

Report review sub-commission Oppression – national question

The review intends to examine our past, to look at the strengths of our International, in order to continue building on them, but to also look at deficiencies, to find the origin of them, to learn from mistakes and to resolve them in order to strengthen our present and future work.

Compared to what a review of our past reveals on the question of gender or racial oppression, our International has a proud record on the question of national oppression. In comparison to other left wing forces we have developed a strong historical position, based on the massive theoretical and programmatic work and the concrete experiences of Peter Hadden and the Irish section.

Peter Hadden's books remain even today, an invaluable resource for comrades wanting to understand and to develop demands and programmes on the national question. They should be regarded as a political treasure of the International. Not because there is a one-size-fits-all formula, but because it offers a method for the development of an independent working class view and position on the national question.

The CWI and the national question

In *Troubled Times*, chapter 3, Peter Hadden explains how it is the rise of the working class "as a force sufficiently strong to make its independent mark on history" that puts the potential for unity, in this case between Catholics and Protestants, on a higher level.

This is true of all forms of oppression. When Sylvia Federici claims that Marx was wrong in seeing the development of capitalism as something progressive when compared to feudalism, she is missing many points, the need for a higher development of the productive forces allowing for a higher living standard for everyone (the necessary condition to get rid of class society) being an important one of them.

But she also misses the point that capitalism creates the working class as a group of people who have the same objective interests and the economic position to overthrow capitalism and take over society. To successfully fight against the bosses and definitely in the struggle for socialism, solidarity and unity are key aspects. For that unity to be possible the working class has to embrace a thoroughly democratic approach in fighting against all forms of oppression. That is the lesson of the Russian Revolution, an event that wouldn't have been possible without the position of Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the right to self-determination of oppressed nations and the rights of national minorities.

Peter mentions New Unionism, the struggle of the most oppressed layers of the working class, the up to then unorganised unskilled workers, which led to the development of Trade Unions that organised the mass of workers and not just the "labour aristocracy," as having played a key role in the development of class unity between Catholic and Protestant workers. In the same way it brought women and immigrant workers into the unions and into the organised working class.

The red thread throughout Peter Hadden's work is that he kept a keen eye on the class question and how the class question and the national question are interrelated and to see

that potential for unity if a correct programme and approach is taken, combining the united social struggle with a defence of democratic rights for all workers.

To develop an independent working class position is also key to Lenin's position on the national question and Peter's life work was to develop this position in the modern era, against the traditions in social-democracy and Stalinism, unfortunately followed by many of the left revolutionary forces. Neglecting to develop a working class view on any form of oppression will always lead to taking on the programme of another class when the question presents itself with such force that you cannot deny or neglect it any longer.

It led to worker's parties and revolutionaries tail ending bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalism or denying the oppressed nation's democratic rights. It led to them abandoning an internationalist approach that recognises the democratic rights of peoples and minorities in order to make real unity, which is free and voluntary and based on equality. Our International was the only revolutionary international organisation not to fall into that trap during and after the Troubles, during which Northern Ireland was a burning issue in the whole world.

Central to the Leninist position is what Lenin called a "consistently democratic" approach, which is the defence of the right to self-determination, but also of the rights of national minorities, based on the understanding that ultimately only united class struggle can put an end to national oppression, but also that the working class of the dominant nation must recognise national democratic rights of oppressed nations and minorities, including the right of secession even if that is not always what we would advocate.

Leninists start from the idea that there is not one formula, but that any position or programme must be based on a thorough analysis of the situation at hand to develop a programme and strategy that can unite the working class in the concrete space and time. This also means that in the course of time programmes need to be adapted to changing conditions and consciousness and that it is not possible to copy-paste positions. Positions must be based on studying the historical development of the national question in a given country and understanding its interrelationship with the class question, on the estimation of the objective situation and consciousness of the broad population, but first and foremost of the working class and its vanguard.

