

THE MARXIST CASE FOR

REVOLUTION TODAY

A FOURTH INTERNATIONALIST
TENDENCY PAMPHLET

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The Marxist Case for Revolution Today

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I. What Is A Revolution?

Revolutions are historical facts of life. Almost all major states in today's world are born from revolutions. Whether one likes it or not, our century has seen something like three dozen revolutions – some victorious, others defeated – and there is no sign that we have come to the end of the revolutionary experience.

Revolutions have been, and will remain, facts of life because of the structural nature of prevailing relations of production and relations of political power. Precisely because such relations are structural, because they do not just “fade away” – as well as because ruling classes resist the gradual elimination of these relations to the very end –

revolutions emerge as the means whereby the overthrow of these relations is realized.

From the nature of revolutions as a sudden, radical overthrow of prevailing social and (or) political structures – leaps in the historical process – one should not draw the conclusion that an impenetrable Chinese wall separates evolution (or reforms) from revolution. Quantitative gradual social changes of course do occur in history, as do qualitative revolutionary ones. Very often the former prepare the latter especially in epochs of decay of a given mode of production. Prevailing economic and political power relations can be eroded, undermined, increasingly challenged or can even be slowly disintegrated, by new relations of production and the political strength of revolutionary classes (or major class fractions) rising in their midst. This is what generally characterizes periods of pre-revolutionary crises. But erosion and decay of a given social and/or political order remains basically different from its overthrow. Evolution is not identical with revolution. One transforms dialectics into sophism when, from the fact that there is no rigid absolute distinction between evolution and revolution, one draws the conclusion that there is no basic difference between them at all.

The sudden overthrow of ruling structures is, however, only one key characteristic of that social phenomenon. The other one is their overthrow through huge popular mobilization, through the sudden massive active intervention of large masses of ordinary people in political life and political struggle. [1]

One of the great mysteries of class society, based upon exploitation and oppression of the mass of direct producers by relatively small minorities, is why that mass in “normal” times by and large tolerates these conditions, be it with all kinds of periodic but limited reactions. Historical

materialism tries, not without success, to explain that mystery. The explanation is many-dimensional, drawing upon a combination of economic compulsion, ideological manipulation, cultural socialization, political-judicial repression (including occasionally violence), psychological processes (interiorization, identification), etc.

Generally, as one revolutionary newspaper wrote at the beginning of the French revolution of 1789, oppressed people feel weak before their oppressors in spite of their numerical superiority, because they are on their knees. [2] A revolution can occur precisely when that feeling of weakness and helplessness is overcome, when the mass of the people suddenly thinks “We don't take it any longer,” and acts accordingly. In his interesting book, **The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt**, Barrington Moore has tried to prove that suffering and consciousness of injustice are not sufficient to induce large-scale revolts (revolutions) in broader masses. In his opinion, a decisive role is played by the conviction that suffered injustice is neither inevitable nor a “lesser evil,” i.e. that a better social set-up could be realized. [3] A concomitant brake upon direct challenges to a given social and/or political order, however, is the locally or regionally fragmented nature of revolts pure and simple. Revolts generally become revolutions when they are unified nation-wide.

Such challenges can be explained, among other things, by that basic truth about class societies formulated by Abraham Lincoln, empirically confirmed throughout history, and which is at least one reason for historical optimism (belief in the possibility of human progress) when all is said and done: “You can fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time.”

When the majority of the people refuse to be fooled and intimidated any longer; when they refuse to stay on their knees; when they recognize the fundamental weakness of their oppressors, they can become transformed overnight from seemingly meek, subdued and helpless sheep into mighty lions. They strike, congregate, organize and especially demonstrate in the streets in increasing numbers, even in the face of massive, gruesome, bloody repression by the rulers, who still have a powerful armed apparatus at their disposal. They often show unheard of forms of heroism, self-sacrifice, obstinate endurance. [4] This may end in their getting the better of the repressive apparatus which starts to disintegrate. The first victory of every revolution is precisely such a disintegration. Its final victory calls for the substitution of the armed power of the revolutionary class (or of a major class fraction) to that of the former rulers. [5] Such a descriptive definition of revolutions has to be integrated into an analytical-casual one. Social revolutions occur when prevailing relations of production cannot contain any more the development of the productive forces, when they increasingly act as fetters upon them, when they cause a cancerous growth of destructiveness accompanying that development. Political revolutions occur when prevailing relations of political power (forms of state power) have likewise become fetters upon a further development of the productive forces within the framework of the prevailing relations of production, a development which is however still historically possible. That is why they generally consolidate a given social order, instead of undermining it.

This materialist explanation of revolutions offered by Marxism seems indispensable for answering the question: “why, and why just at the moment?” Revolutions have occurred in all types of class societies but not in a uniform

way. It appears clearly illogical to attribute them either to permanently operating psychological factors (humanity's allegedly inborn aggression, "destructiveness," "envy," "greed" or "stupidity") or to accidental quirks of the political power structure: particularly inept, stupid, blind rulers, meeting increasingly self-confident and active opponents. According to the particular school of history concerned, one can see that blind ineptitude either in the excessive recourse to repression, or in the excessive amplitude of suddenly introduced reforms, or in a peculiar explosive combination of both. [6]

There are of course kernels of partial truth in such psychological and political analyses. But they cannot explain in a satisfying way the regular and discontinuous occurrence of revolutions, their cyclical nature so to speak. Why do "inept" rulers at regular intervals succeed "adequate" ones, so many times in so many countries? This can surely not be caused by some mysterious genetical mutation cycle. The big advantage of the materialist interpretation of history is to explain that occurrence by deeper socio-economic causes. It is not the ineptness of the rulers which produces the pre-revolutionary crisis. It is the paralysis engendered by an underlying social-structural crisis which makes rulers increasingly inept. In that sense Trotsky was absolutely right when he stressed that "revolutions are nothing but the final blow and coup de grâce given to a paralytic."

Lenin summarized the underlying analysis in a classical way by stating that revolutions occur when those below do not accept any longer as before. The inability of a ruling class or major fractions to continue to rule has basically objective causes. These reflect themselves in increasingly paralyzing internal divisions among the rulers, especially around the question about how to get out of the mess visible to the naked eye. It intertwines with growing self-doubt, a

loss of faith in its own future, an irrational search for peculiar culprits (“conspiracy theories”) substituting for a realistic objective analysis of social contradictions. It is this combination which precisely produces political ineptitude and counterproductive actions and reactions, if not sheer passivity. The basic cause always remains the rotting away of the system, not the peculiar psychology of a group of rulers.

One has obviously to distinguish the basic historical causes of revolutions from the factors (events) triggering them off. The first ones are structural, the second ones conjunctural. [7] But it is important to emphasize that even as regards the structural causes, the Marxist explication of revolutions is by no means monocausally “economistic.” The conflict between the productive forces and the prevailing relations of production and/or political power relations isn’t all purely economic. It is basically socio-economic. It involves all main spheres of social relations. It even eventually finds its concentrated expression in the political and not in the economic sphere. The refusal of soldiers to shoot at demonstrators is a political-moral and not an economic act. It is only by digging farther below the surface of that refusal that one discovers its material roots. These roots don’t transform the political-moral decision into a pure “appearance,” or a manifestation of mere shadow boxing. It has a clear reality of its own. But that substantial reality in its turn doesn’t make the digging for the deeper material roots irrelevant, an exercise in “dogmatism” or an “abstract” analysis of only secondary interest. [8]

In any case, the inability of the rulers to continue to rule is not only a socio-political fact, with its inevitable concomitant of an ideological moral-crisis (a crisis of the prevailing “social values system”). It has also a precise technical-material aspect. To rule also means to control a

material network of communications and a centralized repressive apparatus. When that network breaks down, the rule collapses in the immediate sense of the word. [9] We must never, therefore, underestimate the technical aspect of successful revolutions. But the Marxist theory of revolution also supersedes a peculiar variant of the conspiracy theory of history, which tends to substitute for an explanation of victorious revolutions an exclusive reference to the technical mechanism of successful insurrections or coups d'état. [10] Instead, it is the material interests of key social forces and their self-perception which provide the basic explanation of turning points of history.

