

between say Russia, Brandenburg, and Sweden – but also between the Dutch Republic, Venice, and Switzerland. Another diagram can be drawn in which the underlying factors behind war (economic, demographic, ideological) are presented in relation to the frequency or intensity of wars. Such a diagram might show a shift in the relative influence of the factors suggested. I do not think that such additions will change Tilly's overall picture of state development in Europe fundamentally, for he has presented the phenomenon in a most remarkable way. But even when one admires greatly the effort to analyse complex historical developments using the sort of models Tilly does, one must be aware of the pitfalls associated with this approach.

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**HOBBSAWM E.J.** Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 1990. viii, 191 pp. £ 14.95.

The rise of nations and nationalisms is a relentless characteristic of global political development over the last two hundred years, and Marxists have always found the phenomenon particularly problematic. Indeed, according to Tom Nairn, the theory of nationalism is Marxism's "great historical failure".<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Professor Hobsbawm has finally been led to address the subject in detail. The "national question" has doggedly pursued him through his work both as a historian of capitalism and the labour movement,<sup>2</sup> and as a politically committed Marxist responding to contemporary issues.<sup>3</sup> Until now, however, his writings on the topic have been dispersed within historical works of wider compass, or in occasional essays spread over a period of some twenty years. This book, based on a series of lectures delivered at The Queen's University, Belfast in 1985, is his first attempt to confront the specific issue of nationalism in systematic and comprehensive fashion.

In terms of its erudition, its geographical and historical scope, the energy and lucidity of its argument, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780* is undoubtedly a *tour de force*. This is a relatively short book on a very large topic, strongly interpretative and thus provocative. The essence of Professor Hobsbawm's position is that nations are largely constructed from above, political artefacts based on the principle of the modern territorial state. "Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round" (p. 10) and thus nations are engineered or even invented. He recognises, of course, that the promotion of national consciousness requires a degree of popular receptivity, and typically this depends on a certain level of economic and technological development, which breaks down social and regional particularisms and draws the popular masses into the process. But, as he insists yet again later in the

<sup>1</sup> Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus", *New Left Review*, 94 (1975).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, chapters on the issue in his *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848* (1962), *The Age of Capital 1848–1875* (1975), *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (1987) and *Worlds of Labour* (1984).

<sup>3</sup> Notably his reply to Tom Nairn in *New Left Review*, 105 (1977).

book, “nations are more often the consequence of setting up a state than they are its foundations” (p. 78).

This position is confirmed from the outset in his analysis of the European nation-building process from 1830 to 1880. He focuses only briefly on the radical democratic concept of nationhood launched by the French Revolution, in which notions of popular sovereignty and equal citizenship were paramount. The links between early European nationalisms and popular democratic movements are not explored. And while he accepts that language, kinship, religion or a common history may help to create what he calls “popular proto-nationalism”, he sees this as a facilitating rather than a necessary factor in nation building. For him the driving force in this period was the liberal bourgeoisie and their intellectuals, who conceived the principle of nationality in terms neither of ethnicity nor of popular sovereignty, but of economic rationality and human progress towards “the unified world of the future” (p. 38). The preference was for large states brought about by unification rather than secession. Beyond the “threshold principle” of economic viability, the right of nations to exist rested on other pragmatic considerations – historic association with a current state, the existence of a long-established cultural elite, or a proven capacity to conquest.

In Hobsbawm’s view, it was only after 1880, with the arrival of the era of European democracy and mass politics, that nationalism became a genuine ideology designed for popular consumption, and here the notion of “the invention of tradition” comes into full play.<sup>4</sup> Ruling classes and their governments were obliged to construct a new symbolism of national identity in order to achieve legitimacy, social cohesion and citizen loyalty. This integrative ideology of “state patriotism” often successfully incorporated the notions of citizenship contained in the radical-democratic tradition. And indeed, in as far as the growing class-consciousness of workers itself generated demands for such citizen rights, they too found themselves locked into the logic of loyalty to the bourgeois state, a tragic paradox which, in Hobsbawm’s words, “helped to plunge them willingly into the mutual massacre of World War I” (p. 89).

However, this “state patriotism” was to create a counter-nationalism, inspired by resistance to the standardising, modernising thrust of the nation-state and by the parallel effects of mass migratory movements, imperialist rivalry and the rise of racist pseudo-science. This essentially *petit bourgeois* nationalism was based on loyalty not to the existing state but to an “imagined community”, defined for the most part in terms of language, culture or even race, and thus irreconcilable with the comprehensive principle of equal citizenship. In those countries where state patriotism was able to absorb these new “non-state nationalisms”, the effect was to shift the whole ideological construct to the right, thereby helping to legitimise xenophobic and anti-semitic sentiments. Elsewhere, however, and especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the process engendered a proliferation of state-aspiring nationalist movements driven, in Hobsbawm’s view, by an ethnic but above all by a linguistic rationale, and appealing especially to the educated lower-middle classes.