Our starting point is one of internationalism and the interests of the working class, but this cannot be understood in a simplistic mechanical way. It is in the interests of class unity and the struggle for socialism to show that the working class gives no support whatsoever to national oppression. It does in no way mean a stage-ist approach toward the national question, in which we ask oppressed peoples to "wait" until socialism is obtained.

This is what Lenin wrote in *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (Jan/Feb 1916) under the heading "the Meaning of the Right to Self-Determination and its Relation to Federation":

"The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the present division of mankind into small states and all national isolation; not only to bring the nations closer to each other, but also to merge them. And in order to achieve this aim, we must, on the one hand, explain to the masses the reactionary nature of the ideas of Renner and Otto Bauer concerning so-called "cultural

national autonomy” and, on the other hand, demand the liberation of the oppressed nations, not only in general, nebulous phrases, not in empty declamations, not by “postponing” the question until socialism is established, but in a clearly and precisely formulated political programme which shall particularly take into account the hypocrisy and cowardice of the Socialists in the oppressing nations. Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede.”

In fact the struggle for national liberation was an integral part of the struggle for socialism in the Russian Revolution and Lenin saw the national liberation struggle as a potential “dress rehearsal” for revolution if the working class took an independent position. Our defence of an independent socialist Scotland or Catalonia is based on the understanding that the defence of the democratic rights of the Scottish and Catalanian workers is a necessary condition for working class unity in the struggle for socialism in the UK and the Spanish state.

In Troubled Times, in chapter 14 Finding a Solution, Peter Hadden explains that “a Marxist programme supports all that is progressive in national movements but offers no measure of support to their backward features. Essentially this is a negative programme. We are against the suppression of culture, language, nationality. But we do not promote any particular culture, language or nationality over any other.”:

He goes on to explain that “The best way to assess whether a demand or a set of demands is correct, is to pose the simple question - does it make it easier to gain the ear of nationalist minded workers, does it advance the class struggle? This was the approach of Lenin: “The bourgeoisie always places its national demands in the forefront, and does so in categorical fashion. With the proletariat, however, these demands are subordinated to the interests of the class struggle.” And: “While recognising equality and equal rights to a nation state, it (the working class) values above all and places foremost the alliance of the proletariat of all nations, and assesses every national demand, every national separation from the angle of the working class struggle.”

The Irish comrades were obviously not alone in developing the position of the International, with comrades and sections in Sri Lanka, Israel/Palestine, South-Africa, Cyprus, and later on in Scotland, Quebec, Belgium and others contributing to refine our understanding of the national question today, to look at it in the different shapes and forms it takes. A massive contribution started in the 1990’s when our Russian group/section were confronted with the effects on the national question of the disintegration of the ex-Soviet Union.

This deep understanding made it possible for us to develop a correct position in the wars around the disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia, an issue that led to long monthly articles in Socialism Today. Even if we did not have forces on the ground there, the fact that the whole world was watching in horror at how ethnic cleansing was perpetrated within Europe made it necessary to take an internationalist position on this conflict and defend a democratic socialist solution that would take into account the rights of the different peoples within Yugoslavia and the rights of the working class as a whole.

This was the work of sections and comrades, but the lessons of it were properly discussed within the International: within the international leadership bodies, but also in Summer

Schools, in the MIR and later Socialism Today, in internal Bulletins,... In that way this served all sections and comrades as a basis to start developing their position, programme and demands.

This shared strong position of the CWI was even shown in the faction struggles and splits, in the sense that it was never the main point of dispute. Differences did however play a role, albeit a role in the background and differences did often appear quickly afterwards.