II. Revolutions and Counter-revolutions

While revolutions are historical facts of life, counter-revolutions are likewise undeniable realities. Indeed, counter-revolutions seem regularly to follow revolutions as night follows day. Etymology confirms this paradox. The very concept of “revolution” originates from the sciences of astronomy. The movements of planets evolve in an orbital manner, returning to the point of departure. Hence the suggested analogical conclusion: the role of revolutions as great accelerators, as locomotives of history, is just an optical illusion of short-sighted and superficial observers, not to say utopian day-dreamers. It is precisely such an interpretation (denigration) of revolutions which is compatible with

the great Italian historian Vico's cyclical conception of world history.

Under the influence of the victorious counter-revolution in England in 1660, the great political philosophers of the 17th century, above all Hobbes and Spinoza, developed a basically pessimistic view of human destiny. Revolutions are doomed to fail: "*Plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose.*" Two thousand years earlier, Greek and Chinese political philosophers had arrived at similar conclusions. There is supposedly no way out for human destiny but the search for individual happiness under inevitably bad social conditions, be it happiness through self-discipline (Stoics, Confucians, Spinoza) or through hedonism (the Epicureans). [11]

In the 18th century, the Enlightenment questioned both the empirical and the theoretical roots of dogmatic skeptical pessimism. [12] The belief in the perfectibility of humankind (only sophists or dishonest critics identify perfectibility with actually attaining a final state of perfection, be it said in passing), in historical progress, and thus likewise in the progressive turns of revolutions, re-emerged. Revolution indeed looked beautiful in times of reaction. But already before the outbreak of the revolution of 1789, the camp of the Enlightenment had split between the basically skeptical and socially cautious, if not outright conservative, bourgeois like Voltaire ("*cultivez votre jardin*") [13] and the more radical petty-bourgeois ideologues like J.J. Rousseau, who would inspire the Jacobin revolutionists. This split deepened in the course of the revolution itself. After the successive stages of counter-revolution (Thermidor, the Bonapartist Consulate, the Empire, the Bourbon restoration) the reversal to 17th century skepticism became general including erstwhile enthusiasts for revolution,

exemplified by the English poet Wordsworth (but not Shelley). Only a tiny minority continued to pin their hopes on future revolutions and to work for them. [14] The near-consensus was: the overhead of revolution is too large, especially given the fact that they achieve very little. [15]

The Russian revolution's Thermidor and its tragic aftermath, the horrors of Stalinism, reproduced the same revulsion towards revolutions, first in the late nineteen-thirties and the forties, then, after a temporary reprieve in the sixties and the early seventies, on a generalized scale from the middle seventies on. The Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia and especially Cambodia and Afghanistan, but more generally the reflux of the revolutionary wave 1968-1975 in Europe, from France through Czechoslovakia, Italy, Portugal, strengthened this political retreat. The near-consensus can again be summarized in the formula: revolutions are both useless and harmful from every point of view, including that of progress towards a more humane society. Indeed, this is one of the key platitudes of today's prevailing neo-conservative, neo-liberal and neo-reformist ideologies.

It is, however, based upon obvious half-truths, if not outright mystifications. The idea that revolutions revert to these historical points of departure, if not to situations worse than the pre-revolutionary ones, is generally based upon a confusion between social and political counter-revolutions. While a few social counter-revolutions have indeed occurred, they are the exception, not the rule. Neither Napoleon nor Louis XVIII restored semi-feudal socio-economic conditions in the French countryside, nor the political rule of the semi-feudal nobility. Stalin did not restore capitalism in Russia, nor did Deng Xiaoping in China. [16] The restoration in England was quickly followed by the Glorious Revolution. The compromise of the

American constitution did not lead eventually to the generalization of slave labor but to its suppression, after the civil war. The list can be extended *ad libitum*.

To this objective balance-sheet, the problems of subjective choice are closely related. They confront the skeptics and the pessimists with a real dilemma. Counter-revolutions are not simply “natural” reactions to revolutions, the product of an inevitable mechanical yo-yo movement so to speak. They originate from the same exacerbation of a system’s inner contradictions which give rise to the revolution, but with a specific shift in socio-political relations of forces. They reflect the relative decline of political mass activity and efficiency. There is indeed a “natural law” operating here. As genuine popular revolutions generally imply a qualitatively increased level of political mass activity, this cannot be sustained indefinitely, for obvious material and psychological reasons. You have to produce in order to eat, and when you demonstrate and participate in mass meetings, you don’t produce. Also, great masses of people cannot live permanently at a high level of excitement and expenditure of nervous energy. [17]

To this relative decline in mass activity corresponds a relative rise of activity and efficiency of the old ruling classes or strata and their various supporters and hangers-on. The initiative shifts from the “left” to the “right,” at least momentarily (and not necessarily with total success: there have been defeated counter-revolutions as there have been defeated revolutions). [18] There are likewise preventive counter-revolutions: Indonesia 1965 and Chile 1973 may be taken as examples. But precisely these preventive counter-revolutions clearly reveal the pessimistic skeptic’s dilemma. They are generally very costly in terms of human lives and human happiness – much more costly than revolutions. It stands to reason that much more repression, much more

bloodletting, much more cruelty, including torture, is needed to suppress a highly active, broad mass of ordinary people than to neutralize a small group of rulers. So by abstaining from active intervention against a rising counter-revolution – on the pretext that revolution itself is useless and bad – one actually becomes a passive if not active accomplice of bloody counter-revolution and large-scale mass suffering.

This is morally revolting, as it means tolerating, aiding and abetting the violence and exploitation of the oppressors, while finding all kinds of rationalizations for refusing to assist the oppressed in their self-defence and attempted emancipation. And it is political counter-productive as well as obnoxious. In the end, it often proves to be suicidal from the point of view of the skeptics' alleged devotion to the defence of democratic institutions and reforms. The most tragic example in that respect was that of German social-democracy at the end of World War One. Under the alleged motive of "saving democracy", Ebert and Noske kept the Imperial army's hierarchy and the Prussian officers' corps intact. They conspired with it against the workers – first in Berlin itself, then in the whole country. They made the generals of the Reichswehr into the political arbiters of the Weimar Republic. They permitted them to create and consolidate the Freikorps from which a good part of the later SA and SS cadres were recruited. They thereby paved the way of the rise and eventual conquest of power by the Nazis, which in turn led to the social-democrats' destruction. They thought they could contain regression and reaction in the framework of a democratic counter-revolution. [19] History taught the bitter lesson that democratic counter-revolutions in the end often lead to much more authoritarian and violent ones, when the sharpening of the socio-economic contradictions makes a total instead of a partial suppression

of the mass movement into an immediate goal of the ruling class.

This again is not accidental but corresponds to a deeper historical logic. The essence of revolution is often identified with a widespread explosion of violence and mass killings. This is of course not true. The essence of revolution is not the use of violence in politics but a radical, qualitative challenge – and eventually the overthrow – of prevailing economic or political power structures. The larger the number of people involved in mass actions targeting these structures, the more favorable the relationship of forces between revolutions and reaction, the greater the self-confidence of the first and the moral-ideological paralysis of the second, and the less the masses are inclined to use violence. Indeed, widespread use of violence is counter-productive for the revolution at that precise phase of the historical process.

But what does occur most often, if not always, at some point of the revolutionary process, is the desperate recourse to violence by the most radical and the most resolute sectors of the rulers' camp, intent on risking everything before it is too late, because they still have human and material resources left to act in that way. At some culminating point, the confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution thus generally does assume a violent character, although the degree of violence largely depends upon the overall relationship of forces. In answer to reaction's violence, the masses will tend towards armed self-defence. Disintegration, paralysis and disarming of the counter-revolution paves the way towards revolutionary victory. Victory of counter-revolution depends upon disarming the mass. [20]

When the chips are down, when power relations are stripped of all mediations and are nakedly reduced to bare

essentials, Friedrich Engels' formula is then borne out by empirical evidence: in the final analysis, the state is indeed a gang of armed people. The class or layer which has the monopoly of armed force possesses (either keeps or conquers) state power. And that again is what revolution, and counter-revolution, are all about. Sitting on the sidelines cannot prevent this confrontation. Nor can it contribute to delaying for ever the day of reckoning. In the last analysis the skeptics' and reformists' revulsion from revolution covers an implicit choice: the conservation of the status quo is at best a lesser evil compared to the costs and consequences of its revolutionary overthrow. This choice reflects social conservatism, not a rational judgment of empirically verifiable balance-sheets of "costs" of historical, i.e. real, revolutions and counter-revolutions.