This brings Hobsbawm to the period 1918–1950 which he describes as “The Apogee of Nationalism”, when an attempt was made to construct new states on the

<sup>4</sup> See E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (1983).

basis of linguistic and ethnic criteria. The collapse of the central and east European empires and the Russian Revolution led the victors of World War I “to play the Wilsonian card against the Bolshevik card” (p. 131) creating “a jigsaw puzzle” of bourgeois parliamentary nation states, a disastrous project which simply created new “oppressed minorities” within the frontiers of state territories. At the same time, the collapse of the pre-1914 world economic order saw the triumph of bourgeois nationalism in another vein. “As the economic blizzard swept across the global economy, world capitalism retreated into the igloos of its nation-state economies and their associated empires” (p. 132).

Here the argument that nations are essentially bourgeois political artefacts reaches its natural conclusion, as Hobsbawm indicates the futility of trying to make state frontiers coincide with ethnic-linguistic ones and the limitations of the nation state as a self-contained economic unit. Between the wars, the logic of nationalism in established nation states was purely ideological, seeking to mobilise the middle strata, who had lost faith in other projects and programmes, against the threat of social revolution. At the same time, of course, Hobsbawm is anxious to avoid the suggestion that the tainted word “nationalist” can legitimately be used to describe progressive left-wing movements. Thus the anti-fascist patriotism of the resistance may be seen as the accidental convergence of internationalist and socialist values and aspirations with the rhetoric of national liberation. As for the post-war decolonisation process, Hobsbawm regards the word “nationalist” as largely inapplicable to what were essentially anti-imperialist movements, sometimes led by “local educated elites imitating European ‘national self-determination’” (p. 151), but rarely coinciding with “a political or ethnic entity existing before the coming of the imperialists” (p. 153).

Having thus suggested that the words “nation” and “nationalism” are inappropriate for many of the 100 or more states that have come into being since 1945, Hobsbawm completes his case by arguing that, despite its continuing ideological impact, nationalist politics is “no longer a major vector of historical development” (p. 163) in the late twentieth century. In as far as state-aspiring national movements still exist, they are essentially defensive, a rejection “of modern modes of political organisation, both national and supranational” (p. 164). At best the resurgent West European separatisms of the post-1968 period are reactions against centralisation and bureaucratisation, which have chosen to wrap themselves “in coloured banners” (p. 178). Furthermore, established nation states are progressively losing many of their functions, as internationalisation in its various economic, technological and cultural forms gathers pace. “The new supranational restructuring of the globe” may not herald the disappearance of nations and nation-states, but they will increasingly be relegated to “subordinate, and often rather minor roles” (p. 182).

Hobsbawm’s analysis is entirely consistent with his earlier writings on the subject, and it is open to the same criticisms. He views nationalism as a bourgeois ideological construct, whose “popular” dimension is limited to linguistic, ethnic and cultural solidarities. What is missing in his treatment of the 19th-century nation-building process is any serious consideration of the relationship between the ideal of nationhood and the broad democratic aspirations to self-government awakened by the French Revolution. He insists on the dominant role of the liberal bourgeoisie, despite evidence that German and Italian capitalists had largely lost interest in the

national movements by the time unification occurred, and despite the absence of anything seriously resembling a capitalist class at this time in the aspiring “nations” of Central and Eastern Europe. In reality, the challenge to the European feudal and autocratic order had a much broader social base than he suggests. It simply cannot be equated with “bourgeois” interests, neither can the involvement of the popular classes simply be explained away in terms of ethnic and linguistic particularism. The common feature of all these struggles was the quest for new modes of political organisation and new principles of legitimacy based on popular consent. In a Europe of vast territorial empires and subordinate statelets, this required a redefinition of state frontiers, which in turn gave a fresh salience to ethnic and linguistic issues which had previously lain dormant.

The democratic impulse which inspired these early nationalisms can only be understood if attention is paid to the process of social class formation, something which Hobsbawm surprisingly neglects, not only in the 19th-century European context but also in more recent examples elsewhere. In societies where capitalist class differentiation was not very far advanced, where a nascent bourgeoisie was as yet unable to impose class-conscious leadership on other social groups, the challenge to feudalism and autocracy was socially heterogeneous, and was indeed likely to be expressed in terms of an idealised “general will”, in terms of a socially undifferentiated *peuple*, in terms of equal citizenship in a self-governing community.

This aspiration to “unite all individuals sharing a particular set of criteria of nationality under a common regime based on the notion of popular sovereignty”<sup>5</sup> may have been a sentimental illusion in terms of later historical development, destined as it was to founder on the emerging class contradictions of capitalist society. But placed in their real social context, it is surely untenable to identify such movements with the ideological hegemony of a self-conscious bourgeoisie.

In conclusion, Hobsbawm is right to see nations as political artefacts, to see language and ethnicity as raw material rather than as the essential catalyst, and indeed to recognise the eventual utility of nationalism as an ideological instrument of the bourgeois state. However, his tendency to regard nationalism in all its phases of development simply as an adjunct of bourgeois interests is surely teleological. Professor Hobsbawm is at his most interesting and illuminating in his discussion of how the theme of national identity was reworked into an instrument of social cohesion and control, but less persuasive in his analysis of “state-aspiring national movements”.

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FARHI, FARIDEH. *States and Urban-Based Revolutions. Iran and Nicaragua*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana [etc.] 1990. x, 147 pp. \$ 29.95.

When Theda Skocpol published her *States and Social Revolutions*, she explicitly cast

<sup>5</sup> B. Jenkins and G. Minnerup, *Citizens and Comrades: Socialism in a World of Nation States* (1984), p. 61.