



**Inaugural
N. M. Perera
Memorial
Lecture**

**“The concepts of
‘state’ and ‘nation’
in our time”**

Professor Franjo Kozul

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Professor Perera's lecture

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THE CONCEPTS OF "STATE" AND "NATION" IN OUR TIME

Every epoch bears the stamp of its own time and has its own historical substance which differentiates it from both those that preceded it and those that will follow in the future. These are the mighty processes, tectonic in character, whose power is exerted in the execution of social changes that transform the picture of the world and of relationships within the world. In contrast, transitory and incidental phenomena effect only subsidiary changes and are a function of the fundamental and main processes.

The entire Middle Ages are characterised by wars like the Crusades, in which mythology and mysticism represent the destructive driving force of the interests of the ruling and dominating social groups and classes. The three centuries preceding our own times we know by the broad campaigns of the developed states and nations for colonial conquest and colonial rule over underdeveloped and small peoples the world over, especially in the region of Asia and Africa, but also in Latin America. By applying all means and methods at their disposal, the colonial powers were able for centuries to repress the energies of millions of people, impeding their development and the awakening of their national consciousness. All this was achieved by the application of all types of violence, ranging from ideological and economic pressures to the most brutal forms of military conquest. The consequences of such a long historical process have not vanished, nor are they going to disappear in such a short time. They are evident even today.

The period through which our contemporary world is passing history will without doubt describe as the era of anti-colonial revolutions and movements, which by their scope and momentum uproot everything that had been created during the epoch of colonialism.

In the historical clash between the old and the new, the vanishing and the newly created, the tired and the lively, blocs of nations have been introduced on the historical scene as a subsidiary phenomenon. Under the cover of new ideologies and by other methods, these blocs tend to achieve the same aims which the colonial empires achieved on the level of national interests. Through a process of regroupment new imperial powers are created which do not permit any region, nation or state in the world to remain in a state of free development. Instead of the earlier division and redivision of the world by classical colonial methods, there are now stubborn attempts to divide the world according to geographical meridians and hemispheres, and relate these to two counterpolarized ideological conceptions, as if the criterion of ideological polarization was the sole factor of geographical belonging such that the western hemisphere belongs to one ideology and the eastern to the other. Thus, neo-colonialism tries to achieve its objectives by more subtle ideological and political methods and styles. In the pursuit of this aim pressures of every sort are again exerted, resorts to blackmail and threats, while, especially in more recent times, the most brutal methods of violence and military ventures are not also unknown. The division of the world is suggested, like an echo from the past, and acceptance of the value orientation of one or other of the mammoth bloc systems, as if the logic of living can be forced into the embrace of blocs without leaving a trace outside.

The new historical experience by which the world is to be divided only according to the single criterion of ideology which marks the contending parts out as counter-polarities, is interesting: capitalism, or as some call it "the free world", and socialism, the world of democracy of a new historical quality. Such a division would not be without ground, if a veil did not hide the hand of the super-powers which demands that small peoples and nations be namelessly identified with their respective interests—thereby losing their own historical integrity, their own cultural, historical and national substance; and that they should

blindly follow one of these super-power interests. Contrary to bloc logic and the demands of the bloc powers, small peoples or, as they are called by a synonym, the "peoples of the third world", constitute today the movement of the Non-Aligned countries and come forward on the historical scene with new demands, with a new logic of life.

In this historical novelty, after bitter experiences from the time of colonial rule in the world, Non-aligned countries pose their own demands on the principles of equality, equity, non-interference and a different distribution of the total world wealth. In this way peoples who have for the first time achieved their freedom and whose consciousness of their national entity has reached the level of awareness of their own interests, have been enabled to stimulate their benumbed potential, reject apparent new doctrines that are actually obsolete in content and slip out from these "embraces" of the bloc powers. No one can any more ignore or forget this historical reality.

Parallel to this process flows another one which was difficult to foresee in the past. This could not be predicted even by the most brilliant visionaries and futurologists. Actually, the fantastic rise of technology, as the product of human reason and strength, awakened the hopes that this terrible force, as a product of man, would liberate man from inhumane functions and tasks and that it would act in the function of disalienation of every type, above all the liberation of labour. In the same manner, it was realistic to expect that technology would strongly act upon the integration and social cohesion of the world, enable communication among people and peoples and thus draw them nearer to each other and humanize relations among them. This could not happen, of course, without the destruction and disfunction of technology itself. In a way technology is being transformed into a threatening independent force and thus acts destructively in two ways. Firstly, through military use, it threatens the human race with self-destruction. Secondly, it strengthens the unpredictable

process of dehumanization and human degradation within the labour process and serves as a form of exploitation by those who possess the technologies in relation to those who do not have them.