No normal human being prefers to achieve social goals through the use of violence. To reduce violence to the utmost in political life should be a common endeavor for all progressive and socialist currents. Only profoundly sick persons – totally unable to contribute to the building of a real classless society – can actually enjoy advocating and practicing violence on a significant scale. Indeed, the increasing rejection of violence in a growing number of countries is a clear indicator that at least some moral-ideological progress has occurred in the last 70-75 years. One has just to compare the wild and brazen justification of war by nearly all the leading Western intellectuals and politicians in the 1914-1918 period to the near universal revulsion towards war today in the same milieu to note that progress.

Double moral standards still reign supreme in inter-class and inter-state relations, but the legitimacy of widespread use of violence by the rulers is at least increasingly questioned in a systematic and consistent way by a much

greater number of people than in 1914-1918 or 1939-1945. The future, indeed the very physical survival of humankind, depends upon the outcome of this race between increasing consciousness about the necessary rejection of armed confrontation on the one hand, and increasing de facto destructiveness of existing and future weapons on the other. If the first does not eliminate the second through successful political action, the second will eventually destroy not only the first but all human life on earth.

But such a political action can only be revolutionary and thus implies the use of at least limited armed force. To believe otherwise is to believe that the rulers will let themselves be disarmed utterly peacefully, without using the arms they still control. This is to deny the threat of any violent counter-revolution, which is utterly utopian in the light of actual historical experience. It is to assume that ruling classes and strata are exclusively and always represented by mild well-meaning liberals. Go tell that to the prisoners of the Warsaw ghetto and of Auschwitz, to the million victims of Djakarta, to the oppressed non-white population of South Africa, to the Indochinese peoples, to the Chilean and Salvadoran workers and peasants, to the murdered participants of the Intifada, to the millions and millions of victims of reaction and counter-revolution throughout the world since the colonial wars of the 19th century and the Paris Commune. The elementary human moral duty in the face of that terrifying record is to refuse any retreat into (re)privatization and to assist by any means necessary the oppressed, the exploited, the humiliated, the downtrodden, to struggle for their emancipation. In the long run, this makes also the individual participant a more human, i.e. happier person, provided he does not make any pseudo-Real political concessions and observes unrestrictedly the rule: fight everywhere and always against

any and every social and political condition which exploits and oppresses human beings.

III. The Possibility of Revolution in the West

Revolutions and counter-revolutions, being real historical processes, always occur in really existing social-economic formations which are always specific. No two countries in the world are exactly alike, if only because their basic social classes and the major fractions of these classes are products of the specific history of each of these countries. Hence the character of each revolution reflects a unique combination of the general and the specific. The first derives from the logic of revolutions as sketched before. The second derives from the specificity of each particular set of prevailing relations of production and relations of political power in a given country, at a given moment, with its specific inner contradictions and a specific dynamic of their exacerbation.

A revolutionary strategy [21] represents the conscious attempt by revolutionists to influence by their political actions the outcome of objectively revolutionary processes in favor of a victory of the exploited and the oppressed, in today's world essentially the wage-earning proletariat, its allies and the poor peasantry. It has therefore in turn to be specific to have a minimum chance of success. This means that it has to be attuned to the differentiated social reality which prevails in today's world. We can use the formula of

the “three sectors of world revolution” to designate significantly different strategic tasks, that is, roughly: the proletarian revolution in the imperialist countries; the combined national-democratic, anti-imperialist and socialist revolution in the so-called “third world countries”; the political revolution in the post-capitalist social formations. [22] We shall consider each of these in turn.

Regarding the industrialized metropolises of capitalism, a formidable objection is raised with regard to the possible effectiveness of revolutionary strategy. Many skeptics and reformists do not limit themselves to allege that revolutions are useless and harmful. They add that revolutions are impossible in these countries, that they won't occur anyway, that to hope for them or expect them is utterly utopian; that to try to prepare for them or to further them is a total waste of time and energy.

This line of reasoning is based on two different – and basically contradictory – assumptions. The first one (which is still true) states that no victorious revolution has ever occurred in a purely imperialist country up till now. The case of 1917 Russia is seen as an exceptional case, a unique combination of under-development and imperialism. But it is irrational, even childish, to recognize as revolutions only those that have been successful. Once one accepts that revolutionary processes did occur in 20th century imperialist countries, surely the logical conclusion for a revolutionist is to study them carefully so as to be able to map out a course which will make defeat unlikely when they occur again in the future.

The second assumption is that whatever in the past triggered revolutions [23] (revolutionary crises and processes) will never happen again. Bourgeois society – the capitalist economy and parliamentary democracy – are supposed to have achieved such a degree of stability and

“integrated” the mass of wage earners to such an extent that they won’t be seriously challenged in any foreseeable future. [24] This assumption, which already prevailed during the postwar boom (in obvious function of the undeniable increase in standard of living and social security which was its by-product for the Western proletariat) was seriously challenged in May 1968 and its immediate aftermath, at least in Southern Europe (and partially in Britain in the early seventies). It regained a powerful credibility in the wake of the retreat of the proletariat in the metropolitan countries towards essentially defensive struggles after 1974-1975.

We should understand the nub of the question. The seemingly a-prioristic assumption is in reality a prediction which will be historically either verified or falsified. It is in no way a final truth. It is nothing but a working hypothesis. It assumes a given variant of the basic trends of development of capitalism in the latter part of the 20th century: the variant of declining contradictions, of the ability of the system to avoid explosive crises, not to say catastrophes. In that sense, it is strikingly similar to the working hypothesis of the classical version of reformism, i.e. of rejection of a revolutionary perspective and revolutionary strategy: that of Eduard Bernstein. In his book which launched the famous “revisionism debate,” he clearly posited a growing objective decline in acuity of inner contradictions of the system as premises for his reformist conclusions: less and less capitalist crises; less and less tendencies towards war; less and less authoritarian governments; less and less violent conflicts in the world. [25] Rosa Luxemburg answered him succinctly that precisely the opposite would be the case. And when under the influence of the Russian revolution of 1905, Kautsky came the nearest to revolutionary Marxism and was the

undisputed mentor of Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky [26], he also explicitly identified the perspective of inevitable catastrophes to which capitalism was leading as one of the main pillars of Marxism's revolutionary perspectives. [27] When he moved away from revolutionary Marxism, he started to consider these catastrophes as becoming more and more unlikely, i.e. he started to share Bernstein's euphoric working hypothesis. [28]

What does the historical record reveal? Two world wars; the economic crisis of 1929 and onwards; fascism; Hiroshima; innumerable colonial wars; hunger and disease in the third world; the ongoing ecological catastrophe; the new long economic depression. They leave out that it has been Rosa Luxemburg who has been proven more right than Bernstein; and that it was the Kautsky of 1907 who has been proven right by history and not the Kautsky of the 1914 "ultra-imperialism" theory. Today it seems truer than ever, to paraphrase a famous formula of Jean Jaurès, that late capitalism carries within itself a succession of grave crises and catastrophes like clouds carry storms. [29]

One transforms that obvious truth – obvious in the sense that is borne out by solid historical evidence for three-quarters of a century – into a meaningless caricature when one insinuates that revolutionary Marxists expect or predict permanent catastrophes, every year in every imperialist country, so to speak. Leaving aside the lunatic fringe, serious Marxists have never taken that stand, which doesn't mean that they have never been guilty of false analysis and erroneous evaluations regarding particular countries. If one soberly analyses the ups and downs of economic, social and political crisis in the West and Japan since 1914, what emerges is a pattern of periodic upsurges of mass struggles in some metropolitan countries which have at times put revolutionary processes on the agenda. In our view, the

mechanisms leading in that direction remain operative today as they were since the period of historical decline of the capitalist mode of production was first posited by Marxists. The burden of proving that this is no longer the case is upon those who argue that today's bourgeois society is somehow basically different from that of 1936, not to say that of 1968. We haven't yet seen any persuasive argumentation of that nature.

