

On Nationality (1852)

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872)

Giuseppe Mazzini), the founder (1831) of Young Italy, was perhaps the leading figure in liberal nationalism. He saw the creation of a democratic Italian state as crucial to Italy's development.

Europe no longer possesses unity of faith, of mission, or of aim. Such unity is a necessity in the world. Here, then, is the secret of the crisis. It is the duty of every one to examine and analyze calmly and carefully the probable elements of this new unity. But those who persist in perpetuating, by violence or by Jesuitical compromise, the external observance of the old unity, only perpetuate the crisis, and render its issue more violent.

There are in Europe two great questions; or, rather, the question of the transformation of authority, that is to say, of the Revolution, has assumed two forms; the question which all have agreed to call social, and the question of nationalities. The first is more exclusively agitated in France, the second in the heart of the other peoples of Europe. I say, *which all have agreed to call social*, because, generally speaking, every great revolution is so far social, that it cannot be accomplished either in the religious, political, or any other sphere, without affecting social relations, the sources and the distribution of wealth; but that which is only a secondary consequence in political revolutions is now the cause and the banner of the movement in France. The question there is now, above all, to establish better relations between labor and capital, between production and consumption, between the workman and the employer.

It is probable that the European initiative, that which will give a new impulse to intelligence and to events, will spring from the question of nationalities. The social question may, in effect, although with difficulty, be partly resolved by a single people; it is an internal question for each, and the French Republicans of 1848 so understood it, when, determinately abandoning the European initiative, they placed Lamartine's [*Note: A French poet and politician*] manifesto by the side of their aspirations towards the organization of labor. The question of nationality can only be resolved by destroying the treaties of 1815, and changing the map of Europe and its public Law. The question of *Nationalities*, rightly understood, is the Alliance of the Peoples; the balance of powers based upon new foundations; the organization of the work that Europe has to accomplish.

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It was not for a material interest that the people of Vienna fought in 1848; in weakening the empire they could only lose power. It was not for an increase of wealth that the people of Lombardy fought in the same year; the Austrian Government had endeavored in the year preceding to excite the peasants against the landed proprietors, as they had done in Galicia; but everywhere they had failed. They struggled, they still struggle, as do Poland, Germany, and Hungary, for country and liberty; for a word inscribed upon a banner, proclaiming to the world that they also live, think, love, and labor for the benefit of all. They speak the same language, they bear about them the impress of consanguinity, they kneel beside the same tombs, they glory in the same tradition; and they demand to associate freely, without obstacles, without foreign domination, in order to elaborate and express their idea; to contribute their stone also to the great pyramid of history. It is something moral which they are seeking; and this moral something is in fact, even politically speaking, the most important question in the present state of things. It is the

organization of the European task. It is no longer the savage, hostile, quarrelsome nationality of two hundred years ago which is invoked by these peoples. The nationality . . . founded upon the following principle: *-Whichever people, by its superiority of strength, and by its geographical position, can do us an injury, is our natural enemy; whichever cannot do us an injury, but can by the amount of its force and by its position injure our enemy, is our natural ally, -is the princely nationality of aristocracies or royal races. The nationality of the peoples has not these dangers; it can only be founded by a common effort and a common movement; sympathy and alliance will be its result. In principle, as in the ideas formerly laid down by the men influencing every national party, nationality ought only to be to humanity that which the division of labor is in a workshop-the recognized symbol of association; the assertion of the individuality of a human group called by its geographical position, its traditions, and its language, to fulfil a special function in the European work of civilization.*

The map of Europe has to be remade. This is the key to the present movement; herein lies the initiative. Before acting, the instrument for action must be organized; before building, the ground must be one's own. The social idea cannot be realized under any form whatsoever before this reorganization of Europe is effected; before the peoples are free to interrogate themselves; to express their vocation, and to assure its accomplishment by an alliance capable of substituting itself for the absolutist league which now reigns supreme.

Questions to consider:

- 1) What are the two great issues facing Europe? Which is more important? Why?*
- 2) What, according to Mazzini, constitutes a nation?*
- 3) How do the various nations relate to each other in Mazzini's vision?*
- 4) How does Mazzini's version of nation and nationalism compare to today's understanding of the word?*
- 5) How does Mazzini contrast his version of the nation with that of previous eras?*
- 6) What does his vision have to do with liberalism?*