The process of change and development has for centuries been located — so it was argued — on European and American soil. In this sense too, socialism as an idea, and equally as practice, was construed and determined in the space of the European continent. However, the picture of the world has changed as a result of the changes that have taken place on the Asian and the African continents. In this way the doctrines, theories and philosophies that based themselves on some sort of supremacy of one ethos over the other, or of one region in relation to other continents and meridians, are today being denounced. The fetishistic character of technology as an epochal discovery which will by itself alone save the world from capitalism and poverty, is at the same time being demystified. It has been proved on the ground of already acquired experience that the level of development and the development of economic nature and freedom, *i.e.* humanism, are not synonymous, and neither are they causally related. The most recent events in the world themselves provide the basis for such a claim and conclusion. The new historical situation in the world, due to many changes, draws us back again to some issues which we were accustomed to think belonged to historical experience, to the past.

We also — and not without good reason — pose here the question of the state and our concept of it, and with the same importance the question of the nation, and their mutual correlation in modern times, particularly in the countries where nations are only now establishing the autonomy and independence of their states.

Many volumes have been written on the theme of what is a state and what is a nation, and the history of social thought which searched for a reply to that question dates back in time. It is true, however, that the scientific study

of the concept of a nation is of a more recent date. Even so, theories about the nation existed in the past and we can study them in the light of a longer historical retrospect.

Theories, doctrines, conceptions and definitions of the nation and the state have been created for centuries. In this way the state and the nation are "eternal themes" which inspire social thought. Some theories vanished; some were created, defended and supported, disputed and denied, both in the sphere of philosophy and theory and under the influence of historical practice. In fact, both "state" and "nation" are synonyms for community, and the notion of a society founded on common territory and sharing a common system of values has remained as a constant, as the substance and reality of these categories. By its very nature it is clear that even within this social frame-work there is no absolute unity. Society is classified by other criteria (class, social, status, religious etc.), but in this case it is a question of the primary criterion of a common connection binding people into a community. The difference between the nation and the state is obvious. Actually, the state is framed in space and a state cannot exist without a territory, while this is not the case with the nation, except in the conditions of a state that is of the nation type. The nation is also a territorial community, but not exclusively so. A number of nations can join a state and, vice versa, the members of the same nation can live in different states.

Three questions at least appear immediately on which we have to throw light in analysing the correlation state-nation.

First, what does territory represent for the state and are there states without territory, as an expression of their sovereignty. This question, especially, has been only recently posed as it is suggested that the division of the world is in terms of ideologies and not into states and nations.

This has given rise to theories of "restricted sovereignty" and theories of "sub-nations" and supranational communities and "leading" nations within the framework of ideological concepts, *i. e.* systems.

Irrespective of the fact that the state is a political phenomenon and the nation ethnical and cultural, the condition for their existence is territory—not only as a natural area but also as the ground on which they are sovereign. The territory is not only a source of life, the condition for existence, but also the source of a natural imminent community. A people (a nation) without a territory and, thus without a state, are without historical substance, without the foundation for life. Peoples, nations and states which have lost their territory died out or were victims of assimilation or genocide, and thus were wiped out from history. Many ethno-cultures died out or vanished from civilisation by the very fact that by subjugation they lost their territory. Therefore it is not strange that the struggle for territory, as the precondition of the life of the community, was always the most drastic and the most radical.

There is no ideology, political concept or interest that has been defended so much as the defence of territory. Historical experience abounds in evidence that there are no values, and there cannot be values, in the name of which a territory of a community could be sacrificed. The universal values of capitalism or socialism and the concepts which suggest a society without frontiers, without popular and national identity, under the pretext that the process of the creation of mankind is thereby being strengthened, hide the interests of the so-called subnations or leading nations with which others should identify themselves and thus lose their national and state identity, their culture and mental, religious and historical significance.

Therefore territory is a common supposition for the survival of both the state and nation, but state and nation are not synonymous merely because it is possible to identify the "state of a nation type."

The **second** question is what happens if a number of nations live on one territory, as is the case with my country, or **vice versa** if as is sometimes the case, one nation lives in different state borders.

Actually, this is a problem, especially for nations only now historically affirmed, nations which are only now being developed and are in the process of attaining their national self-consciousness and consciousness of belonging to one **ethnos**, which is not the same as the tribal community, *i. e.* an ethnic group which has its social foundation in kinship interrelations.

The **third** question is thus posed: what is the role of the state and what are the state and the nation under the conditions and in the expanses only now acquiring their social organisation and establishing an autonomous and independent state?

Since the creation of civilisation, class polarisations and the creation of communities founded on territory, the state has existed, and always in a double function. The state has always had the function to protect the community from outside, whether it is a matter of the small Greek **polis** or of contemporary empires of millions of inhabitants in size. Secondly, the state by way of force protects the internal cohesion and integration of the entire structure. Notwithstanding the fact that individuals and groups have never had absolutely identical interests or equal positions, the state has always executed the policy and functioned as the instrument of the ruling class, come forward as a supra-class, supra-national power, presenting itself as the factor of the protection of class equilibrium which harmonises and evens out status interests and thus "protects the common and the general" in the society, the community.