The concept of periodically and not permanently possible revolutionary explosions in imperialist countries logically leads to a typology of possible revolutions in the West, which sees these revolutions essentially as a qualitative "*transcroissance*" of mass struggles and mass experiences of non-revolutionary times. We have often sketched this process of "overgrowing," based not upon speculation or wishful thinking but on the experience of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary explosions which have really occurred in the West. [30] We can therefore limit ourselves to summarizing the process in the following chain of events: mass strikes; political mass strikes; a general strike; a general sit-down strike; coordination and centralization of democratically elected strike committees; transformation of the "passive" into an "active" general strike, in which strike committees assume a beginning of state functions, in the first place in the public and the financial sector. (Public transport regulation, access to telecommunications, access to saving and bank accounts limited to strikers, free hospital services under that same authority, "parallel" teaching in schools by teachers under strikers' authority, are examples of such inroads into the realm of the exercise of quasi-state functioning growing out of an "active" general strike.) This leads to the emergence of a de facto generalized dual power situation with emerging self-defence bodies of the masses.

Such a chain of events generalizes trends already visible at high points of mass struggles in the West: Northern Italy, 1920; July 1927 in Austria; June 1936 in France; July 1948 in Italy; May 1968 in France; the “hot autumn” of 1969 in Italy; and the high points of the Portuguese revolution 1974-1975. Other general strike experiences [31] involving a similar chain of events were those of Germany 1920 and Spain (especially Catalonia) 1936-1937. (Albeit in a very different social context, the tendency of the industrial proletariat to operate in the same general sense in revolutionary situations can also be seen in Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia, 1968-1969, and Poland 1980-1981.) Such a view of proletarian revolutionary behavior in the imperialist countries makes it easier to solve a problem which has haunted revolutionary Marxists since the beginning of the 20th century: the relation between the struggle for reforms (economic as well as political-democratic ones) and the preparation for revolution. The answer given to that problem by Rosa Luxemburg already in the beginning of the debate remains as valid today as it was at that time. [32] The difference between the reformists and revolutionists does not at all lie in the rejection of reforms by the latter and the struggle for reforms by the former. On the contrary: serious revolutionists will be the most resolute and efficient fighters for all reforms which correspond to the needs and the recognizable preoccupations of the masses. The real difference between reformists and revolutionary Marxists can be thus summarized:

1. Without rejecting or marginalizing legislative initiatives, revolutionary socialists prioritize the struggle for reforms through broad, direct extra-parliamentary mass actions.

2. Without negating the need to take into consideration real social-political relations of forces, revolutionary socialists refuse to limited the struggle for reforms to those which are acceptable to the bourgeoisie or, worse, which don't upset the basic social and political relations of power. For that reason, reformists tend to fight less and less for serious reforms whenever the system is in crisis because, like the capitalists, they understand the "destabilizing" tendency of these struggles. For the revolutionists, the priority is the struggle for the masses' needs and interests, and not the defence of the system's needs or logic, nor the conservation of any consensus with capitalists.
3. Reformists see the limitation or elimination of capitalism's ills as a process of gradual progress. Revolutionists, on the contrary, educate the masses in the inevitability of crises which will interrupt the gradual accumulation of reforms, and which will periodically lead to a threat of suppression of conquests of the past, or to their actual suppression.
4. Reformists will tend to brake, oppose or even repress all forms of direct mass actions which transcend or threaten bourgeois state institutions.

Revolutionists, on the contrary, will systematically favor and try to develop self-activity and self-organization of the masses, even in daily struggles for immediate reforms, regardless of “destabilizing” consequences, thereby creating a tradition, an experience of broader and broader mass struggle, which facilitates the emergence of a dual power situation when generalized mass struggles – a general strike – actually occur. Thereby, proletarian revolutions of the type sketched above can be seen as an organic product – or climax – of broader and broader mass struggles for reforms in pre-revolutionary or even non-revolutionary times.

5. Reformists will generally limit themselves to propagating reform. Revolutionary Marxists will combine a struggle for reforms with constant and systematic anti-capitalist propaganda. They will educate the masses in the system’s ills, and advocate its revolutionary overthrow. The formulation and struggle for transitional demands which, while corresponding to the masses’ needs, cannot be realized within the framework of the system, plays a key role here.

Doesn't such a view of "really feasible revolution" in the west seriously underestimate the obstacle which the Western proletariat's obvious attachment to parliamentary democracy constitutes on the road towards the overthrow of bourgeois institutions, without which no victorious revolution is possible? We don't think so.

In the first place, many aspects of the legitimate attachment of the masses to democratic rights and freedom is not at all an attachment to bourgeois state institutions. It expresses, to use a clarifying formula of Trotsky, the presence of nuclei of proletarian democracy inside of the bourgeois state. [33] The larger the masses' self-activity, self-mobilization and self-organization, the more the butterfly of democratic workers' power tends to appear out of its "bourgeois" chrysalis. The fundamental issue will be one of growing confrontation between the "naked core" of bourgeois state power (the central government, the repressive apparatus, etc.) and the masses' attachment to democratic institutions which they themselves control.

In the second place, there is no reason to counterpose in an absolute and dogmatic way organs of direct workers and popular power, and organs resulting from undifferentiated universal franchise. Workers and popular councils and their centralized coordination (local, regional, national, international council congresses) can be more efficient and democratic forms of making possible the direct exercise of political, economic and social power by millions of toilers. But if it is necessary to reject parliamentary cretinism, it is likewise necessary to reject anti-parliamentary cretinism. Whenever and wherever the masses clearly express their wish to have parliamentary-type power organs elected by

universal franchise – the cases of Hungary, Poland and Nicaragua are clear in that sense – revolutionists should accept that verdict. These organs need not supercede the power of soviets insofar as the masses have learned through their own experiences that their councils can give them more democratic rights and more real power than the broadest parliamentary democracy alone; and insofar as the precise functional division of labor between soviet-type and parliamentary-type organs is elaborated into a constitution under conditions of workers power.

Of course, soviet institutions can and should also be elected on the basis of universal franchise. The fundamental difference between parliamentary and soviet democracy is not the mode of election but the mode of functioning. Parliamentary democracy is essentially representative, i.e. indirect democracy, and to a large extent limited to the legislative field. Soviet democracy contains much higher doses of direct democracy, including the instrument of “binding mandates” of the electors for their representative and the right to instant recall of these by their electors. In addition, it implies a large-scale instant recall of these by their electors. In addition, it implies a large-scale unification of legislative and executive functions which, combined with the principle of rotation, actually enables the majority of the citizens to exercise state functions.

The multiplication of functional assemblies with a division of competence serves the same purpose. A key specificity of soviet democracy is also that it is producers’ democracy, i.e. that it ties economic decision-taking to work places and federated work places (at local, regional and branch levels etc.), giving those who work the right to decide on their workload and the allocation of their products and services. Why should workers make sacrifices in spending time, nerves and physical strength for increasing output, when

they generally feel that the results of these additional efforts don't benefit them, and they have no way of deciding about the distribution of its fruits? Producers' democracy appears more and more as the only way to overcome the declining motivation (sense of responsibility) for production, not to say the economy in its totality, which characterizes both the capitalist market economy and the bureaucratic command economy.

IV. The Lessons of Third World Revolutions

The revolutionary processes in the Third World since World War II have confirmed the validity of the strategy of permanent revolution. Wherever these processes have climaxed in a full break with the old ruling classes and with international capital the historical tasks of the national-democratic revolution (national unification, independence from imperialism) have been realized. This was the case of Yugoslavia, Indochina, China, Cuba, Nicaragua. Wherever the revolutionary process did not culminate in such a full break, key tasks of the national-democratic revolution remain unfulfilled. This was the case of Indonesia, Bolivia, Egypt, Algeria, Chile, Iran.

