

# Editorial

This issue focuses on the national question. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx wrote:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood....

In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

When it was written in 1847 this was way ahead of its time but in the course of the 20th century it became more and more true. Today in the 21st century we live in a world where giant cities, dwarfing anything in Marx's day, exist across the globe and where more or less the same multinational corporations operate in all of them. McDonalds' burgers can be bought in Moscow, Beijing and Cairo as well as New York and London. Disney films can be watched in Mumbai and Buenos Aires and t-shirts and jeans are the near universal uniform of the masses everywhere.

But this objective globalisation of production, consumption and, to some extent of culture, has not at all done away with national antagonisms and conflicts. On the contrary right wing nationalist and outright fascist forces proliferate across Europe and many other countries eg UKIP, Golden Dawn, Front National, Jobbyk, Swedish Democrats, the BJP (in India), while there are also a multitude of more or less left wing nationalist movements directed against national oppression., e.g. ETA and Basque nationalism, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine and, of course, the various strands of Republicanism in Ireland.

There are a number of reasons for this powerful persistence of nationalism as a political force. First the fact that while capitalism certainly develops towards global integration, it does so competitively i.e. on the basis of intense and permanent competition between rival multinational corporations, the majority of which have a national base (e.g. Coca-cola sells globally but is based in the US) and between nation states as such. Second, this economic competition leads to geo-political conflict which takes on a certain strategic and military momentum of its own, producing numerous wars. Third, global capitalist development is deeply uneven with some areas and states leaping ahead and others being left behind and as a result being prone to domination, both economically and politically; and where there is domination there also tends to be resistance. Fourth, in all these conflicts ruling classes and aspirant ruling classes (such as the middle classes in colonised countries) turn to nationalism as their main ideological tool for mobilising their populations under their leadership. So the contemporary importance of 'national questions' should not surprise us; indeed we must expect that this will continue to be the case while capitalism survives.

Here we address the national question today through five articles. John Molyneux out-

lines, on the basis of the classical Marxist tradition, the main principles underpinning a revolutionary socialist response to nationalism; in particular he addresses the apparent ‘contradiction’ of socialists being internationalists but also supporting the right of nations to self-determination and goes on to consider some complex intermediate cases. Andy Durgan from En Lluita, the SWP’s sister organisation in the Spanish state, examines the development of the growing movement for independence in Catalonia. He charts the historical ups and downs of Catalan nationalism; its suppression by Franco, its temporary neutralisation by the granting of a degree of autonomy, its resurgence in 2012 and its current impasse in face of intransigence on the part of the Spanish state and the reluctance of the Catalan bourgeois nationalists to lead a real struggle. However he argues that socialists should take a clear position in favour of independence. An important consideration here is the potentially explosive consequences of a collision between a Catalan majority for independence and the central state in Madrid, terrified of the break up of Spain.

In some ways the Catalan case parallels that of Scotland, analysed here by Keir McKechnie. Keir shows that Scotland cannot be seen as an oppressed nation - a victim of colonial oppression like Ireland or India - but was rather a partner in British imperialism. For this reason the Scottish National Party did not develop as an anti-imperialist movement or party. Nevertheless he argues that objectively the break-up of Britain would be a significant blow to imperialism and should be supported, but without sowing illusions that Scottish independence would, in itself, resolve the problems of the Scottish working class.

Most socialists and radicals will be aware at some level of the plight of the Kurdish people, divided by imperialism among rival states (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria) and oppressed in all of them; few, however, will know much of their long history and struggle. This makes Memet Uludag’s article, which outlines that history and argues for the central importance of the issue for the region today, particularly

welcome: it may possibly be the first time anyone on the Irish left has published a substantial analysis of the Kurdish question.

Brian Kelly brings it all back home in an important analysis of the situation in the North. First he notes and analyses the significant rise of loyalist sectarianism over the past year. Then he goes on to critique three responses to this phenomenon: the dominant narrative of ‘two traditions which should respect each other’ espoused by Sinn Fein amongst others; the stages theory that there can be no working class unity until after the national question has been solved (by a united Ireland); the dismissal of both loyalist and nationalist traditions as equally sectarian and reactionary. Instead he argues for a strategy that pursues working class unity on class issues while simultaneously opposing sectarianism and partition.

What unites all these articles is that they approach each of these concrete national questions from a standpoint of anti-imperialism and internationalism which sees international working class unity as the ultimate goal.

The question of democracy is at the centre of contemporary political debate. Numerous phenomena, from the Irish people’s anger at ‘the crooked bankers and politicians’ to the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy movement, and even the reaction to Russell Brand’s take down of Jeremy Paxman, show that huge numbers of people feel, rightly, that they are not represented by the present system. But what would real democracy look like?

The question of the state has always been at the centre of Marxist politics. The key difference between reformist and revolutionary socialists has always been, and remains today whether the existing state apparatus can be taken over and used for socialist purposes or whether it needs to be destroyed and replaced by a new form of state altogether. But what would this new form of state look like?

Tina MacVeigh’s study of the experience of workers’ councils addresses both these important questions. As she says history ‘does give us some clues’.

Seamus Heaney, arguably Ireland's greatest poet since W.B. Yeats, died on 30 August of this year. Paul O'Brien offers a balanced but deeply appreciative assessment of his legacy.

Finally, we have been able to expand our book reviews section with Michael Taft on

Austerity Ireland, Sinéad Kennedy on Nancy Fraser's *Fortunes of Feminism*, James O'Toole on Harry Browne's *The Frontman* and Annette Mooney on Kitty Holland's *Savita*. This is a practice we would like to maintain. Please send us reviews of recently published books.