Bearing in mind the social and political entity of the state, in the course of history, the men of spirit and thought have continuously endeavoured to find out its real nature, to demystify its mythological power and fetishist

features, Theories, doctrines and definitions of the state were thus created. The starting premise was always—until the beginnings of the theory of the withering away of the state—that there is no society or nation without the state. But the question was always posed: what type of state, of what conception and with what social function? Due to the mystification of its sources of power and its assumed prowess in the application of force, the number of those who attributed to it a supranatural character and ascertained that it was God-given—and not that it was created as a historical phenomenon—was not small. Other theories and doctrines have, mainly, attempted to explain the social meaning of the state by way of piling up various attributes (just, democratic, popular, humanistic, welfare state, socialist, bureaucratic, despotic, oppressive state, dictatorship, state of social balance etc.)

All these and other determinants of the state obviously start from the assumption that the state is indispensable. But it is also evident that all states were not formed, or developed, according to a unique model. Their roles differ and the concept of the state depends on numerous circumstances in which it is constituted and in which it acts. It depends on the general development of the community; on the size of classes and groups with divergent interests in the same community; on the period of the creation of the state organisation and under which political circumstances and cultural conditions in the community; and, particularly, on the ideological concept which gives rise to the state as an ideological and political phenomenon.

By its very nature, one concept of the state uniquely corresponds to a slave-holding society, even as the state is differently conceived under the conditions of feudalism and capitalism and another model pertains particularly to socialism. There are theories that, due to mentality, traditions and ethnic features, dictatorship corresponds to some peoples, while, again because of specific features, democracy, *i. e.* a democratic state, is more appropriate to others. Such theories, whose ideological and philosophi-

cal basis is racism, have not managed to hold ground and due to the pressure of historical practice belong already to the past.

Due to the rapidity of changes and their intensity, the newly created state organisations and liberated peoples and nations have found themselves "unprepared" to answer immediately the question of what new and specific concept and what state organisation to construct—bearing in mind, of course, all circumstances occurring in the period when they acquired independence. Accepting the experience of the farther or nearer past, or of other conditions and circumstances, following in the tradition of a bourgeois class-state would represent a great historical risk, while the creation of a new state according to the given conditions would be neither an easy nor a short-term task. The entire further trend of the development of the state would largely depend on the foundations upon which the state is constructed and its ideological concepts.

My country has had a bitter experience and knows what it means to establish a state on bourgeois bases, as was the case in 1918, *i.e.* when others decided for a people what their own model of social and state organisation should be. During the period of the constitution of Yugoslavia a monarchical form of rule was imposed on a multinational community. The consequences of such a form of rule have been a continuing conflict between the constituent nations, which was to acquire drastic forms especially during the war. Only the state founded on the national equality of peoples and nationalities ("national minorities") could respond to the interests of everyone in particular and of all together. Therefore the state in multinational communities has also a supplementary specific role, for it is a matter of the arrangement not only of status and class interests, but also of national ones.

The theory of the nation is of recent date. Of course, we are thinking here of modern bourgeois theories, created on European ground. Until now a whole scale of

doctrines and definitions of a nation has been affirmed, their common feature being that all assert that a nation is a phenomenon created, developed and established in the capitalist society and that it ends there. From such theories develop further theories, according to which the problem has disappeared by the mere fact that the so-called historical nations have achieved their climax; and that the problem of the nation does not exist in the conditions of the construction of socialism — as if the question is not posed in the countries which have liberated themselves from colonial rule.

How do theories that the nation relates only to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and to the conditions of the capitalist system, and not to the conditions of socialism, apply to newly liberated peoples? This hides two types of facts: first, the assertion that socialism is the only system which solves class controversies and, second, that the new communities created in the anti-colonial process of liberation are systems in which statehood is being constructed. In the latter systems only the problem of ethnic groups and their mutual relationship is solved. Thus these ethnic groups have not grown up to the level of national self-consciousness or created the awareness of togetherness and forms of national identity. To accept such philosophy or theoretical doctrine would mean to consolidate the system of inequality and the possibility of assimilation and, what is more important, to put national consciousness to sleep in conditions in which the transformation from kinship and tribalism to the new communities of civilisation, of political and territorial rank, would be difficult to achieve without national consciousness.