The theory (strategy) of permanent revolution is counterposed to the traditional Comintern/CP strategy since the middle nineteen twenties, to wit that of the "revolution by stages," in which a first phase of "bloc of four classes" (the so-called "national" bourgeoisie; the peasantry; the

urban petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat) is supposed to eliminate by a common political struggle the semi-feudal and oligarchic power structures, including foreign imperialist ones. Only in a second phase is the proletarian struggle for power supposed to come to the forefront. This strategy first led to disaster in China in 1927. It has led to grave defeats ever since. It is increasingly challenged inside many CPs themselves.

It is of no avail to avoid making this fundamental choice by the use of abstract formulas. The formulas, “workers and farmers government” or, worse, “people’s power” or “broad popular alliance under the hegemony of the working class,” just evade the issue. What revolutions are all about is state power. The class nature of state power – and/or of the question which major fraction of a given class exercises state power – is decisive. Either the formulas just cited are synonymous with the overthrow of the bourgeois-oligarchic state, its army and its repressive apparatus, and with the establishment of a workers state; or the formulas imply that the existing state apparatus is not to be “immediately” destroyed – in which case the class nature of the state remains bourgeois-oligarchic and the revolution will be defeated.

When it is said that without the conquest of power by the working class, without overthrow of the state of the former ruling classes, the historical tasks of the national-democratic revolution will not be fully realized, this does not mean that none of these tasks can be initiated under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois governments. After World War II, most of the previously colonial countries did after all achieve political national independence without overthrowing the capitalist order. In some cases at least, India being the most striking one, this was not purely formal but also implied a degree of economic autonomy from imperialism which

made at least initial industrialization under national bourgeois ownership possible. Starting with the late sixties, a series of semi-colonial countries succeeded in launching a process of semi-industrialization which went much farther (South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Mexico, Singapore, Hong Kong are the most important cases), often supported by substantial land reforms as indispensable launching pads for these take-offs. The famous controversy of the nineteen fifties and the nineteen sixties on the so-called “*dependencia*” theory – the impossibility of any serious degree of industrialization without a total break with imperialism – has thus been settled by history.

It is likewise incorrect to interpret the theory of the permanent revolution as implying that the overthrow of the old state order and the radical agrarian revolution must perforce coincide with the complete destruction of capitalist private property in industry. It is true that the working class can hardly be supposed to tolerate its own exploitation at factory level while it is busy, or has already succeeded in, disarming the capitalists and eliminating their political power. But from this flows only that the victorious socialist revolution in underdeveloped countries will start making “despotic inroads” into the realm of capitalist private property, to quote a famous sentence of the **Communist Manifesto**. The rhythm and the extent of these inroads will depend on the political and social correlation of forces and on the pressure of economic priorities. No general formula is applicable here for all countries at all moments. The question of the rhythm and the extent of expropriation of the bourgeoisie is in turn tied to the question of the workers – peasants alliance, a key question of political strategy in most of the third world countries. Keeping capitalist property intact to the extent of not fulfilling the poor peasants’ thirst for land is obviously counter-productive.

Hitting private property to the extent of arousing fear among the middle peasants that they too will lose their property is counter-productive from an economic point of view (it could become also counter-productive politically).

On balance, however, experience confirms what the theory suggests. It is impossible to achieve genuine independence from imperialism and genuinely to motivate the working class for the task of socialist reconstruction of the nation without the expropriation of big capital in industry, banking, agriculture, trade and transportation, be it international or national capital. The real difficulties only arise when the borderline between that expropriation and the tolerance of small and medium-sized capital (with all its implications for economic growth, social equality and direct producers' motivation) has to be determined.

The historical record shows that a peculiar form of dual power of confrontation between the old and the new state order has appeared during all victorious socialist revolutions in underdeveloped countries: dual power reflecting a territorial division of the country into liberated zones in which the new state is emerging, and the rest of the country where the old state still reigns. This peculiar form of dual power expresses in turn the peculiar form of the revolutionary (and counter-revolutionary) processes themselves, in which armed struggle (guerrilla warfare, people's war) occupied a central place. In the cases of China, Yugoslavia, and Vietnam, this resulted from the fact that the revolution started as a movement of national liberation against a foreign imperialist aggressor/invaser, while becoming increasingly intertwined with civil war between the poor and the well-to-do, i.e. with social revolution. In the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua, the revolution started likewise as armed struggle against a viciously repressive and

universally hated and despised dictatorship, again growing over into a social revolution.

One should of course not simplify the pattern emerging from these experiences. At least in Cuba and in Nicaragua (to some extent also in the beginnings of the Indochinese revolution and in several stages of the Yugoslav revolution) urban insurrections played an important role. A successful general strike and a successful urban insurrection decided the outcome of the Cuban and the Nicaraguan revolutions. The proponents of the strategy of armed struggle today generally adopt a more sophisticated and complex strategy than in the sixties, combining guerrilla warfare, the creation of liberated zones and the mobilization of mass organizations in urban zones (including forms of armed self-defence) in order to lead the revolution to victory. This combination seems reasonable in many semi-colonial countries, where state repression under pre-revolutionary conditions leaves no other alternative to revolutionary strategy. We believe, however, that this pattern should not be considered unavoidable once and for all in all Third World countries, regardless of specific circumstances and particular social-political relationships of forces at given moments.

V. Political Revolution in So-called Socialist Societies

The concept of political (anti-bureaucratic) revolution in the bureaucratized societies in transition between capitalism and socialism (bureaucratized workers states) was first launched by Trotsky in 1933. It resulted from the diagnosis of the growing

contradictions of Soviet society and from the prediction that these contradictions could no longer be removed through reforms; and it was related, therefore to the prediction that a self-reform of the bureaucracy was impossible. [34] Most left tendencies considered this concept, and the premises on which it was based, as either a fantasy, or objectively a call for counter-revolution. The overthrow of the bureaucratic dictatorship could only lead to a restoration of capitalism: that was the assumption.

These objections were unfounded. Trotsky's prognosis of political revolution, like his analysis of the contradictions of Soviet society, appear as one of his most brilliant contributions to Marxism. Since 1953, we have witnessed a chain of revolutionary crises in Eastern Europe: GDR June 1953; Hungary 1956; Czechoslovakia 1968; Poland 1980-1981. One can discuss whether similar crises didn't also occur in China, both in the nineteen sixties and the nineteen seventies. (Mikhail Gorbachev himself calls his perestroika a revolution and compares it with the political revolutions which occurred in France in 1830, 1848 and 1870.) [35] In all these concrete revolutionary processes, there was no prevalent tendency to restore capitalism. This did not only result from the objective fact that the overwhelming majority of the combatants were workers who have no interest in restoring capitalism. It was subjectively determined by the very demands of these combatants, which in Hungary set up workers' councils with the Central Workers Council of Budapest leading the struggle. Similar development occurred in Czechoslovakia and in Poland. The line of march of the political revolution in the USSR will be quite similar.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that attempts at self-reform of the bureaucracy have been many – the most spectacular of them being the introduction of workers’ self-management at factory level in Yugoslavia in 1950. While often instrumental in triggering off a “thaw” of the bureaucracy’s stranglehold on society and enabling a revival of mass activity and mass politization at various degrees, these attempts have always failed to solve the basic ills of these societies. This was especially true for the historically most important of these attempts, the one initiated by N.S. Khrushchev in the USSR. Indeed, today most of the “liberal” and “left” Soviet historians and intellectuals agree that the reason for the failure of Khrushchev was insufficient activity from below. This, incidentally, is also Gorbachev’s official version of the Khrushchev experience.