One example of this was the position Ted Grant's IMT developed on the falling apart of Yugoslavia. Only a number of years after the split the IMT took a position against the right to self-determination of Kosovo, bringing forward the question of a socialist federation of the Balkans while explicitly speaking against the right to self-determination:

“In the given conditions, so-called self-determination is a recipe for endless wars and ethnic slaughter in the Balkans. (their emphasis) This cannot be in the interest of any of the Balkan peoples. Only the rival cliques of bourgeois gangsters and Mafiosi can benefit from such an abomination. It is necessary to call a halt to the madness! It is necessary to cut across the national feuds by fighting for a socialist federation of Balkan peoples, with full autonomy to every nationality.(...) The only way to prevent the further oppression of the people of Kosovo and to solve this question once and for all is through the revolutionary overthrow of Milosevic and his clique. But this can only be done by the Serbian working class. This task cannot be entrusted to the imperialists, who are not concerned about the fate of Kosovo or of any oppressed people in the world, but only in their own narrow and selfish interest.” (The Kosovo pogrom and the Balkan powder-keg, Alan Woods, 12 March 1998)

The recognition by the Serbian working class that the Kosovan workers and poor had the right to self-determination was however a necessary precondition to make a joint fight for a **free and voluntary** socialist federation possible after the atrocities committed by the Serbian state – without this, why should the Kosovan workers and poor have any trust that the Serbian people would not act “in their own narrow and selfish interest?”

Similarly, the ‘Scottish debate’ was primarily about the liquidation of our revolutionary party into the Scottish Socialist Party and with it an opportunist shift away from a revolutionary programme. Such a shift also reflected a shift to a left nationalist position on the question of Scottish independence. The former comrades increasingly acted as left advisors to the SNP including arguing for the establishment of parliamentary blocs with the SNP and other pro-independence parties. Increasingly while formally arguing for an “independent socialist Scotland,” the emphasis was on what could be achieved on the basis of independence e.g. how poverty could be challenged without making it clear that a complete break with capitalism was necessary.

Since 2014, there has been a more blatant shift to an opportunist approach with both the SSP and Tommy Sheridan in different ways advocating a ‘tactical’ vote for the SNP in different elections and in the case of Sheridan actually joining the former first minister Salmond’s splinter from SNP, Alba. At best, our former comrades in Scotland argue for a stage-ist approach, first independence (on a capitalist basis) and then socialism, in doing so feeding illusions in ‘independence’ under capitalism. Such an approach is widespread on the Scottish left, in rebuilding the forces of Marxism we have to seek to connect with workers and youth who wish to struggle for independence but in a manner which emphasises an

independent position including challenging the idea that independence under capitalism is the solution and explain the need for an independent socialist Scotland, not simply in a sloganeering manner but as a concrete necessity to achieve the aspirations of a large section of workers and young people.

It's not just in Scotland where former comrades have shifted to an opportunist position on the national question. A striking example occurred during the dispute in Ireland. The group that is now RISE argued they had no differences with the majority on the national question. This was despite their emphasis on calling for a 'united front approach' with Sinn Fein. Since leaving they have entirely ditched a Marxist approach on the national question and advocate a border poll and for socialists to call for a yes vote. In an article by Paul Murphy, they put this forward despite acknowledging the possibility that it could lead to sectarian conflict or that it "may simply change the dynamic of oppression, with Protestants feeling coerced into a state they do not identify with"! They do so on the basis that this is the view of the majority in Ireland i.e. those in the South and Catholics in the north and that for socialists to take an independent position is "blowing back into a hurricane." In other words socialists have to pick sides and opportunistically adapt to the attitudes of a section of the population, in this case the dominant mood in the South on this question. In contradistinction, our task is to tell the truth to workers, that such a poll would not lead to a resolution of the national question, will divide rather than unite workers and young people and that the only way to resolve the national question in Ireland with conflicting aspirations, is on the basis of common struggle of workers and young people for socialist change.