To contrast the nation to the state, within which live a number of ethnic communities of the nation type, would mean the generation from within of destruction of the state which, far from being antipodes of the nation, should be the active agency of the equality and equity of nations. On the other hand, to contrast the nation to

internationalism and to elevate the international above the national interest, is also to create the preconditions of national oppression and assimilation in the name of "higher international" and "supranational" objectives. Status differences among people are not one sided but are multi-dimensional. People and groups can be polarised according to numerous criteria: class, social, religious, regional, and even anthropological and mental. But differentiation according to the ethno-national criterion is a historical reality which does not depend on the model of the state or of the political system. According to our views, national freedom and equality are an essential precondition for human freedom in general.

We can, theoretically and philosophically, presuppose an ideal state of class and status equity only if freedom were not threatened by the criterion of national discrimination itself. States and societies which have overcome particularism and ethnic divisions and thus established states of the "nation type", are more probably engaged in the domain of class and status issues, than in that of the nation itself. However, the stages of development cannot be jumped over and thus the countries which have not achieved such a state of affairs have to overcome their historical heritage. Social problems are not identical in highly developed industrial countries, having a long history of statehood construction, with what they are under the conditions of inadequately developed and only recently liberated peoples and states.

Unfortunately, our knowledge of this region, of the social milieu and cultural features of your country, is poor and too inadequate for us to be able to analyse comparative advantages or to incorporate your experience in a more thorough study of the correlations of state-nation, *i.e.* ethnic and cultural issues with legal and political superstructure. This is the "specificum of differentiations" of every society, *i.e.* of every state. The positive experience of the past has to be a function of the present and the future and not a mere compilation of facts and events during the course of

history which fulfils intellectual, *i. e.* cultural, curiosity. I would like for this reason to draw attention to our experience.

My country is thousands of kilometres distant from Sri Lanka; worlds and cultures divide us, differences of every kind, from history and ethnogenesis to specific cultural and political features. Due to this every suggestion or offer of experience from different conditions would be impermissible. However, experience claims that our countries, in spite of cultural and political differences, have found and are still finding joint values, joint parameters of activity within the world community, especially within the community of the Non-Aligned countries. These are the converging points which imply specificities and differences. The differences are not a product of political wisdom or system solutions, but are created independently of our will, although within these differences what is common exists too.

Bearing in mind this historical truth, with the aim of an exchange of experience, allow me to point to our stands of principle and practice in the sphere of the relationship of state-nation without illusions that we have achieved the utmost that is possible.

First, Yugoslavia has built its state order on a universal ideological, philosophical and theoretic concept of socialism without its own proper experience prior to the revolution. Only one experience existed, which we abandoned and constructed our own practice respecting the circumstances and specificities in which the new social system is being constructed. The price of such an historical undertaking is exacting, but it was proved that the sacrifices made on such a road to the new society were justified.

Second, our basic starting point was that a unitarian and centralistic state does not correspond to a multinational community, irrespective of the principles and ideals by which such a conception of the state is being sustained. Until then, as is well known, the doctrine of centralism

was ruling in the theory and practice of the communist movement.

Third, the theory of the leading nation was rejected irrespective of its numbers and cultural and historical characteristics. This determined our stand that every people and every "national minority" has the right to equality, not only normative — legal and political — but also cultural and economic. There are no "big" and "small" peoples, except in statistical figures.

Fourth, our ideological concept starts from the premise that there is no internationalism on the world historical level without internationalism within the state community in which a number of peoples and nations live. Therefore, internationalism is first established within the state community.

Fifth, in the ideological and political concept of Yugoslavia, socialism is not construed as an ideological concept of a bloc character, according to which the world is divided into two iron "monolithic" systems, but as a system of fundamental values of the new world; as a new epoch which is growing out of the old world with numerous differences and controversies which do not hamper the fundamental values and principles on which the new society is being constructed. Therefore, the doctrines according to which socialism is a universal state-value by itself have been rejected, and by that also the dogmatic vision of socialism. The fundamental presupposition is that the world is not only being unified by ideological convergences or normative-system identifications, but on the basis of respect of differences which can only, under the conditions of equality, be overcome on the road to the integration of mankind.

From such a fundamental stand there developed and consolidated the idea and the reality of the movement of Non-Alignment, of which we are contemporaries, and we can say with pride that Yugoslavia and your country are the founders of the anti-colonial and anti-bloc movement

whose basic aim is the creation of a more just and humane world.

All this has, in Tito's conception, historical foundations in the system of self-management as the basis of the social, socio-political and economic system. We have learnt from our own experience that there is no democratic state whose basis is exploitation of a bourgeois character or which is founded on the ideology of bureaucracy and technocratic structures. The return of the alienated rights of the producers to manage the results of their labour and the elimination of inequalities which have been historically created in class societies, can alone hold out any promise for the freedom of nations and for the humanisation of relations among peoples, and among groups and nations.

These are only the basic and essential dimensions of our social system which give rise to all subsystems corresponding to our historical and contemporary practice. It does not in any way represent an ideal model or a universal value which can be transplanted into other conditions or some other given period.

(This translation has not been seen by the lecturer)

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