So the historical balance-sheet is again clear: attempts at self-reform can start a movement of change in the bureaucratized workers’ state. They can even facilitate the beginning of a genuine mass movement. But they cannot bring about a successful culmination of such change and movement. For this, a genuine popular revolution is indispensable. Self-reform of the enlightened wing of the bureaucracy cannot be a substitute for such a revolution. The bureaucracy is a hardened social layer, enjoying huge material privileges which depend fundamentally on its monopoly on the exercises of political power. But that same bureaucracy does not play any indispensable or useful role in society. Its role is essentially parasitic. Hence its rule is more and more wasteful. It tends to become the source of a succession of specific economic, social, political, ideological-more crises. Hence the need to remove it from its ruling position is an objective necessity for unblocking the march forward towards socialism. For this, a revival of mass activity, in the first place political activity of the working

class, in needed. While a revolution will have many implications in the field of the economy, it will basically consolidate and strengthen the system of collective ownership of the means of production and of socialized planning, far from overthrowing it. That is why we speak of a “political revolution” instead of a “social revolution.” [36]

To a large extent, the bureaucracy rules in function of the political passivity of the working class; Trotsky even said through passive “tolerance” by the working class. The historical-social origins of that passivity are well-known: the defeats of the international revolution; the pressure of scarcity of consumer goods and of lack of culture born from the relative backwardness of Russia; the consequences of the Stalinist terror; a disappointment of historical dimensions, leading to a lack of historical alternatives to the bureaucracy’s rule. But the very progress of Soviet society during the last half century, achieved on the basis of the remaining conquests of the October revolution and in spite of the bureaucracy’s misrule, slowly undermines the basis of that passivity. The stronger, more skilled and more cultivated becomes the working class, the greater its resentments and expectations clash with the slow-down of economic growth and the manifold social crises which the bureaucracy’s misrule and waste provoke. So conditions emerge which tend to revive the working classes’ activity.

Timothy Garton Ash quotes a remarkable memorandum by the new Polish Prime Minister, Mieczyslaw F. Rakowski, which concludes with the prediction that if the “socialist formation” does not find the strength to reform itself, “the further history of our formation will be marked by shocks and revolutionary explosions, initiated by an increasingly enlightened people.” Indeed. But as Ash himself clearly indicates, in spite of his favoring reforms moving towards a restoration of capitalism tempered by a “liberal” democracy,

the difficulty lies precisely in the social correlation of forces: the working class is not ready to pay the price for a return to capitalism, i.e. massive unemployment and inequality. So you can't have generalized market economy plus political democracy. You can only have partial market economy plus political repression. So you can't have radical reforms. So the likelihood that you'll have a political revolution is growing. Ash himself rather cynically concludes: "It seems reasonable to suggest that the reform has a rather higher chance of minimal success – that is, of averting revolution – if only because of the further diversification of social interests which it will promote. The freeing of the private sector, in particular, means that Hungary might yet have an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie that will go to the barricades – against the revolting workers. Capitalists and Communists, shoulder to shoulder against the proletariat: a suitably Central European outcome for socialism. To estimate the percentage chance of peaceful transformation, by contrast requires only the fingers of one hand. [37]

Yet, precisely because the bureaucracy is not a new ruling class but a parasitic cancer on the working class and society as a whole, its removal through a political revolution by the workers does not require the type of armed conflict which until now has accompanied revolutions in class societies, including modern capitalist ones. It is more in the nature of a surgical operation. This was confirmed in the case of Hungary 1956 which went the farthest towards a victorious political revolution. A significant part of the CP apparatus and practically the whole army went over to the camp of the workers (of the people). Only a tiny handful of secret police agents opposed arms to the victorious masses in open provocations, thereby provoking an overt conflict (and their own sad fate) which otherwise could have been avoided. In Czechoslovakia 1968 a similar trend was set in motion. In

fact, in all cases of such political revolutions witnesses up till now, only foreign military intervention could prevent it from becoming victorious nearly without bloodshed. One does not see what force could replace such a foreign intervention in the case of the USSR, probably not the Soviet army. And the capacity of the KGB to repress 265 million people seems dubious to say the least.

History has also confirmed the utopian character of the idea that the construction of socialism could be fully achieved in a single country or a small number of countries. It has confirmed that the USSR (and the so-called “socialist camp”) cannot escape the pressure of the world market (or international capitalism): the pressure of wars and of the permanent arms race: the pressure of constant technological innovations; and the pressure of changing consumption patterns for the mass of the producers. But far from being an unavoidable result of that pressure, the bureaucratic dictatorship undermines the revolution’s objective revolution in the USSR and Eastern Europe would strengthen considerably that resistance. It would make new advances towards socialism possible. But we should not fall into the illusion that it could even so, actually achieve a classless society of its own, independently of revolutionary developments elsewhere.

VI. World Revolution Today

The concept of the three sectors of the world revolution refers to the different strategic-historical tasks with which the revolutionary process is confronted today. But this only represents the first step towards a concretization of the concept of world

revolution today. The question of these sectors and their interaction, and hence their growing unity, has also to be raised.

For decades, the apologists of the Stalinist dictatorship used to say that revealing the dark side of the Soviet (the Eastern European, the Chinese) reality discourages the workers in the West from fighting to overthrow capitalism. But history has fully confirmed that it is impossible to conduct a fight for a good cause on the basis of lies, half-truths or the hiding of truth. As it was impossible, in the long run, to hide the revolting aspects of Soviet reality, the mass of the workers in the West and Japan (including those adhering to or voting for Communist Parties) ended by assimilating them. What really discouraged and demoralized them was not the revelation of these facts but the facts themselves – including their decade-long suppression by the Communist Parties and their fellow travellers. One of the biggest subjective obstacles to a new development of revolutionary consciousness among the Western working class is the repulsive mask which Stalinism has put on socialism (communism). By contributing to tearing off that mask, a victorious political revolution in the East greatly advances the cause of socialism the world over. It strengthens the struggle against capitalism and imperialism instead of weakening it.

The idea that such a revolution would at least weaken the USSR (or the “socialist camp”) at state level and thereby change the military relationship of forces in favor of imperialism is likewise unfounded. It is an undeniable fact that the existence of the USSR in spite of the bureaucratic dictatorship and theory of “peaceful coexistence,” objectively contributed to the victory and eventually the consolidation of the Chinese revolution and the downfall of the colonial

empires in the subsequent decades. But parallel to that objective reality must be seen the fact that the Soviet bureaucracy tried to obstruct the progress of the Chinese revolution through the strategy it advocated, and played a key role in the post World War II consolidation of capitalism in Western Europe.

Furthermore, it is wrong to disconnect military strength from its economic and social base and from the political nature of governments. A Soviet Union, not to say a “socialist camp,” governed through a pluralistic socialist democracy and a broad consensus of the majority of the toilers, would be much more efficient economically, far more influential in the world, and thereby much stronger militarily than the USSR of today. [38]

The concept of interrelationship between the three sectors of the world revolution is supported by the fact that while victorious revolutions in the Third World countries can weaken imperialism, they cannot overthrow it. In the epoch of nuclear weapons it is obvious that imperialism can only be overthrown inside the metropolis itself. But the main obstacle to that overthrow is not the objective strength of imperialism or the bourgeois state, nor the absence of periodically expressed demonstrations inside the metropolis. The main obstacle is subjective: the level of Western (and Japanese) working class consciousness and the political quality of its leadership. Precisely for that reason, new qualitative advances towards socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and the removal of the bureaucratic dictatorships, would greatly assist in the solution of the problem.

On the other hand, any leap forward towards a victorious proletarian revolution in the West and the most advanced semi-industrialized Third World countries (like Brazil), which will occur under immeasurably more favorable

objective and subjective conditions than the Russian October Revolution, will usher in material advantages which will operate as a powerful stimulant for the toilers of all countries, beginning with the Soviet toilers if they have not yet overthrown the bureaucracy's yoke at that moment. To mention just one key aspect of an already victorious proletarian revolution in an economically advanced country: the slogan of the half-work day would play the same role as the slogan of "Land, Bread, Peace" played in the Russian revolution. And if that were realized no sector of the working class the world over could stay impervious to the reality.