Deficiencies in the last 10-15 years

It is on the level of internationalising the lessons of sections with a developed approach as the various national questions develop that we have seen a lessening of attention to detail by the old IS/CWI, roughly over the last 10-15 years which at times meant sweeping generalisations that were not based on real developments. This was however an important period when it comes to the national question, the total deadlock of the peace processes that nowhere solved the issues, also because the promised "peace dividend", that is the improvement in the lives of the masses or ordinary people through the "peace process", never came along, nor could it on the basis of the deepening of neoliberal austerity, and the hardening of the cuts after the 2008 Recession.

Many national questions have exploded or entered into new phases in those years. The framework of the capitalist "solution" (beyond outright repression), the power sharing deals that characterise countries like Belgium or Lebanon and regions like Northern Ireland, are crumbling.. Harmonious living together is impossible in a social desert, which is one aspect, but the other is that such power sharing deals lead to a profoundly undemocratic situation in which the elites of different communities work out a deal that is then imposed on the whole population.

In Belgium this has led to a growing indifference towards the political establishment, a disconnect that was characterised by the "big people's feast" that was held on the day Belgium broke the world record of the longest period of federal government negotiations. In Lebanon it led to the development of the demand to get rid of all parties within the massive revolt that started at the end of 2019. **In the same way we saw how in the revolt in Iraq**

young people carried the Iraqi national flag as a symbol of a mood against division and in favour of unity in fighting the system. It is clear that we need more profound international discussion on such developments and what they mean for our perspectives and approach. In general we need to re-establish the tradition of far more international discussion.

An example of the lessening of attention for international discussion on the issue of the national question was that in a number of World Perspectives documents, the perspectives for Belgium seemed to be picked from alarmist articles from the international press, rather than based on the analysis and position of the section. In the draft Thesis on Europe for the 9th World Congress (2007) the following sentence led to an amendment of the Belgian section: *“In Belgium and Scotland there is increased support for so-called “friendly divorces” on the lines of the 1993 break-up of Czechoslovakia, and such moods could develop again in northern Italy.”* This went straight against the analysis and perspectives the Belgian section had developed.

The final text said the following: *“Within some countries there is renewed discussion of the idea of a so-called “friendly divorce” on the lines of the 1993 break-up of Czechoslovakia. In Belgium in the run up to a new “state reform”, pushed by the Flemish parties to impose a harder neo-liberal policy in the French speaking part, the idea of a “friendly divorce” is being discussed more, but is generally seen as something utopian and does not have, at this stage, support amongst broader layers. The major bosses’ organisation and the two major trade union federations oppose this idea. Scotland has seen increased support for independence, partly as a reaction against the Blair government, and such moods could develop in other countries.”*

This still fell short of a clear and precise analysis and perspectives. When mentioning the “friendly divorce” of Czechoslovakia, it should have been made clear that this was an exceptional case that couldn’t be transferred to established states such as the UK or Belgium – as the real later developments showed. Czechoslovakia did not have an established ruling class, being at the start of the restoration of capitalism. Compared to Belgium the now Czech Republic and Slovakia were relatively homogeneous regions with clearly demarcated distinct territories with big differences in their respective economic make up and orientation (one looking toward the EU, the other clearly linked to Russia), nor did it have a mixed capital. Nor in Belgium nor in the UK a split would be so straightforward or “friendly”; the comparison was only based on highly superficial elements as brought forward in the – English speaking – international press.

In the IS draft for the 2017 World Perspectives document the programmatic demand for Brussels as a shared capital for Flanders and Wallonia – in comparison to Kirkuk (Northern Iraq Kurdish capital), but in discussions put forward as a simple copy of the position we defended at the time for Jerusalem – was put forward in a very blunt way. After long discussions with the Belgian section going against the insistence of the IS the following was put in the text: *“23. This would be similar to the approach of the CWI and our Belgian section towards Brussels which has a preponderance of French speakers but is located within the Flemish region. We recognise the right of self-determination for all the peoples and regions in Belgium within a socialist confederation of Belgium, with the Brussels region having a special relationship with the other parts of Belgium.”*

