses of workers and peasants who spoke the same language and practiced the same traditions. A national bourgeois elites and monarchies had distorted nationalism and exploited it for their own ends. Thirdly, nation-states would provide the necessary economic foundations that would hasten the demise of international capitalism. Interestingly, Gumplowicz criticized Luxemburg’s assertion that history pushed towards ever-larger territorial units with growing economic interconnections (i.e., organic integration). To the contrary, the pathway to capitalism’s collapse lay in the restoration of national borders, which would prevent international capitalism from exploiting the masses. But would support for nation-states not violate internationalist principles?

Self-determination and internationalism were two sides of the same coin according to Gumplowicz. To be international is not the same as being anational (beznarodowość). “Genuine internationalism,” he argued, “is an alliance of folk (ludowych) elements of various nations based on the recognition of equitable rights of each nation.” Hence, “internationalist socialism can only be based on mutual recognition of each nation’s right to independent statehood within ethnographic borders.” But would liberation of one nation not lead to the oppression of another? How could equitable borders be established? Internationalist principles engendered in socialism would ensure each state’s rejection of expansionist territorial claims. Socialist states would combat all aspects of aggressive foreign policies. Furthermore, borders would be based on ethnography and not historical claims. This especially pertained to Poland and its restoration to the pre-partitioned status:

Let’s pay homage to the past and admit that traces of our former Polish statehood have sentimental value, even where that statehood was aggressive and harmful. But following that homage, let’s be courageous enough to look contemporary truth in the eyes and admit, that in the victorious contemporary path of democratization, the old outposts of Polish life in ethnographic Lithuania and Latvia, in ethnographic Byelorussia and ethnographic Ukraine have no future.

Gumplowicz was realistic enough to admit that minorities would still persist even within the borders of ethnographic socialist states. This would be especially inevitable in East Central Europe with territories that contained a mixed population.

Gumplowicz’s solution to the minority dilemma was simple: if a minority did not want to be assimilated, its only option was moving back to its own territorial homeland. Both, Poles living abroad and non-Poles in

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1578 Gumplowicz placed enormous emphasis on language. He explained: “Specifically for a worker and a peasant, who speaks only in his native language, the greatest political freedoms become dead letter if benefiting from them is dependent on the use of a foreign language.” Kwestya Polska a Socalizm, 21-2, 32.
1579 Gumplowicz actually juxtaposed the bourgeoisie against the masses of peasants, which he believed constituted the bulk of the nation. Kwestya Polska a Socalizm, 32, 112-14.
1580 Gumplowicz argued that capitalism had become international to the point that it dismembered national borders. American capitalism could thus exploit French or German mines with little regard for the local population. Borders would ensure priority of national interests, which would translate into better working and living conditions for the masses. Profits would be shared by the masses domestically rather than kept in the few hands of the bourgeois elites. Kwestya Polska a Socalizm, 35-7, 65-110. This was not unlike Marx’s earlier debates with List over free trade and protectionism.
1581 Gumplowicz, Kwestya Polska a Socalizm, 32, 34.
1582 Gumplowicz, Kwestya Polska a Socalizm, 47. He did not provide specific borders or territories which would constitute the future socialist Poland.
1583 Some of these ethnically mixed territories included: Suwalki, Grodziej, Siedlec, Brześć Litewska, Chelm and Hrubieszow.
socialist Poland, would eventually succumb to assimilation. Both groups should be afforded cultural and lingual freedoms (through ethnic cultural institutions), but they also had to learn their residence country’s language, culture, history and literature. But what would happen to the Jews who did not have a territorial homeland?

Although he devoted an entire chapter to the Jewish question, Gumplowicz was not optimistic about the survival of their identity in the long run. His initial conclusion was that Jews were a nationality (narodowość) and not a nation (naród). They spoke a distinct language, which created a unique culture, but they were not a nation, which Gumplowicz defined as “a branch of humanity fused by a single language and culture, a mass unified by living on a certain part of the earth’s surface and filling it with their existence and work.” To put simply, Jews did not possess the most important defining characteristic of a nation—a territorial homeland. Moreover, because they did not even long for statehood, they possessed no national vigour (żywotność). Even if they acquired a definable territory, they would face the hopeless prospect of creating a civilization—a national culture—from scratch. Zionism, which is to lead the Jews out of the ghetto,” he concluded, “is for the contemporary generation of Jews unfeasible precisely because contemporary Jews are children of the ghetto.” Thus, their only prerogative should be to search for a place that offered them a better life, one that strove for equality rather than statehood.

Even if the 19th and 20th centuries provided no definitive Marxist statement on the nationality question, they do reflect a heterogeneity of responses to nationalism. “Like other movements,” as Kołakowski asserted in the mid-1970s, “[Marxism] attempts to conceal this heterogeneity from itself and to maintain its ideology at a level of such vagueness and fluidity that it cannot be compelled to change it even when drastic changes occur in the shape of the movement itself.” The nationalization of Communism has been visible everywhere where Marxism has assumed concrete political forms. And in all instances, Marxists have faced a situation of accepting nationalism without self-contradiction. Even Luxemburg’s seeming national nihilism was not free of such contradictions, which she was never able to resolve. She denied the existence of nations but recognized the importance of national oppression. She denounced Lenin’s abandonment of democratic practices after 1917 but called for the suppression of national separatist movements in the name of large centralized states. But why has this paradoxical theoretical denial of national reality persisted in Marxist discourse? “It is due to precisely this theoretical denial of national reality,” Kołakowski concluded, “that Marxism could so successfully be exploited as the ideological organ of the Russian Empire—since it supplied it with conceptual tools which permitted the chauvinist pursuit of national oppression without necessarily employing nationalist phraseology, but assisted by numerous traditionally Marxist and internationalist concepts.”

1584 Gumplowicz believed that a socialist national government should do everything to prevent the emigration of people. It should provide a socio-economic environment to attract Poles who lived abroad to come back to Poland and build socialism at home. But he also recognized that if some Poles chose to remain outside of Poland, that they would be facing assimilation. Similarly, the non-Poles who decided to remain in a socialist Poland would also face eventual assimilation into mainstream Polish society. Assimilation was simply impossible to resist.

1585 Gumplowicz, Kwestya Polska a Socjalizm, 47-50.

1586 Gumplowicz, Kwestya Polska a Socjalizm, 51.

1587 What he meant by civilization is the affiliation between a nation and a given territory. He believed that this entailed a lengthy process which Jews would not have the time to complete quickly enough to prevent assimilation.

1588 Gumplowicz, Kwestya Polska a Socjalizm, 55.


Marxism will continue to ally with nationalism while branding it as humanity’s worst enemy, it will exploit its appeal and mobilizing force while denying its importance, and it will continue to criticize national oppression of some while denying self-determination to others. For if Marxism accepted nationalism into its ideological constellation, could it still be called Marxism?
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