The potential relationship – we say potential because it is obviously not yet a fact today – between the three sectors of world revolution is premised on historical/social unity of the world working class and the strength of the forces operating towards the development of conscious awareness of that unity. We know perfectly well how strong the obstacles are on the road towards that political consciousness. They have been enumerated and analyzed a thousand times. What we want to stress is that they can be overcome by the operation of still stronger objective trends. The unity of the process of world revolution is related to the growing internationalization of the productive forces and of capital – exemplified in the emergence of the transnational corporation as the typical late capitalist firm predominant in the world market – which leads unavoidably to a growing internationalization of the class struggle. Hard material reality will teach the international working class that retreating toward purely national defensive strategies (exemplified by protectionism) leaves all the advantages to capital and increasingly paralyzes even the defence of a given standard of living and of political rights. The only efficient answer to an internationalization of capital's strength and maneuvers is international coordination,

solidarity and organization of the working class. During the last decades, the objective need for world revolution as a unity of the three world sectors of revolution has received a new and frightening dimension through the growth of the destructive potential of contemporary technological and economic trends, resulting from the survival of capitalism beyond the period of its historical legitimacy. The accumulation of huge arsenals of nuclear and chemical weapons; the extension of nuclear power; the destruction of tropical forests; the pollution of air and water the world over; the destruction of the ozone layer; the desertification of large tracts of Africa; the growing famine in the Third World: all these trends threaten disasters which put a question mark on the physical survival of human-kind. None of these disasters can be stopped or prevented at national or even continental level. They all call for solutions on a worldwide scale. The consciousness about the global nature of humanity's crisis and the need for global solutions, largely overlapping nation-states, has been rapidly growing.

Mikhail Gorbachev and his main advisers and intellectual supporters tend to draw from a correct perception of the globalization of problems and of the absolute necessity to prevent a nuclear war the conclusion that progressively, these global problems will be solved through an increased collaboration between imperialist and "socialist" states. They base themselves on two assumptions in that regard. First they believe that a course towards world revolution exacerbate inter-state relations to the point where the outbreak of a world war would become more likely, if not unavoidable. Second, they tactily presume that the inner contradictions of capitalism will tend to decrease, that the real class struggle will become less explosive, that trends towards increased class collaboration will prevail in the 21st century. Both these assumptions are utterly unrealistic.

They are of the same type as the hope to achieve the building of a really socialist society in a single country, of which they represent in a certain sense the logical continuation. The fact is that while victorious or even unfolding revolutions have undoubtedly led to counter-revolutionary interventions by imperialist powers, they have on several occasions prevented larger wars from occurring. Without the German revolution of 1918-1919, and the revolutionary general strike in that country in 1920, the preparations for a general strike in Britain that same year, a major war of all imperialist powers against Soviet Russia would probably have occurred. Without the victory of the October revolution, the first World War would probably have been prolonged at least for one if not for more years. The revolutionary upsurge in Spain, France and Czechoslovakia in 1936 significantly slowed down the march toward World War II. If it would have been victorious even only in Spain, not to say in France and Czechoslovakia as well, World War II could have been prevented. So to identify revolutions with unavoidable war is just a misreading of the historical record. In fact, a victorious revolution in France and Britain today, not to say in the USA, would be the surest way to make world war impossible.

The real reasoning of the neo-reformist Gorbachev version of “globalization” is based on the classical reformist illusion of a decline in the explosiveness and intensity of the inner contradictions of capitalism and of bourgeois society. We have already dealt with the unrealistic character of that assumption. It errs especially by not taking into account the structural link between the destructive uses of technology and economic resources on the one hand, and competitive attitudes, competitive strife, private property and market economy on the other hand. Bourgeois society can never lead and will never lead towards a world without weapons

and without technological innovations applied regardless of their costs to the natural and human ecology. You need socialism to achieve these goals. And you have to achieve these goals if humanity is to survive. The strongest justification for world revolution today is that humankind is literally faced with the long-term dilemma: either a World Socialist Federation or Death.

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Footnotes

1. Precisely because the Marxist conception of revolution encompasses the necessary dimension of mass action, the concept of “revolution from above” is not strictly accurate, although it was used by Engels and has, of course, a well circumscribed significance. Joseph II’s reforms in Austria; Tsar Alexander II’s abolition of serfdom; Bismarck’s unification of Germany; the Meiji “revolution” in Japan, were historical attempts to pre-empt revolutions from below through radical reforms from above. To what extent they were successful or failed in that historical purpose must be analyzed in each specific case. The same applied *mutatis mutandis* to Gorbachev’s reform course in the Soviet Union today.

2. This was the epigram of the weekly **Révolutions de Paris**, which started to appear from the end of August 1789 in Paris.

3. See Barrington Moore Jr., **The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt**, M.E. Sharpe, White Plains, N.Y. 1978.

4. This was the case during the days preceding the downfall of the Shah in the streets of Teheran, a spectacle largely forgotten because of the subsequent developments in that country.

5. This does not automatically flow from the disintegration and disarmament of the former army. The ruling class can make an attempt to substitute a new bourgeois army to the old one, as it

did in Cuba after the downfall of Batista and in Nicaragua after the fall of Somoza, but without success.

6. This is the currently prevailing explanation of the reasons for the Shah's downfall: the combination of the "white revolution" destabilizing traditional Iranian society and the savagery of SAVAK.

7. In Russia, the cause of the February-March 1917 revolution was the rottenness of tsarism and the tremendous parasitical weight of the peasants' exploitation upon the overall economic development of the country. The triggering factors of that revolution were hunger riots of the Petrograd women workers which the cossacks refused to repress. This expressed the emergence of a *de facto* alliance between the working class and the peasantry, contrary to what had occurred in the repression of the 1905 revolution. There is, however, also a deeper dialectical mediation between structure and conjuncture. The specific social-political order in Tsarist Russia determined both its participation in the first world war, and its increasing incapacity to cope with the material and political prerequisites of successful warfare. This incapacity in turn deepened the social crisis in a dramatic way – leading to chronic food shortages, to hunger riots and hence to the decisive days of outbreak of the February-March 1917 revolution. A similarly multi-layered analysis is needed to understand contemporary revolutionary moments – including unsuccessful ones, such as May 1968 in France. What went on in France during the climax of the mass upsurge and the general strike deserves to be seen as a revolution, although it was defeated. And the triggering factor of the student revolt in Paris must itself be seen in the context of a deeper structural crisis of social and political relations. Useful here is the remarkable study by the Soviet sociologist, Alex D. Khlopin, **New Social Movements in the West: Their causes and prospects of developments**, which complements Western Marxist analyses.

8. In Russia, the material interests of the cossacks as sons of peasants, the connections of these interest to political awareness on the one hand, and to the explosive crisis of the relations of production in the countryside on the other hand, all converge to

explain the cossacks' peculiar shift in behavior, at a given moment, in a given place.

9. It is, of course, possible that this breakdown is only temporary and only lasts some weeks or months. But this doesn't make the collapse less real. In Germany – not only, but of course especially in Berlin – this is what occurred in November-December 1918. In France, this is what occurred at the climax of May 1968. Indeed, it was recently confirmed that, at that moment, General de Gaulle couldn't phone General Massu, the commander of the French army in Germany: he had lost control of the whole telecommunication system in Paris as a result of an effective general strike. An anonymous woman telephone operator whom he finally succeeded in speaking to personally, refused to obey his order. The decision of the strike committee prevailed. These are the unknown heroines and heroes of revolution. This is the stuff proletarian revolutions are made of.

10. See Edward Luttwack, **Technique of the Coup d'État** (1968); cf. interview with **Stampa-Sera**, August 8, 1988.

11. Nevertheless Spinoza, who was himself skeptical about the outcome of revolutions, explicitly proclaimed the people's right to revolution, more than a century before that same right was enshrined in the *Preamble* of the *American Declaration of Independence* first, in the *French Declaration of the Rights of Men and Citizens* afterwards. To our knowledge, the Yugoslav Constitution is today the only one which not only contains explicitly that right, but even adds to it the duty to make a revolution under specific conditions.

12. The dogma of the basic "evil" of humankind is based in the West on the superstition of Original Sin. Of late, it has received a pseudo-scientific veneer with the Konrad Lorenz school of the alleged universal aggressivity of human beings, which some psychologists then tend to generalize into a human trend towards self-destruction. Better psychologists, in the first place Sigmund Freud, pointed out that the human psyche combines both a trend towards cooperation and a trend towards self-destruction, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, to love and to kill. If only the second one would have prevailed, humankind would have disappeared a long time

ago instead of showing an impressive demographic-biological expansion.