Putting forward in a simplistic way a programme for Brussels as a shared capital for the two main regions completely ignores the sentiment in the Brussels population, which showed in different opinion polls to reject the idea of being run by the other regions. In fact Brussels is in some ways today a “shared capital” in the sense that Brussels has the powers of a region (which is opposed by the Flemish nationalist forces in the traditional Flemish Christian democracy and by the NVA and Vlaams Belang, who describe the formation of the Brussels Region as a historic mistake), but competences such as education and parts of health care are controlled by the Flemish government and the French Community government, meaning they are split on language lines (with a majority of the population who do not speak Dutch or French as their first language, being from an immigrant background and feeling no attachment to either of the two big regions) and effectively separate the population on language lines, forcing the immigrant communities to choose which community they “belong” to.

With no say in the financing of the heavily underfinanced region, decided from above by the federal government in which there has to be parity between the two main language groups, the developing sentiment is to want these competences for Brussels itself, with the Brussels population deciding on their education etc. Also the formation of the Brussels government itself has become more and more complicated as the Flemish community has a guaranteed position and an effective veto in the Brussels government which goes well beyond the real presence of Flemish people in Brussels. The extensive and complicated power sharing deals made undemocratically above the heads of the population have led to the development of a “Brussels feeling”, which should be taken in account when putting forward programmatic demands for the region.

A more problematic example of this retreat of internationalism and international discussion, which is necessary in order to get the best and most complete view on the situation as possible, is the fact that when the England and Wales section developed its approach toward Brexit, this was not accompanied with thorough discussion with the Irish section, whereas the position would obviously have its effect on Northern Ireland. Irish comrades participated in NC discussions in EW, but no joint discussion was organised. It did not lead to a massive difference in approach, but such a joint discussion could have strengthened, for instance our approach towards youth in the Remain camp, including in our propaganda being more conscious of the illusions young people had and legitimate fears around Brexit particularly in relation to racism, something for which the Irish section was more sensitive. The normal situation in a healthy International would have been for the sections involved to discuss this together. The same applies for the question of Scottish independence. **The failure to take this open approach was reflective of differences the then IS had with the Irish leadership, including believing an imbalance was taken to the question of a border poll and particularly to the prospect of a return to sectarian violence which the IS believed could be cut across by transitional arrangement towards a united Ireland as a result of “intense pressure from the ruling classes in the UK, Ireland, EU and the US,”(IS Majority reply to The National Question in Ireland and the dispute in the CWI).**

In the countries of the former Soviet Union, the national question has been particularly complicated. The historic legacy of the Bolsheviks which recognised the right of self-determination, respect for languages and cultures, and under Lenin’s insistence, the formation of the USSR as a Union of equal Soviet republics was

completely negated in the consciousness of Soviet workers by decades of Stalinism. The crude, bureaucratic approach adopted as Stalinism consolidated itself was exacerbated by forced collectivisation. The Hitler Stalin pact saw the forced integration of the Baltic states and part of Moldova into the Soviet Union. The deportation of ethnic groups such as the Crimean Tatars, Chechens and Volga Germans during WW2 left deep scars that laid the basis for the explosion of new conflicts as capitalism was restored in the early 1990s.

The CWI minority led by Grant and Woods underplayed the significance of the national question during the collapse of Stalinism. Having first claimed that the national question had been solved in the USSR, they managed to ignore it in the debate over the significance of the 1991 coup. The majority had in general a good approach. Peter Taaffe identified the dangers that the attacks of the Russian language in Moldova, for example, although later as the war in Transdnistria, the Russian speaking part of Moldova, broke out, there was a tendency to apply a 'one-size fits all' analysis ignoring feedback from comrades who visited the region. Increasingly comrades on the ground were left with little discussion on concrete and often very complex, and often new issues such as, for example, that of self-determination for regions such as Chechnya, which after two brutal wars saw the displacement of a large part of its population.

In August 2008 the Russo-Georgia war broke out, this sparked off a split in the Russian section. Our position, then with the full support of the IS, even though Georgia's Saakashvili government had launched the military attack on the mainly pro-Russian South Ossetia, was to give no support to Russian imperialism in invading Georgia. We called for workers' unity, the defence of the right to self-determination of South Ossetia, and the formation of independent workers' organisations to fight for the establishment of governments to defend workers' interests, overcome poverty and ensure peace, and for a democratic socialist federation of the Caucasus. [Russia and Georgia || Implications of a Five Day War • ISA \(internationalsocialist.net\)](#).

Six years later after Ukraine's Euromaidan in Ukraine in 2014, the earlier clarity retreated to be replaced by a superficial approach, and with the distinct impression of being influenced by those friendly lefts and trade union leaders who were sympathetic to Russian imperialism. Russian government claims were taken at face value – the sacking of the Crimean parliament by Russian troops and forced removal of the anti-secession Premier, replaced by a pro-Russian and notorious gangland boss, was dismissed as “setting up a parallel administration”. Having earlier accepted that 40% of the peninsula's population – Ukrainians and Tatars – had no say in the referendum, the Kremlin's claim that “an overwhelming majority voted in favour of joining Russia ... 96.77% voted 'for' integration and turnout was 83.1%” was accepted as fact.

Members of the Russian section were severely criticized for explaining the undemocratic way the whole process was organized. Recognising that if there had been a democratic vote, the Crimean population would probably have voted to join Russia, we defended the right to self-determination with guarantees for the Tatar and Ukrainian populations. However we warned of the possible consequences of joining Russia, including a strengthening of authoritarianism. The clear implication of the former IS's position however was that we should call for a yes vote in the referendum. As conflict spread to East Ukraine, as the Kremlin declared it was going to retake 'Novorossiia' the role of Russian imperialism was again downplayed and little recognition given to the fear of those in East Ukraine that their region was being turned into another region where the conflict between Western and Russian imperialism was to be played out.

Another example is the publication on the Greek website of the article on Wales by Glynn Matthews in January this year without any discussion with the section, nor by Glynn nor by the Greek comrades. It is absurd in a revolutionary International to publish articles on national questions in countries where we have a section without discussing it with the section.

The national question in the UK is an important aspect of the objective situation in the country and incorrect positions come with a political price. Positions and programs should be thoroughly discussed in the section and democratically decided on. Comrades who disagree with their section's position should prioritise political discussions in their section, as it is only through a thorough discussion that we can *"assure that all the necessary nuances and programmatic points are included. This collective approach is a strength of ours in being able to produce good quality material."* (from a letter to GM, with copy to Andros and Eleni, from the Political Committee of the EWS section).

Importantly GM' article makes *"no reference to or indication of a perspective of united struggle by workers and youth in Wales, England and Scotland"*. It calls for the development of a Welsh workers' party, but *"while it has been our position in the past that a distinct workers' party is necessary in Scotland, we have never discussed or argued this in relation to Wales. While this could be reviewed in response to future developments, it is our view that calling for a distinct Welsh workers' party is not a correct position at this time."*

The PC's response also mentions that the article omits the fact that Wales, differently to Scotland, voted to leave the EU, and that it exaggerates the significance of left elements in Plaid Cymru. It makes the point that the article describes SA as part of the Welsh Left, which within the article can only be understood in the sense of being part of a Welsh nationalist left.

While we support a call for independence, always for socialist independence, in some situations, when this is supported by the most active layers of the working class, as in Scotland and Catalonia, our approach is very different to that of left nationalism. Left nationalism is in many ways more dangerous, more divisive for the working class than right wing nationalism and has to be responded to. As opposed to left wing nationalism we start from an internationalist approach, defending the right to self-determination in order to come to a real voluntary unity based on equality.