13. Two thousand years ago, the Jewish philosopher Hillel expressed the contradictions of individual skepticism in a succinct way: “If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am for myself alone, what then am I? and if not now, then when?” Kant tried to escape that dilemma through his categorical imperative, but failed to apply it convincingly to social conflicts (see his attitude towards the French revolution). Marx found the solution in his categorical imperative to struggle against all social conditions in which human beings are debased, oppressed, and alienated.

14. Revolutionary continuity was maintained by a handful of followers of Babeuf who, through the person of Buonarotti, helped to inspire Auguste Blanqui’s *Société des Saisons*, which gave rise to a new revolutionary organization in the 1830s. But for nearly forty years, there were very few organized revolutionaries in the country which witnessed five revolutions in the course of a century.

15. The debate goes on, of course. René Sedillot (**Le coût de la révolution française**, Paris, Perrin, 1987) is the most brazen of the latter-day dragon-killers, who continue the good fight against the French revolution after two centuries. The sophisms on which he bases his argumentations are revealed by the fact that he adds the victims of counter-revolution, in the first place of Napoleon’s wars, to the cost of the revolution. But he does not compare these “costs” to those of the *Ancien Régime*’s dynastic wars: the devastation of a quarter of Germany, the big famine in France at the beginning of the 18th century, etc.

16. The inclusion of Deng Xiaoping in this list is of course open to serious challenge. Mao was not Lenin; he was rather a unique combination of given traits of both Lenin and Stalin. Hence, Deng Xiaoping, in spite of many right-wing tendencies in his politics, cannot be considered the Thermidorian equivalent of Stalin of the Chinese revolution.

17. Incidentally, this is one of the objective bases for the second “law of permanent revolution” formulated by Trotsky. For the

revolutionary process to continue after it starts to recede in a given country, its center of gravity must shift to another one.

18. Classical examples of defeated counter-revolutionary coups are the Kornilov one in Russia, August 1917, the Kapp-von Luttwitz putsch in Germany, 1920 and the Spanish military-fascist uprising in July 1936 in Catalonia, Madrid, Valencia, Málaga, the Basque country, etc.

19. A democratic counter-revolution is a counter-revolution which seeks to maintain essential features of bourgeois democracy, including the legal mass labor movement, universal franchise and a broadly free press, after having beaten back the workers' attempts to conquer power and to arm themselves. Of course, while engaged in suppressing the German revolution, Ebert, Noske and Co. systematically curtailed democratic freedoms, forbade political parties, suspended newspapers, requisitioned strikers and even outlawed strikes, to preserve the bourgeois state. Moreover, Ebert cynically lied before the All-German Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (December 1918) when he denied having brought soldiers to Berlin for repressive purposes. He had actually done so, in direct connection with the Imperial Army's High Command, behind the back of his fellow "people's commissars" (ministers) of the Independent Socialist Party. The repression started a few days later.

20. This occurred in Germany throughout the country starting with January 1919 in Berlin. It occurred in Barcelona after the May days in 1937, in Greece starting with December 1944, in Indonesia in 1965, just to quote some examples. Courageous left socialists like the prewar Austrian social-democrats and Salvador Allende in Chile did not refuse to fight counter-revolution arms in hand, but they refused to organize and prepare the masses systematically for this unavoidable showdown and deliberately left the initiative to the enemy, which meant courting disaster.

21. Revolutionists cannot "cause revolutions," nor can they "provoke" them artificially (this is the basic difference between a revolution and a putsch). Engels even went further and stated: "*Die Leute die sich rühmen, eine Revolution gemacht zu haben, haben immer noch am Tage darauf gesehen, dass sie nicht*

wussten, was sie taten, dass die ‘gemachte’ Revolution, jener die sie hatten machen wollen, durchaus nicht ähnlich sah” (letter to Vera Sassulitch of April 23, 1885, **MEW**, Band 36, p.307). [“The people who boast of having made a revolution have always seen only the next day that they hadn’t know what they were doing, that the revolution they had ‘made’ didn’t look like the one they had wanted to make.” – *Translation by MIA*]

22. The concept of “combined revolution” is also applicable to some imperialist countries, but with a different ponderation of the combined elements from that of third world countries. E.g. the combination of proletarian revolution and self-determination of oppressed national minorities in Spain; the combination of proletarian revolution and Black and Hispanic liberation in the USA.

23. E.g. in Finland 1917-1918; in Austria 1918-1919, 1927, 1934; in Germany 1918-1923; in Italy 1919-1920, 1944-1945, 1969; in Spain 1931-1937; in France 1936, 1968; in Portugal 1974-1975.

24. Some argue that the impossibility of escaping “technology compulsion” (*technologischer Sachzwang*) constitutes today an unsurpassable obstacle on the road to proletarian revolution and “Marxian socialism.” This is an unproven assumption, based upon the *petitio principii* that technology somehow develops and is applied independently from the social interests of those who have the means (under large scale commodity production: the capital) to apply it.

25. See Eduard Bernstein: **Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie** (1899). [published in English under the title *Evolutionary Socialism*. – *Note by MIA*]

26. On Kautsky’s evolutions away from revolutionary Marxism in 1909-1910, its turning point (his capitulation to the *Partei Vorstand* on the censorship that body applied to his booklet **The Road to Power**) and its political outcome in his opposition to Rosa Luxemburg’s campaign in favor of political mass strikes, see Massimo Salvadori, **Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution**, NLB, London 1979, pp.123 ff.

27. Karl Kautsky, **Les Trois Sources du Marxisme** (1907), ed. française, Spartacus, Paris 1969, pp.12-13.

28. Kautsky's articles on ultra-imperialism in which he considered inter-imperialist wars more and more unlikely, started to appear from 1912 on. The final one had the unfortunate fate of appearing in **Die Neue Zeit** on the aftermath of the actual outbreak of World War I.

29. We have developed this idea further in our article *The reasons for founding the Fourth International and why they remain valid today*. **International Marxist Review**, Summer-Autumn 1988.

30. Ernest Mandel, **Revolutionary Marxism To-day**, New Left Books, London 1979.

31. The case of the German workers' answer to the Kapp-Luttwitz coup of 1920 and of the Spanish workers' answer to the fascist-military uprising of July 1936 – in a more limited way also the Italian workers' uprising of 1948 – helps to integrate into this typology the question of the proletariat's capacity to answer massively counter-revolutionary initiatives of the bourgeoisie. This will remain on the agenda in the West in the future as it was in the past. But this does not justify any refusal to recognize that the process of proletarian revolutions likely to occur in the West and in Japan will most probably be quite different from these particular examples, as well as from the revolutionary processes which we witnessed in Yugoslavia, China, Indochina, Cuba, Nicaragua during and after World War II.

32. See Norma Geras, **The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg** (New Left Books, London, 1976) on this, and on Rosa being one of the founders, together with Trotsky, of a theory of dual power emerging from workers' mass strikes.

33. Trotsky, **Was Nun? Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Proletariats**, January 1932.

34. Leon Trotsky first formulated that conclusion in 1933 in his article *The Class Nature of the Soviet State* (October 1, 1933), **Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-1934**, p.101f.

35. On the question of how far that characterization is legitimate, see Ernest Mandel, **Beyond Perestroika**, Verso, London 1988.

36. On the theoretical foundations of the definition of “political revolution” and the analysis which leads to it, see Ernest Mandel, *Bureaucratie et production marchande*, **Quatrième Internationale**, No.24, April 1987.

37. **The New York Review of Books**, October 27, 1988.

38. The Mexican sociologist Pablo Gonzales Casanova has tried to refute the legitimacy of the political revolution in the bureaucratized workers states on the basis of a hierarchy of revolutionary tasks on a world scale. As long as imperialism survives, revolutionists (socialists, anti-imperialists) everywhere in the world should give priority to the fight against that monster over and above all other struggles. (See his *La Penetración metafísica en el Marxismo europeo*, in **isabado, suplemento de Unomasuno**, 8/1/1983). Underlying that reasoning is the hypothesis that an ongoing, not to say a victorious, political revolution in a bureaucratized workers’ state somehow weakens the fight against imperialism. But that supposition is completely unfounded, for the reason we have advanced.