It's likely this article was published for purely factional reasons, but the question remains why the weakness of it, lacking all elements of the historical approach established in the CWI spoken of at the start of this text, was not recognised or considered important by the editorial board of Xekinima.

Our demands around Socialist Federation/Confederation

The comrades in the sub-commission on this subject also felt that in comparison to the movement and the referendum on independence in Scotland it was difficult on an international level to obtain a clear view on the development of our approach, slogans and demands with which the comrades intervened in the tumultuous events in Catalonia. **The question of whether, when and how we put forward the demand of a federation or a confederation has not been sufficiently discussed internationally.**

While there are important differences between a federation and a confederation (with in the latter each member state holding sovereignty, whereas in a federation this is exclusively the case for the central federal state), the most important point is to point in an international direction and to oppose breaking existing links between workers in the wider region, calling for common struggle and solidarity and in many cases calling for the continuation of united working class organisations in the struggle for both social demands and for democratic rights. Our demands around federation point to the need to socialist transformations of regions rather than narrow nationalist confines and point to the maximum unity of people in regions on a basis of free and voluntary unity based on equality and not coercion, taking into account the effects of national oppression and making clear the working class of the dominant nation fights this oppression and does not want to continue it. This is one major difference between our position, a Marxist approach, and left nationalism.

When Lenin worked out his approach on the national question in Tsarist Russia at the start of the last century, he spoke against those forces and individuals on the left who do not defend the right to self-determination of oppressed nations. Being in favour of the widest possible unity, he explains that we prefer a federation to a united state that is based on national oppression and that the voluntary federation on a socialist basis can lead to a united state at a later stage.

A confederation is a much looser form of unity, it would complicate common social and economic development and institutionalise national differences far more than in a federation. In Belgium the working class opposes the Flemish nationalists' call for a confederation because it would mean the split of social security and national wage negotiations, both seen as major post-war gains of the Belgian working class.

However in other situations the idea of a federation can be misunderstood. This is clearly the case in the Spanish state, with a history of forced national unity under the Franco dictatorship and the main working class parties in the past calling for a "socialist federation" in order not to give support to genuine national demands, supported by large portions of the most active layers of the working class in the Basque Country and Catalonia. This is also an issue in Britain and Ireland as it could be understood as a "socialist UK" or in the ex-USSR as a repetition of the past structure dominated by Russia.

When it comes to programmes and slogans on the National Question, there is no one-size-fits-all approach which can be automatically transposed from one situation to another. Instead, it is necessary to look at the concrete conditions which lie behind the rising support for independence, as well as its depth and character. For example in the Spanish State we have put the emphasis on the slogan, 'For a Socialist Catalonia' due to the specific history of the country. The 1978 constitution outlaws the historic nations of Spain unilaterally declaring independence. The Stalinist and reformist left calls for a Spanish Federal Republic. The leader of Izquierda Unida has stated that they are not in favour of 'unilateral declarations of independence'. Consequently, the call for a 'federation' can be seen as a block on genuine independence in Catalonia and the Basque Country. We highlight the necessity of the socialist character of an independent Catalonia by calling for: *'an authentic socialist Catalonia, as part of a free and voluntary confederation of the Spanish state, the Iberian peninsula and Europe.'*

It's an example of how the national question has become much more complicated in the 100+ years since Lenin worked out the position of the Bolsheviks and the Communist International. A skillful and sensitive approach must be adopted, an approach that would not bring forward the element of federation after independence necessarily in slogans or titles, risking losing the ear of nationalist minded workers before even being able to start the discussion, but making it part of a patient and profound explanation, and putting the emphasis on "voluntary and equal" when speaking about a socialist federation as we do in Scotland, linking it to wider unity by adding the call for "a wider socialist confederation of Europe".

In some cases we might put forward a "confederation" instead of the principally preferred federation and/or bring forward a wider unity to respond to genuine fears for the continuation of oppression of the past within a given state. But we never put aside our internationalist approach and our struggle for socialism, nor the need for working class unity in the struggle against e.g. austerity and capitalism, but also in the struggle for independence of a region to assure this struggle does not lead to bloody civil war. There is a clear need for more thorough and regular discussion on this issue in the International.

Conclusions and proposals

So the federalist drift, with an International Secretariat that did not have the necessary contact with the sections anymore, nor the necessary collective approach to leadership needed for information to flow and to be discussed, has had its effect, also on the position on the national question of the CWI. A loss of sharpness, not necessarily in the position of the sections involved, but on an international level, a loss of sense for detail, a lack of proper study of all the concrete factors that are involved, and an element of laziness and complacency in the IS. But the approach to the living national question always needs to be concrete, based on consciousness as it develops and sometimes takes leaps, if not we would heap mistake upon mistake

A federalist drift also has implications for our perspectives in relation to perspectives regarding national questions. As well as a laziness in applying one side fits all approach, there is another danger in not recognising how international processes impact on national questions. For example many of 'peace processes' mentioned above began in the 1990s

after the collapse of Stalinism, when US imperialism felt more room to attempt to find solutions in a unipolar war and crucially many 'national liberation movements' shifted to the right in the context of an ideological offensive post the collapse of stalinism. The crisis of neoliberalism today has turned these so-called 'success stories' into failure. Similarly, the crisis facing neo-liberalism and the weakness of workers organisations has led to the growth in support for independence movements in different contexts. Likewise we need to consider what effect the new Cold War can have on national questions not just in Asia but across the world.

It is in that cadre that here and there gaps have appeared in our understanding. In looking for instance at the material produced in the MIR and Socialism Today, the question of language and language policies in the cadre of the national question today has only briefly been touched on. An important discussion in sections in the Spanish state, Quebec and Belgium, it is also an important question in the national and language patchwork that was left behind after the fall of Stalinism, with Russian speaking minorities spread all over and a multitude of ex-national minority's language communities in Russia. It's a question we need more discussion and written material on between the different sections on an international level.

Linked to this is the question of the use of language by the International and the need to continue on the road we are now, with the development of an international face in Spanish and Portuguese with Un Mundo por Ganar and the Latin-American magazine. We should continue to set goals to develop the international face of ISA and make it possible to find us in a number of important languages.

Another element that remained underdeveloped in our material is the question of indigenous people, around which among others the comrades in Canada and Quebec or in Australia have developed a thought out approach, but which has not led to international discussion and material until the recent VMU.

Next to the already mentioned necessary discussion on the question of federation/confederation, there is also a lack of international material on the national question in different regions in Africa, where it has taken on an acute form, but also on for instance, the question of Puerto Rico.

These are preliminary conclusions flowing from the discussion in the review subgroup on national oppression. These should be discussed in the international bodies and published in the IMB for discussion in the sections, which should then flow back into the international discussion to plan the work that flows from it, including writing material on elements we find are underdeveloped or finding ways to share the material of the sections more, to reinstate our strong tradition of serious international discussion on the subject of national oppression, a tradition that has weakened, but that can and has to be re-established.

We think it would be worthwhile to organise a number of cadre schools to fill in the gaps that have appeared on the question of language and language policies, on the programme on the rights of indigenous peoples, on the role of the EU linked to perspectives for the national question, on the question of programmatic demands for federation or confederation, on the national question in Africa...

These could be organised and prepared by the international bodies (e.g. on VMU's), but alternatively also by the concerned sections, for example the Belgian and Quebec section could organise a cadre school on the question of language, involving other sections confronted with this issue.

We also feel we should re-establish the sharing of written material (like perspectives documents or internal material) between the sections confronted with the national question, e.g. through the IMB as the comrades from other sections now often only have access to public positions, but not to the analysis and perspectives that inform these public positions. This would be of enormous help to the understanding of the whole international and of the sections which deal with such issues in the development of their position.